



Sheltering Arms

FAMILY HANDBOOK 2026 - 2027

The standard for early
childhood education



shelteringarmsforkids.com

Dear Families,

Thank you for choosing Sheltering Arms Early Childhood Education and Family Centers. Sheltering Arms is committed to providing your child with world-class early learning and to providing you with comprehensive family support services.

-We implement a research and play-and-project based curriculum that emphasizes whole-child development, and we have strong partnerships that support our teachers and classrooms. As a result, our children continually score in the 90th percentile, exceeding developmental milestones for language and literacy. This is important in that these milestones translate into indicators that help predict a child's future achievement in school, we are also here to support you, and through our 2-Generation approach, we connect with community partners to identify and provide resources for you and family.

As a leader in early childhood education, we are committed to excellence. We work with local community partners such as The Rollins Center at the Atlanta Speech School and the United Way-to deliver cutting edge education and family services. We are also members of two national networks known for innovation in early learning – Educare Schools, a network of 25 early learning and care centers across the country providing high quality services while influencing the field through policy, advocacy, and research, and the Ascend Network of the Aspen Institute, a renowned program and policy think tank.

There are so many great things happening in early childhood education, and we are excited to serve families who understand the promise, possibilities, and power of early learning. Please make sure to stay connected with us through your centers and online. Again, thank you for choosing Sheltering Arms!

Sincerely,



Blythe Keeler Robinson President and CEO



Section 1: About Sheltering Arms



Introduction

Sheltering Arms is one of Georgia's largest nonprofit early education and childcare providers. We are a network of 11 neighborhood early education and family support centers located in five metropolitan Atlanta counties: Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton and Gwinnett. Our early learning and family support services include, but are not limited to, Head Start and Early Head Start and the Georgia's Pre-Kindergarten program.

Mission

Sheltering Arms closes opportunity gaps by transforming the lives of children and their families through high-quality affordable early childhood education and leadership in the field.

Vision

Sheltering Arms sees thriving communities where all families hold the power to create the opportunity for themselves and their children.



Our Work

Sheltering Arms provides:

- High-quality early childcare and education that prepares young children to succeed in school and that is accessible to all, regardless of family income.
- Comprehensive support services for families that promote healthy self-reliance.
- Professional development, based on core competencies for early education and family services practitioners, improves the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Community partnerships and collaborations create a more synergistic and seamless system of support for children and families.

Days and Hours of Operation, Monday-Friday, Year Round

The centers are open Monday-Friday, year-round, from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The first day and last day of the Pre-K school year are aligned as much as possible with the public-school systems.

Governing Bodies

The Board of Directors, comprised of community leaders, governs the organization, sets policy, creates short- and long-range strategic plans and has fiduciary responsibility. The Policy Council, comprised of 51% Head Start parents and 49% community representatives, provides leadership for the Head Start program.

Family's Participation in Policymaking and Planning

Parents are directly involved in program policymaking and planning through the center's Parent Leadership Organization (PLO). The Parent Leadership Organization meets monthly and is open to all family members. Families have the opportunity to be elected to leadership positions and to participate in committees, or focus groups, and for Early Head Start and Head Start families, the Policy Council. Each meeting offers parents the opportunity to give their opinions, and to participate in advocacy actions and event planning.

Staff help families understand their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Parent leaders and committee members are required to sign a code of conduct agreement as a representative of Sheltering Arms. Each year some families may be appointed to a self-assessment team to assess the effectiveness

of the program. In addition, each year parents give their input in a parent questionnaire, and the results are used in program planning and evaluation.

Accreditation

Since 1946, Sheltering Arms has been accredited by organizations such as the Child Welfare League of America, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Quality Rated. To be a nationally accredited program means that our organization has demonstrated a strong commitment to providing high-quality programs for young children and their families.



Volunteers

Sheltering Arms is well-regarded in the community and attracts volunteers from corporate and community partners, as well as the Senior Services Foster Grandparent program. Parents are also encouraged to volunteer occasionally by assisting in classrooms, chaperoning field trips, or supporting other center activities. While these parent volunteers are not required to undergo a criminal records check, they must never be solely responsible for children other than their own and must remain under the continuous direct supervision of a Center Employee, in accordance with DECAL Licensing regulations. To learn more or become a volunteer, visit www.shelteringarmsforkids.com.

Smoke and Drug Free Environment

Each center is a smoke and drug-free environment. There is no smoking or use of tobacco or drugs on the premises. No alcohol products are permitted in the centers where children are being cared for.

Non-Discrimination

Services are provided to children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, economic status, sex or ability.

November 23-25 GA Pre-K closed (Fee based services available)

November 26-27 Thanksgiving - Center Closed



Holidays – Centers Closed

The Centers will be closed for the following holidays during the school year: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving, November 26–27. We will also be closed December 24–31 for the holiday break.

Staff Development Days – Centers Closed

July 19- 23 (Tentative, subject to change), August 21, September 18, October 12, November 11, February 15, March 15, and April 19.

