Family Handbook Topic Areas

Developing a family handbook is a process. Programs often begin with basic policies and information and add sections based on the program development and to address questions or the information needs of families. It can be challenging to keep the balance between covering all the important topics and keeping the length and complexity within reason.

The family handbook has many underlying purposes such as marketing; helping families see if the program is a good match for the child and family; information and policy sharing and will serve as a resource to families about your program. The family handbook should look professional and be reviewed and corrected prior to sharing with families. Often programs ask families to assist in the review process. It is recommended that the family handbook be dated so you remember to review and updated annually.

Many programs ask families to sign that they have received a copy of the family handbook as a way to document sharing policies and procedures. Make sure all staff read, are familiar with and have a copy of the family handbook as a reference.

The following are Sample Topic Areas that you may want to include in your family handbook. It is important that you tailor your family handbook to your own program and the needs of your families. Therefore, you may wish to add or remove topics to this sample.

- Authorization to Pick up Child
- Forms, how to change and update
- Policies about custody situations
- Arrival and departure policies
- Birthdays
- Options for celebrations, food, parties, invitations for out of program time etc.
- Child Development
- Developmental milestones
- Challenging times such as biting, sharing, lying – and where to find additional information
- Clothing and Cubbies
- Label clothing, extra clothing to leave in cubby,
- Children should have comfortable, washable, weather appropriate clothing
- Footwear
- Gear for infants/toddlers (diapers, bottles, cream etc.)
- Communication

- Daily information shared with families…explain written and verbal methods
- Conference schedules and policies
- Who families should speak to about a concern, problem or question
- Partnerships with families for high quality early learning

- Importance of families and family feedback to help make the program best for families and children
- Community Resources
- Timeline/plan on sharing written information on topics including health and human services, wellness, nutrition, and fitness and/or child development with families
- Curriculum and Assessment
- Learning Standards and their use in the program
- If applicable, implements activities appropriate to meet IEP/IFSP goals and/or special needs plans and objectives
- Holiday celebrations – how handled
- Daily schedules (posted in classroom)
- Initial developmental screening
- Assessment -tools used, frequency and how shared with families
- School readiness
- Field trips
- Show and tell
- Daily outside time
- Use of TV, media, videos, computers in the program
- Enrollment and Attendance
- First few days in the program, calling to check, materials to read etc.
- Public, social, and community services information
- Information explaining the "Getting to Know You" meeting
- Intake Procedures -forms and permissions, updating contact information
- Confidentiality
- Non Discrimination Policies
- Financial Arrangements
- Tuition, registration fees, annual increases, vacation/holiday credit, required notice of withdrawal from program, overtime charges, late payment fee, etc.
- Health and Safety
- Health records, immunizations, health policies and procedures, communicable diseases
- Injury prevention and procedures
- Site sanitation, hand washing, daily facility cleaning
- Training of staff such as pediatric first aid, emergency preparedness
- Emergency Plan for program
- Mission Statement, Vision, Values, Philosophy, etc.
- Program Governance
- Diversity

- Nutrition, Meals
- If program provides meals – menu posting, times, components of meals
- If families provide lunch and/or snacks- nutrition information and suggestions
- Allergies and food preferences
- Quality
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan of the program
- Keystone STARS
- Accreditation

- Family Engagement
- Volunteering, conferences to review child's progress, educational events/meetings for families
- Program supports to strengthen and connect families
- Importance of family involvement
- Program evaluation and family feedback
- Rest Time, Nap
- Security items
- Blankets and sleeping gear
- Staff
- Qualifications of the staff, professional development of staff, scheduling, security/clearances, etc.
- Toys
- Types of toys children may bring and when
- Transitioning
- Individual meeting offered to families to share specific information regarding the child's transition to another classroom or educational setting
- Sharing child's developmental progress
- Written plan for child transition with families and school, as well as a list of community/school stakeholders regarding child transition
- Procedure/release form for releasing child's file/information to another educational setting

Program's schedule/plan for participating in community/school transition activities