SMPC NATURE PRESCHOOL

Policies & Procedures Handbook

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Mark 10:14

"But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Mission & Educational Philosophy

At SMPC Nature Preschool we provide a high-quality, play-based early childhood education rooted in biblical values. Our mission is to nurture the whole child—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually through meaningful, hands-on experiences with the natural world. At SMPC Nature Preschool, we believe children learn best when guided by their own natural curiosity and interests.

We nurture this sense of wonder by using inquiry-based lessons and gentle scaffolding. With inquiry-based learning, children are encouraged to ask questions, explore their surroundings, and seek answers through hands-on investigation. Our educators do not direct a child's play, rather they observe what captures a child's attention and pose thoughtful questions, like "what do you think lives here?" Our educators offer a quiet, supportive presence with minimal interference where children learn to trust their own minds and bodies.

Under a canopy of mature trees, our one-of-a-kind outdoor classroom invites children to explore God's beautiful creation through hands-on discovery. Equipped with a mud kitchen, log benches, picnic tables, garden, and other delightful, natural elements, this space inspires endless imagination. Inside "The Nest," a quaint brick building located in the charming town of Saxonburg, children gather in cozy spaces where learning feels like home.

At SMPC Nature Preschool, we bring the Bible to life through play using beautifully prepared story boxes. Each story box is centered on a different Biblical narrative and is filled with figurines, felt pieces, and natural items like rocks, leaves and twigs. These curated items spark curiosity and help children explore scripture in a hands-on way. Guided by a gentle, Montessori-inspired approach, our lessons encourage young hearts and hands to wonder, play, and build their own meaningful connection with God.

Our Team of Educators

Our dedicated and enthusiastic educators are fully certified and have years of experience and expertise in early childhood development and nature-based learning techniques.

Application Fee

A $25.00 non-refundable application fee is required to apply to SMPC Nature Preschool.

Admissions Policy

SMPC Nature Preschool admits children from the ages of three to five years old without regard to race, color, religion, ancestry, sex, national origin, handicap or disability. If the parents (or legal guardians) of a child identify that a child has special needs, the Preschool Director and the parents (or legal guardians) will meet to review the child's educational and care requirements. SMPC Nature Preschool will provide reasonable accommodation for a child with special needs in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws. If a child requires a personal aide, one must be present with the child in order to attend SMPC Nature Preschool.

Enrollment

Enrollment for the school year is based on a first-come, first-serve basis. Registration opens in February and applications are accepted on a rolling basis year-round. If your child is currently enrolled, you will have priority for the following year. This priority policy also applies to siblings of current and past students and members of Saxonburg Memorial Presbyterian Church.

To enroll, children must be at least 3 years old by September 1st. A non-refundable registration fee of $100.00 is required to secure your child's spot. All registrations are completed on our website. Failure to pay the registration fee will result in your child not being registered and not being able to attend class. Every attempt is made to place children in their preferred class; however, we reserve the right to create optimal learning communities by balancing classes according to gender and age.

Tuition

Tuition fees can be found on our school website. Tuition paid in full prior to the start of the school year, will receive a 5% discount. Tuition is due on the 1st of the month. If your tuition is not received by the 5th of the month, it will be considered delinquent. A $25.00 late fee will be charged for tuition not paid by the 5th of each month. If your account is not up to date by the 1st of the next month, your child will be ineligible to return to SMPC Nature Preschool until tuition is paid. Tuition payments can be made by check or on our website. We do not accept cash. Checks should be made payable to "SMPC Nature Preschool" with the child's first and last name on the memo line. There is a returned check fee of $15.00. Tuition is not refunded or reduced for days missed due to severe weather, illness or family vacations. A 10% tuition discount applies to each additional younger or co-enrolled sibling. Children of members of Saxonburg Memorial Presbyterian Church will receive a 20% discount per child. At SMPC Nature Preschool, we review our tuition rates annually and may adjust our rates each year depending on school needs.

Withdrawal

Parents (or legal guardians) may withdraw their child at any time; however written notice is required. You will also be required to pay the full month's tuition for the month of which you withdraw. If you paid your child's tuition in full at the beginning of the school year, you will be reimbursed for the months your child did not attend preschool.