Weather-Related & Public Safety Closures

As an organization, Sheltering Arms typically closes all of our centers, made by the local public school district in the county where each center is located. Therefore, on the first day of an inclement weather event, a center will be closed if the corresponding public school district is closed.

However, there may be instances where we make different decisions based on the specific safety needs of our centers. Additionally, individual centers may close due to public safety concerns such as power outages, gas leaks, or other emergency situations that impact operations.

Families will be notified through multiple channels:

- **Procare Parent Engagement App**
- **Sheltering Arms website, Facebook, X, and Instagram pages**
- **Local news outlets (e.g., Channel 11 - WXIA)**

Section 2: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment & Attendance (ERSEA) Requirements



Enrollment Requirements

All families must complete an initial inquiry for childcare by visiting www.shelteringarmsforkids.com or stop by one of our centers for assistance with completing their application. Families who complete the initial online application process and upload required documentation will be advised which program they are eligible for within five business days. Families are responsible for supplying and maintaining accurate information for enrollment purposes including current phone numbers, emergency contact information, a list of authorized people for pick-up and other documentation required by Sheltering Arms.



Eligibility for Head Start and Early Head Start

Children may qualify for Early Head Start if they are under 3 years old by September 1, and for Head Start if they are 3 or 4 years old by that date. Eligibility is also based on household income, following federal income guidelines.

To apply, families will provide:

- Proof of age (e.g., birth certificate, passport)
- Proof of income (e.g., tax return, TANF/SSI, employer letter)
- Proof of residency (e.g., utility bill, lease, or notarized letter)

Enrollment is prioritized based on criteria approved by the Policy Council, including children in foster care, experiencing homelessness, with special needs, or other family circumstances. Children not immediately placed will be added to a waitlist for the current school year. There is no cost for the core program day (8:00 AM–2:30 PM). Families needing extended care may enroll in our After School program.

Eligibility for Georgia Lottery Funded Pre-Kindergarten Program

To enroll in the Pre-K Program, children must be four years old on or before September 1 of the current school year. Children who are five years old on September 1, 2026, and did not previously attend Georgia's Pre-K Program for more than 30 instructional days, may also be eligible to enroll. Children who are six years old on September 1, 2026, are not eligible for Georgia's Pre-K Program.

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) leads a statewide recruitment each April for classes starting in the fall. Enrollment is first-come, first-served, and families with completed applications are prioritized—regardless of their position on the waiting list.

While the core Pre-K day is free, tuition is charged for After School care, non-Pre-K days, and Summer Enrichment. To complete enrollment, families must provide proof of residency (such as a utility bill, lease, or mortgage in the parent's name) and age verification (like a birth certificate,

passport, or official medical document). Income information may also be requested to determine eligibility for additional services

Attendance

Children benefit from regular attendance year-round, including during the summer. We ask that all families notify the center as soon as possible to advise of any tardiness or absences. When your child is absent without notification, staff will contact parents within 1 hour of a child's expected arrival and document the reasons as required by our licensing, funding, and accrediting entities.

Pre-K and Early/Head Start children are required to attend the core instructional day (8:00 am – 2:30 pm). Pre-K children who are late or absent without an excuse may be dismissed from the program according to the Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) Standards. Pre-K parents may refer to the Pre-K Family Handbook.

We will use child attendance data to identify children with patterns of absence (such as two consecutive unexplained absences). We will develop appropriate strategies to improve individual attendance among identified children, such as direct contact with families or intensive case management, as necessary. If the child's attendance does not improve or resume, then the program must consider that slot vacant. Families will be informed in writing that the child will be dis-enrolled on a specified date. We cannot grant extended periods of absence if a child is enrolled in Early/Head Start or Pre-K. We will immediately begin the process to enroll a child in the vacated space from the waiting list.



Arrival and Departure

When arriving at the center, parents, caregivers, or authorized adults (18 years or older) should walk children inside, check in using our electronic system, and accompany them to their classroom, where they'll be signed in. If arriving late, please let a member of the management team know the reason before heading to the classroom. Be sure to let the classroom staff know your child has arrived and remember to wash your hands when entering and leaving the classroom.

We also ask all adults to dress in a way that sets a positive example for children — daytime-appropriate clothing is required, always including shoes. Please avoid items like pajamas, bathrobes, bonnets, bedroom slippers, clothing with profanity or slang, and overly casual attire such as crop tops, short shorts, leggings, or revealing gym wear. Our goal is to maintain a welcoming, respectful, and professional environment for everyone.

Core Day & Time of Arrival

For students to fully benefit from our educational curriculum, Sheltering Arms requires all children to participate in the core day of the program, which is 8:00 am to 2:30 pm. **ALL** children must be in their classroom by 8:00 am. After 8:00 am, children are considered tardy.

Child Departure

Children will only be released to those persons over 18 years of age whose name appears on the "Permission to Pick Up" list authorized by families.

- Photo identification will be required from any authorized person who is unknown to staff when that person requests to pick up a child.
- Parents or other people must use the check-out system when picking up the child. If a child is picked up early (before 2:30 pm), the person requesting the child's release must also notify staff of the reason for early pickup from the core day. No child will be released to any person suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Changes to the "Permission to Pick Up" must be made in writing either via email or the Procure Engagement App.
- Children enrolled in Pre-K or Head Start must be picked up by 2:30 pm unless they are enrolled in the After School Program. Children who stay past 2:30 pm will be charged a late fee of \$1.00 per minute beginning at 2:31 pm. The late fee will be charged to the parent's account and will be due by Friday of the week it was charged.
- Children that stay past the center closing time will be charged a late fee of \$1.00 per minute for every minute after closing. The late fee will be charged to the parent's account. This late fee will be due by Friday of the week it was charged. If not paid, the child will not be able to return to the center on the following Monday. Multiple (chronic) late pick-ups may lead to dis-enrollment from the program.
- Multiple (chronic) late pick-ups are defined as a child being picked up late 2 or more times within a week and 5 late pick-ups in a month. Child Protective Services will be notified about children not picked up within one hour of closing unless a parent has made contact with the center and presented a reasonable reason for late pick up.

Dis-enrolling

Every effort will be made to work with children and parents in our program. However, there are instances when it may become necessary to dis-enroll a child. In the unlikely event this occurs, parents will be notified in writing that the child will be dis-enrolled on a specific date and officially withdrawn from the program. Instances that may result in disenrollment include:

- **Disruptive behavior** - children who demonstrate behavior that is harmful to themselves or others. All incidents of disruptive behavior will be documented, and all resources and techniques to improve the behavior will be exhausted. Families will be fully informed and involved in all efforts to correct the disruptive behavior prior to dis-enrollment. Documents on disruptive children will be reviewed by the Mental Health Specialists in order to develop a plan of action.*
- **Poor attendance** - all absences will be documented and discussed to try to improve the situation.
- **Delinquent payments** – payment is due on Friday, in advance of service. Payments are delinquent at closing time on Friday.
- **Late pickup** - leaving children in the center after closing hours or after their program day ends. A late fee will be assessed, and if the fee is not paid after more than two late pick-ups, this could result in dis-enrollment.
- **Late arrival** - Pre-K children who do not come on time as required by the BRIGHT FROM THE START: GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING.
- **Failure to provide necessary documents** – families who do not provide the required documentation within the proper timelines.
- **Family disruption of the program** – abusive, profane or loud inappropriate language and threatening behavior by adults that are harmful to children, staff, other families, volunteers, self, or the center.
- **Non-compliance with the Agreements signed at enrollment.**

**To avoid dis-enrollment, a child's day may be modified due to disruptive behavior. However, this will be carefully monitored by the Mental Health Specialists to determine the effectiveness of the modified day strategy.*

Section 3: Tuition, Fees and Scholarships



Tuition and Fees Policy

There is an annual registration fee for enrollment in the early learning program at Sheltering Arms. Tuition is charged for Child Care, After School, Summer Enrichment, non-Pre-K days, and school holidays.

Sheltering Arms operates on a sliding scale/tier-based tuition model based on verified household income. We do not offer scholarships. Instead, families are assessed and placed into appropriate tuition tiers to ensure equitable access to high-quality early education.

Families enrolled in tuition-based programming should expect an annual tuition adjustment that reflects inflation and cost-of-living increases. These adjustments help ensure the sustainability and quality of our programs.

Tuition Payment Requirements

- All families are required to enroll in the autopay system through the Procure Engagement App.
- This system ensures that tuition balances are zeroed out weekly, maintaining consistent and timely payments. Accounts may be subject to fees charged for insufficient funds.
- Tuition is based on a school-year tuition rate, which is divided into weekly increments for convenience. This means that:
 1. Tuition remains due even when the center is closed due to inclement weather, holidays, teacher workdays, or other unforeseen circumstances.
 2. This structure ensures that staffing, resources, and programming can be maintained consistently throughout the year.

Tuition is payable in accordance with the Parent Understandings, Permissions, and Agreements Form signed at the time of enrollment. All payments must be made via autopay, using a debit or credit card linked through the Procure system. To maintain your child's enrollment, tuition must be paid in full,

even during absences due to vacation, illness, or other extended periods. If tuition is paid in advance and the child withdraws from the program, any unused tuition will be refunded by check from the Administrative Office.

Section 4: Early Childhood Education Curriculum & Classrooms



Curriculum

We use The Creative Curriculum, a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive curriculum for programs serving children from birth through age five. It is based on knowledge of child development theory and careful consideration of the latest research in the field of early childhood education. It is based on five fundamental principles:

- Positive interactions and relationships with adults provide a critical foundation for successful learning.
- Social-emotional competence is a significant factor in success.
- Constructive, purposeful play supports essential learning.
- The physical environment affects the type and quality of learning interactions.
- Teacher—family partnerships promote development and learning.

Through the curriculum, teachers are provided with the tools and knowledge for working with all students.

This includes working with English and dual-language learners as well as advanced learners and children with disabilities. Our main focus is on creating high- quality learning environments that will enable every child to reach his/her full potential.