Program offerings

3-year-olds and 4-year-olds:	2 days/week for 2 ½ hours
4-year-olds and 5-year-olds:	3 days/week for 2 ½ hours

Daily Schedule

At SMPC Nature Preschool, our daily schedule blends structured learning with free exploration, active play, and quiet reflection. Our curriculum supports holistic development by offering opportunities for both individual and collaborative play. Children join engaging small and large group activities, share stories over snack time, practice foundational self-care skills, and move their bodies in nature.

Typical Day

Arrival/Sign In (morning welcome and prayer)
Outdoor Play
Transition Time (washing hands, changing shoes, etc.)
Snack and Story
Large Group
Free Play or Choice Time
Small Groups
Farewell Circle Time (with closing prayer)

Attendance

Regular attendance helps our students settle in quickly and brings a wonderful sense of routine and stability to their day. If your child is ill or unable to attend class, please notify your child's teacher as soon as possible.

Arrival & Dismissal

Parents (or legal guardians) are responsible for transporting their child to and from SMPC Nature Preschool. It is important for children to arrive on time to fully experience the regular routine in their classroom, and to not disrupt class already in session. All children must be signed in at the beginning of the day and signed out at the end of the day by an adult. Your child should not arrive earlier than 15 minutes before class time and they should be picked up promptly at the end of their time with us. Please ensure that your child eats breakfast or lunch, uses the restroom, and washes their hands before class.

Parents must escort their child into our building and place them in the care of a staff member. For the safety of your child, please hold their hand and do not let your child run in the parking lot. Do not leave your vehicle running in the parking lot while you drop off or pick up your child. Please notify staff if you are going to be late or need to pick up your child early. If no one arrives to pick up your child within 15 minutes of dismissal time, the student's emergency contact will be called.

If someone other than a parent (or legal guardian) will pick up your child from Preschool, we must receive a written note when your child is brought to school. If someone new is picking up your child, please ensure their photo identification is ready and available to provide to staff. Again, for your child's safety, we cannot release your child to anyone without your written consent. If a child needs to leave school before the designated dismissal time, parents (or legal guardians) must provide written notification to the child's teacher upon arrival.

School calendar and Breaks

SMPC Nature Preschool follows the Knoch School District calendar (including Knoch's calendar for Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break and Spring Break). You will receive a calendar prior to the start of the school year.

School Closures & Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather, SMPC Nature Preschool will follow Knoch School District for cancellations or delays. If Knoch is closed, we are closed. If Knoch is delayed and has in person instruction, we will have a modified schedule from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. If Knoch has a delay and remote instruction, preschool is cancelled. SMPC Nature Preschool does not make up snow days. If there is a day when we choose to delay or cancel when Knoch does not, or if we decide not to follow Knoch's cancellation or delay decision for that day, parents (or legal guardians) will be notified.

Non-Emergency Communication

We communicate information about your student and our Preschool in several ways:

- Children's backpacks and cubbies- check your child's cubby upon arrival and their backpack after class
- Website- www.saxonburg.org/preschool
- Email
- Daily interaction at arrival and dismissal

Child-Specific Communication

> "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
>
> Ephesians 4:49

Brief questions or conversations can be addressed during drop off or pick up times. We ask parents not to carry on long conversations with the teacher upon arrival or dismissal, as they need to give their full attention to the children. We do encourage you to communicate any changes at home or within your family (i.e. sick grandparent, family member in the hospital, parent on a work trip) with your child's teacher as it is helpful for staff to be aware of any changes that could affect your child. If you would like to discuss something private, or need longer than a few minutes, please feel free to schedule an appointment with your child's teacher or if necessary, the Preschool Director. A direct line of communication ensures that we can address concerns or issues head on before they potentially become bigger. It is our goal to work through any issues collaboratively and with attention and care to your child.

Respectful and kind communication with our staff is essential. If a parent's (or legal guardian's or other family member's) behavior, communications, or interactions on or off our property becomes disruptive, intimidating, overly aggressive, or deeply uncooperative with our policies, methods, or safety procedures, SMPC Nature Preschool reserves the right to dismiss the family from our program.