Family Involvement

We view parents as their child's first teacher and an essential partner in the education process. We invite families to engage in their child's educational experience. We look to families to provide information about their child's interests and strengths as well as input into the goals they have for their children. We strive to create a learning environment that includes materials, activities, and interactions that will meet the individual needs of each child as well as the group as a whole. Lesson plans are developed weekly, addressing the needs identified through ongoing assessment, daily teacher observations, and curricular objectives. Families are required to attend parent/teacher conferences at least twice a year.

Families are invited to also participate in a home visit twice each year. Staff members are more than happy to talk with families about their children; however, it is best not to discuss a child's behavior in his/her presence. ALL families are encouraged to ask for a conference at any time.

Guidance and Discipline

Children learn what they live. Our example of honest and fair action with all children, loving and calming words, and gentle hugs of encouragement are the most powerful ways we teach children how to live in the world. Teachers provide a positive environment where the rules are clear and consistent. Teachers encourage positive behavior by being well-prepared with age-appropriate learning activities:

- Redirecting children whose behavior is inappropriate to another activity.
- Praising and encouraging specific behavior.

The goal of discipline is to help children learn inner control over their own behavior. Helping children express emotions using words rather than physical force is the best way to help them do this. Staff may schedule conferences with families to discuss concerns about a child's behavior in order to gain their understanding and support of ways to work better with the child.

When persistent behaviors make it difficult for a child or other children to benefit from classroom activities, staff will develop a written plan to help the child. The plan will involve families, teachers,

management team staff, and community resources. If after diligent efforts to include the child in group care, the child poses a threat to him/herself or others it may be necessary to dis-enroll the child.

Biting

Infants, toddlers and two-year olds are often unable to communicate effectively with words and may sometimes bite another child. Staff make every attempt to prevent this from happening. However, at some point your child may be bitten or bite another child. Staff will treat the wound and notify you on the Incident Report form and on the biting form. Biting incidents are confidential. Parents may decide to have the bite checked by their doctor if the skin was penetrated and bleeding occurred.

Toilet Learning

Staff use correct names for body parts and bodily functions with children of all ages. When your child shows signs of readiness to use the toilet, our staff will be happy to assist you. Please carefully read our Toilet Training Readiness handout.

Individual Needs of Children

The goal of the Sheltering Arms curriculum is to provide children with an environment that is conducive to learning, encourages curiosity, exploration, problem solving, and self-expression and assists children in developing a positive self-image. This helps teachers to get to know each child well. Primary caregivers stay with the same infants, toddlers/twos until they turn three and move to the preschool classroom.

Developmental Assessment

Sheltering Arms uses the Teaching Strategies GOLD ongoing observational assessment tool for children from birth through kindergarten. It is a research-based tool grounded in 38 objectives for development and learning that are predictors of school success and aligned to Georgia Early Learning Standards. The assessment is used to identify the skill levels of each child upon entering the program and to track progress throughout the year.

Developmental assessment reports are produced in the fall, winter, and spring, and the information is shared with parents. Arrangements are made, in partnership with parents, when the assessment indicates a possible need for further testing or evaluation. Our goal is for each child to meet their developmental milestones and to receive immediate interventions when they do not. In addition, our Pre-K teachers use the Work Sampling System to collect child assessment information. This information is shared with parents twice a year, in the winter and spring.

Inclusive Environment

Sheltering Arms is committed to enrolling children with special needs in the most inclusive setting appropriate, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Children with exceptionalities will be accommodated based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP), specialized evaluation, and/or Special Care Plan. Families of children with developmental concerns are encouraged to seek services through the Babies Can't Wait Program (for children under age 3) or the local public school system (for children over age 3).

Families are encouraged to share any information regarding their child's needs so that appropriate accommodation can be provided. Failure to disclose such information may pose health and safety risks. In rare cases, a child's needs may exceed what is considered reasonable for Sheltering Arms to provide. Reasonableness depends on three key factors: the child's needs, required accommodations, and available resources.

Transitions

Each child will have a transition plan to encourage the successful transition from class to class, into kindergarten, and to other childcare programs. Transition activities are designed to prepare all partners (children, families, schools and communities) to develop knowledge, skills, and relationships that help children move from one educational setting to another.

Transportation (field trips)

Transportation is provided for scheduled field trips. Field trips are an important part of our educational program for children aged three- and four-years-old. Field trips are subject to cancellation due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control. Outings into the community, nature walks, and other such activities help enhance classroom activities. Families are encouraged to go with the class whenever possible. Families will be notified about trips and outings and must provide written permission. We try to plan trips that do not require an additional fee from our parents. Families of three and four-year-olds will be notified in advance of field trips or special activities away from the center. Parents must sign a written authorization for their child to participate in each trip. There are no water related activities or field trips that will occur in water that is more than two feet deep.

Diapers and Pull-Ups

Parents of children in diapers are urged to provide enough diapers for the week. During toilet training, parents are urged to bring a minimum of six pairs of plastic covered training pants or pull-ups. Be sure the outer pants are large enough for the child to manage. Diapers will be provided for children enrolled in Early Head Start.



Clothing and Personal Belongings

Teachers plan a variety of educational, hands-on learning activities for your child. Sometimes your child's clothing may become soiled or dirty, so please consider this when dressing your child for school. We recommend comfortable, inexpensive clothing. Please label your child's clothing with your child's name or initials.

The center is **NOT** responsible for lost or damaged clothing, shoes, earrings or other jewelry. Necklaces and small beads are a safety risk for young children and may not be worn at the center.

Each child must have at least one extra change of clothing, including underwear in his/her cubby for emergencies. Families should check their child's change of clothes frequently so that appropriate clothing based on the seasons is available as needed. Children who are toilet training must have 2-3 changes of clothes, especially underwear. Please wash and return center clothing as soon as possible.

Children must wear shoes with heel straps. Rubber soled shoes are best for running and climbing. Open toe shoes, sandals, flip-flops, wedges, shoes with high heels or rollers may not be worn.

Child Security Items

Children may bring a security item or pacifier, if needed, for a smooth home to center transition, but PLEASE do not allow children to bring toys, games, or other items to the center. **The center is not responsible for lost or broken items.**

Hazardous Items

Children **are not** permitted to wear scarves, necklaces, pacifiers, or other items around their necks. In addition, pacifiers may not be attached to clothing. Beads, small rubber bands and small hair bows cannot be worn for hair adornment because they pose a choking threat if they become loose. Balloons are not allowed in the center.

Celebrating Birthdays and Special Events

We enjoy celebrating your child's birthday and other special or cultural events that are meaningful to your family. Families are welcome to bring store-bought treats (like cupcakes or cookies) to share during a short celebration between 2:00–2:30 PM. All food must be nut-free, store-bought, and in the original packaging so we can check for allergies. You may also bring simple table decorations or goodie bags—but this is completely optional. If you bring goodie bags, please include one for each child in the classroom and choose safe, age-appropriate items.

All celebrations must be cleared with the Center Management team through our Engagement App at least 3 business days in advance. This helps us check for food allergies and make sure the celebration works for everyone. Please remember: no balloons or homemade food are allowed. We ask that families keep things fun and simple—there's no need to go over the top. Talk with your child's teacher if you have questions, and thank you for helping us create joyful, inclusive celebrations.

Section 5: Health and Safety



Required Health Documentation

To give your child a healthy start, families should provide a copy of the following medical documents to the child's center:

As a part of building school readiness with our families, Family Support Coaches will work with families to ensure each child has a medical and dental home and is receiving continuous quality medical care. Additionally, collecting this information supports the process in which early intervention measures may be necessary. **We strongly encourage all families to turn in requested medical documentation within 45 calendar days of their child's enrollment.** These medical documents include but are not limited to:

Immunizations

All enrolled children must have a current immunization record on Georgia Form 3231 from either the Health Department or family physician within 30 days of enrollment. All childcare centers are required by law (O.C.G.A. Chapter 20-2-771) to have current immunization records on file for each child. An official affidavit must be on file if immunizations impact the medical health of the child or conflict with the religious beliefs of the parent or guardian.

Well Child/Annual Physical Exams

All enrolled children must have a current physical exam (well child exam) when the child is enrolled in the program. Within 90 days of enrollment, all children shall have up to date health exams on file at the child's center. Physical exams must be updated periodically based on the age of the child per the recommended well- child screening schedule.

Sensory Screenings

All enrolled children must have a hearing and vision screening. Families can provide, or the program will perform evidence-based vision and hearing screenings within 45 calendar days of enrolled children. These screenings will help to identify any visual or hearing deficits which may interfere with a child's academic growth and development.

(Form 3300)-Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening

Families should submit a copy of their child's well child exam and a completed Georgia Form 3300 (Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening) within 90 days of enrollment for all four-year-old children or within 90 days of their child's fourth birthday, whichever comes first.

Dental Exams and Oral Hygiene

All children are required to have a dental exam on file at the child's center within 90 days of enrollment. Children should brush their teeth at least twice a day using toothpaste approved by the American Dental Association. All infant gums and tongues are cleaned after each feeding.

Exclusion from the Center

When children show signs and symptoms of disease or illness (**including, but not limited to, a fever, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, congestion, yellowish or green discharge from the nose, sore throat, ear ache, etc.**) families will be contacted to pick up the child from the center until the child is free of all symptoms of illness. For the safety of your child and for the safety of other children and staff, we ask for your full cooperation when children have signs of illness.

Short-term Exclusion

A child shall be sent home from the center if a contagious symptom is identified, such as, but not limited to; a persistent cough, rash-like appearance, two or more loose stools (diarrhea), or sore throat symptoms. The Center will follow the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations, and the Common Infectious Illnesses Chart (CIIC) for guidance on the exclusion of sick children from the center and the time frame for readmission. Some common communicable diseases and/or COVID-19 will require medical documentation or negative results, to support the child's safe reentry into the program. A child cannot return to the center until they have been symptom free for 2 days. Please refer to the CIIC chart posted in the center for reference.

Requirement to Report Communicable Diseases

The center is required to report any suspected cases of notifiable communicable disease to the local county health department. Families of all children enrolled shall be notified in writing of the occurrence of any of the illnesses on the communicable disease chart within 24 hours after the center becomes aware of the illness or the next business day. If your child has been diagnosed with a communicable disease, please notify the center so that we can properly notify families.

Policy Regarding Blood Borne Pathogens

Sheltering Arms makes every effort to protect its children, parents, and employees from any communicable disease. Blood borne viruses have not been found to be transmitted by casual

contact, i.e. wiping noses, sharing mouthed toys, hugging, coughing, sneezing, using common utensils or touching common surfaces used by someone infected with a blood borne pathogen. Routine safety precautions will be executed when handling blood or bodily fluid (i.e. rubber gloves, proper handwashing, and careful sanitizing and disinfecting of all surfaces, etc.). If open lesions occur on the skin and/or in the mouth or other parts of the body, the short-term exclusion policy will be executed.

Sheltering Arms can provide printed material and educational information regarding blood borne pathogens to families, in an effort to maintain a safe environment and to help alleviate any concerns.



Parental Notification (illness, injury, communicable disease)

Families will be notified immediately by phone when professional medical attention is required, or the child experiences symptoms of a fever, persistent cough, shortness of breath, vomiting, or diarrhea. Staff will contact families to pick up the child immediately **(within 1 hour of the phone call)**. If the family cannot be reached, we will continue to notify all emergency contacts provided by the families until the child is picked up. Staff will provide families or designated pick-up people with an exclusion letter which will include instructions if medical attention is required.

Sheltering Arms is required to report any serious illness or injury requiring hospitalization or professional medical attention to the center's licensing agency and/or the Public Health Department. Center staff will document these incidents on an Incident Form.

Family Notification (illness, injury, communicable disease)

Families will be notified immediately by phone when professional medical attention is required, or the child experiences symptoms of a fever, persistent cough, shortness of breath, vomiting, or diarrhea. Staff will contact parents to pick up the child immediately **(within 1 hour of the phone call)**.

If the parent cannot be reached, we will continue to notify all emergency contacts provided by the parent until the child is picked up. Staff will provide families or designated pick-up people with an exclusion letter which will include instructions if medical attention is required.

*Sheltering Arms is required to report any serious illness or injury requiring hospitalization or professional medical attention to the center's licensing agency and/or the Public Health Department. Center staff will document these incidents on an Incident Form.

Staffing of Children with Special Conditions

For children with special health or nutritional conditions (diabetes, sickle cell, anemia, seizures, asthma and food or environmental allergies, etc.) staffing may need to take place at the center before the child can begin school. A staffing is a meeting between the family and staff to discuss the child's special condition, individual needs and provide clarity on how we can best support the child while in our care. Families must provide medical documentation (action, treatment, nutrition, emergency plans) from a physician or nutritionist prior to the staffing. If the child has rescue medication or other medication required to be administered at school, the administration of the medication is discussed during the staffing.



Individualized Health Care Plan (IHCP) and Individualized Nutrition Care Plans (INCP)

All children with chronic or acute medical conditions, which require daily maintenance medication or rescue emergency medication will have an IHCP and/or INCP (Food or Environmental Allergies, Asthma, Diabetes and Seizure Action Plans, etc.). Children requiring special equipment or accommodation should present documentation from the child's healthcare provider.

Procedure for Medication Administration

A Medication Authorization Form must be completed for ALL medicines to be administered at the Center and signed by the parent every week. Authorization for medicine is for one week only. A new

form must be submitted every Monday. Only medication that must be taken more than two times per day will be accepted (see Emergency Medication below). Medication will be administered as prescribed.

We encourage families to administer controller medications as prescribed and ask their doctor to prescribe medicines that can be given in 12-hour cycles, if possible, so that medicine can be administered at home and not at the center. If the child must receive medication at the center, ask the pharmacist to divide the medication so that a portion can be left at the center.

Prescription medications must:

Be in the original container and labeled with the following information:

- Child's first and last name clearly marked.
- Dosage and length of treatment.
- Have specific instructions for administering, handling, storing, and disposing of medication.
- Name of the health professional that prescribed or recommended the medication.
- Date prescription was filled
- Expiration date

Over-the-counter medications must:

- Be accompanied by a letter from the health professional indicating that the medication must be taken at least 3 times each day.
- Include specific instructions for dosage, length of treatment, storing, and disposing of medication.

Emergency Medication

All children who require the use of rescue medications (medications only used in emergencies, such as Epi-pens, rescue inhalers, seizure medication) are required to have a staffing with our Health Services Specialist and supporting documentation (treatment or action plan) from a physician in order to leave medication at the center. All rescue medications must remain at the center anytime a child is present, or the child will not be allowed in the center.

NOTE: *At this time, we will only administer rescue medication as indicated in the child's action plan.*

In case of adverse medical reactions, families will be notified immediately. If families cannot be reached, staff will call the emergency numbers listed by families on the enrollment application. If the situation is critical, we will call 911.

Handling Other Emergencies

When a medical emergency arises involving a child, either at the center or on a field trip, the center's staff will seek prompt emergency medical treatment and provide any certified or licensed emergency medical personnel with immediate access to the child. In the case of a SERIOUS accident, the closest staff member with first aid training will render first aid, and a member of the Center Management Team will call 911 and contact the parent. The designated hospital for each location is posted in the center. If rescue medication is used while the child is in our care, staff will contact the parent and call 911 according to the action plan. In the event of a lost child, either at the center or on a field trip, the center staff will initiate a search, designate a teacher to be in charge of the group,

and then notify the center management team, who will take any other necessary steps to locate the child.

In case of severe weather, loss of electrical power or water, death or serious injury at the center, staff will contact families immediately and follow operational procedures. No center personnel will impede in any way the delivery of emergency care or services to a child by licensed or certified emergency health care professionals.

Staff Training in Emergency Procedures

Center staff are trained in emergency first aid procedures and CPR. When minor incidents (bumps, scrapes, and scratches) occur, we will treat the injury. A written incident report form will be sent home on the day of the incident, filed in the incident log, and noted in the child's contact log. Families will be notified of head injuries.

Child Accident Insurance

Insurance coverage is provided to all children enrolled at Sheltering Arms while they are at the center or involved in any center-related activity. If a child is involved in an accident and requires medical attention, families will be notified immediately. If the center is unable to reach parents or the emergency release names given by families and the situation warrants medical attention, staff will obtain the medical attention. Families will then be notified as soon as possible. If medical attention is required, claim forms can be obtained from the center management team. It is the parent's responsibility to have the claim forms completed by the attending physician or medical facility and to return them to the center with the bill. Staff will send it to the insurance company.

Fire and Storm Evacuation

Fire and storm evacuation routes are posted in each classroom. Fire and storm drills are conducted monthly and posted on the center bulletin board. In the event the center must be evacuated, staff will take the children to the designated evacuation site determined for each center. The evacuation site is posted in the center. Staff will contact families as soon as possible to alert them of the evacuation and to provide instructions on picking up their children from the designated location.

Child Safety Reminders

- No children shall be left unattended in vehicles while on Sheltering Arms' property.
- Please do not speed in the parking lot.
- All children must be securely buckled in the proper safety seats when arriving and departing on Sheltering Arms' property.
- Please let us know in advance if your child will require special equipment to access the center.

Requirement to Report Suspected Child Abuse

Each child will be observed daily, upon arrival, by the teachers to check for and document early symptoms of illness, suspected child abuse, neglect, exploitation, or deprivation. If abuse, neglect, exploitation, or deprivation is suspected, a member of the center's management team will make a report to the local Department of Family and Children Services as required by law (GA. Code 19-7-5).

Mental Health

Positive self-concepts are developed in children through the mastery of age-appropriate skills, the establishment of warm and caring relationships with teachers, peers and the opportunity to make many choices for themselves.

We have staff available to provide training for staff and families, to observe children in the classroom setting, to provide individual consultation and technical assistance for staff and families, and to make recommendations for intervention for children with special needs.

Mental Health means that young children are growing in their ability to:

- Understand and share feelings
- Have close and positive relationships
- Explore and learn

Early Childhood Mental Health (birth-5 years) is a child's growing capacity to do these things, all in the cultural context of family and community (adapted from ZERO TO THREE):

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions
- Develop close, secure relationships
- Explore the surroundings and learn

Early Childhood Mental Health is the same as Social Emotional Development.

Section 6: Nutrition



Meals and Snacks

Sheltering Arms provides breakfast, lunch, and a snack. We provide food that helps to meet over two-thirds of the child's daily nutritional requirements. **No outside food is allowed** in centers unless special permission is granted according to a doctor's prescription by the Director or Health Services Specialist. Menus are posted weekly in each center. Families may submit suggestions for the menus during the menu planning cycle. As a program participant in the CACFP, our agency ensures that children receive a variety of healthy meals and snacks. Children are encouraged to taste new foods. Special consideration is given to those children requiring special diets and feeding equipment.

Families with children that require special diets must have their pediatrician complete an Individual Nutrition Care Plan and submit it to their Family Support Coach. Notify the Family Support Coach if your child has any known food allergies or special dietary requirements. If your child has severe food allergies and/or requires an Epi-pen, families are required to meet with staff prior to the child's first day of school. We serve whole milk to one (1) year old children and 1% milk to children two (2) and older unless otherwise required for medical reasons.

Infant Formula and Baby Food

Families of infants must complete the Infant Affidavit form which states the kind of formula and cereal we will serve. If a child requires formula other than the ones that we provide, the family must provide us with a doctor's note. In this case, Sheltering Arms will provide milk or formula for Head Start/Early Head Start children only. Also, families of infants must sign and date an Infant Feeding Plan for children under age one. The plan includes the formula to be given, instructions for introducing solid foods, the amount to be given, and notations about food allergies. Food is never used as a punishment or as a reward.

Breastfeeding

Mothers are encouraged and supported to breastfeed. A designated area is set aside at each center for breastfeeding mothers to breastfeed. Any breast milk remaining one hour from the beginning of the feeding shall be discarded or returned to parents.

Section 7: Family Engagement



Family Responsibilities

- Meet with a Family Support Coach to complete the enrollment application and agreements. Families may also participate in a Family Impact Visit to complete a family needs assessment called a Bridge Assessment where goals and subsequent resources are provided. Transitions to new classrooms and programs are also discussed during Family Impact visits.. Family Impact Visits can be completed by family request/as needed or in the Fall/Spring for all Head Start families.
- Notify the center of any change of address, employment, income, family status, home or business telephone number as soon as possible. Emergency numbers must always be current.
- Provide court documents regarding visitation rights if you are separated or divorced. Staff cannot refuse a parent the right to visit or pick up their child from the center without documentation.

Family Involvement

- Attend Parent Leadership Organization meetings and center events as often as possible.
- Read and respond to posted information and correspondence from the center.
- Collaborate with the staff in meeting the readiness requirements for success in school.
- We encourage families to volunteer as often as possible.
- Advocate for Sheltering Arms, Head Start and quality childcare for all children.

Communication

- Cell phone in the center during drop off and pick-up is not allowed
- Communicate with staff and other families in a professional manner and in a manner that sets a good example for children. Examples: no profanity, shouting, name calling or threatening words or gestures.

Confidentiality and Privacy

All family and child information are kept confidential and will not be shared with any outside agency or individual without written parental consent. Access to a child's file is limited to protect the privacy of children and families. Information may be released to state or federal licensing agencies if required, or to a hospital or physician in case of an emergency. Families are asked to sign a release form that allows the center to seek emergency medical care if a parent or guardian cannot be reached.

Classroom surveillance cameras are used for internal safety and training purposes only. Video footage is not available for viewing by families or individuals in order to protect the privacy of all students. Thank you for helping us maintain a safe, respectful, and private environment for every child.

Parent Notification of Center Policies

Each center maintains a Parent Notification Bulletin Board in the hallway or center lobby area that includes the License, copy of rules, review of evaluation report, communicable disease chart, statement of parental access, names of persons in charge, current weekly menu, emergency plans for severe weather and fire and statement for visitors.

Parent Communication Messages

- Sent through the Engagement App.
- Shared in newsletters for families that may be distributed each month.
- Shared with staff by talking on a daily basis. Discussed during a scheduled appointment with staff.
- We encourage families to sign- up for our monthly e-newsletter and to follow us on social media. Links can be found at www.shelteringarmsforkids.com.
Phoned, texted, or emailed.

NOTE: Notes placed on center bulletin boards, cubbies, or lockers, or distributed at parent events or meetings must have the prior approval of the center director. The director has the right and responsibility to deny solicitations of any kind.

Process for Expressing Concerns

Enrollment at Sheltering Arms is voluntary, and we are very glad you have chosen us! We are committed to providing you with a high-quality program. Policies and procedures are in place to meet the requirements of those that fund or regulate our program. We want you to be involved with your child's care and education. We welcome your ideas and believe concerns are best handled informally and expediently between the parties involved. At Sheltering Arms, we foster respect and appreciation for the diverse ways and ideas of other people.

We want to teach our children that respect for differences is the key to diverse people living in a world of peace. We believe it is okay to "agree to disagree" but to do so respectfully. At all times it is important to respect each other's emotional and physical space. Any person who verbally or physically threatens another person will be asked to leave immediately.

Formal steps to express concerns include:

- If you have a concern about your child, please address the concern with your child's teacher first, not in the presence of the child. If the concern is not addressed to your satisfaction, then discuss your concern with the Curriculum Specialist and/or Family Support Coach. If you are still

unsatisfied, discuss the concern with the Center Director. It is best to schedule a conference with the teacher or director so that adequate time can be arranged to hear your concerns.

- If you have concerns about our policies and procedures, please feel free to discuss any aspect with the Center Director. It is best to schedule a conference so that a proper time can be arranged to hear your concerns.
- If your concern about your child or the policies and procedures are not resolved with the Center Director, you may ask the Center Director to arrange a meeting within five days with the Sr. Director of Site Leadership.
- If the concern is not resolved in a meeting with the Sr. Director of Site Leadership, the next step is to put your concern in writing to the Chief Operations Officer at the administrative office within five days of the meeting with the Senior Director of Site Leadership.
- The Chief Operations and Programs Officer will review the concern and make a recommendation for resolution within five days of receipt of the concern.
- If step five fails to resolve the concern, it may be referred to the President/CEO of Sheltering Arms for review within five days of the Chief Operations Officer's recommendation. The determination of the President/CEO will be final.



TO CONTACT THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM, WRITE OR CALL:

385 Centennial Olympic Park Drive, NW Atlanta, GA 30313
(404) 523-2767 or (404) 523-9952 (fax)

Blythe Keeler Robinson, President & CEO
Renee Davis-Richardson, Chief Operations & Programs Officer
Steve White, Senior Director, Site Leadership
www.shelteringarmsforkids.com