Assessments & Conferences

Children will be assessed daily through informal observation. Student work samples will be collected throughout the course of the year to be added to a portfolio of growth. Families will keep the portfolio at the end of the school year. Formal assessments will take place at least twice a year and include a parent/legal guardian conference with the child's teacher. Throughout the emergent curriculum, photographs, work samples, and written observations will be celebrated at the culmination of lessons. For example, to close a unit study on isopods, we will celebrate all that we have learned by displaying the knowledge for others to see and celebrate along with us. Perhaps it will be a "museum night" or simply a display table to investigate during pick up/drop off.

What to Wear & Bring to School

Our emergent curriculum encourages children to explore and discover the world around them, which often means getting messy. At SMPC Nature Preschool we will get wet, we will get muddy, and we will be outside every day! Your child will have daily access to paints, markers, natural elements, and other messy materials, so please send them in durable, comfortable clothes that are ready for indoor and outdoor activities.

To make sure your child stays safe and comfortable while running, jumping, climbing, and exploring, please send your child in supportive, closed-toed shoes with gripping soles (no flip-flops, sandals, clogs, or crocs). Dressing your child in easy-to-adjust layers keeps them comfortable as they move between outdoor weather and indoor warmth. Avoid dressing your child in cotton fabrics when it is very warm or very cold. Lastly, please label your child's clothing and belongings to prevent mix-ups.

Here's what your child needs to stay comfortable and safe outdoors:

Fall / Spring gear

Long-sleeved shirt
Fleece/wool sweater
Long pants
Mid-layer fleece jacket/sweatshirt
Rain jacket with hood
Rain pants (or rain suit)
Rain boots
Longer socks (no footies)

Winter gear

Base layers (wool, high tech poly, or fleece)
Insulated water-proof jacket
Insulated water-proof boots
Warm hat that covers ears
Waterproof, insulated mittens
Wool/wool blend socks
Insulated waterproof pants (or snow suit)

Additionally, your child must bring the following to SMPC Nature Preschool each day:

- A regular-sized backpack (be sure to mark your child's name on all items he or she brings to school and check your child's backpack daily)
- A folder with your child's name on it
- A filled, reusable, spill-proof water bottle with your child's name on it
- If you would prefer that your child have a specific brand/formulation of sunscreen, please bring it to school on the first day (to be kept in a locked cabinet at school). Otherwise, staff will apply a child-safe SPF.
- A spare set of clothes (shirt, pants, underwear, socks-changed out for each season) in a labeled zip-lock bag
- Reusable grocery bag or washable bag for transporting wet or muddy gear from school to home
- Indoor slip-on shoes to change into after outdoor play

Outdoor Play

Children will go outside every day unless there is inclement weather or unsafe conditions. We monitor the weather each day and if certain conditions exist (lightning, extreme wind chill and/or temperatures, heavy winds, smoke or smog) we will remain indoors.

Using the Bathroom

All students should be potty trained before starting preschool at SMPC Nature Preschool. We understand that potty training takes time and children will have accidents, but they should be well on the road to being fully potty-trained. This will help them to fully participate in our program. Teachers will accompany students to the restroom, but children are encouraged to use the restroom independently. We ask that you provide an extra set of clothing for your child to keep at school in case of accidents. Throughout the change of seasons, you will have a chance to update the contents according to weather. If your child has any physical or developmental delays that prevent them from being potty trained before the start of school, please communicate that with the Preschool Director prior to the start of school. Please ensure your child uses the restroom before leaving home or you take your child to the restroom upon arrival. If a child has an accident other than urine at school, we will call a parent (or legal guardian) to come and change them.

Items from home

Toys, blankets, and jewelry should be left at home as they can be distracting or could get broken or lost at school. SMPC Nature Preschool is not responsible for lost or broken items brought from home to school.

Illness

For the good of others and the health of your child, please do not bring a sick child to school. If your child experiences any of the following, please keep your child at home:

- The child has an acute cold with fever, runny nose and/or excessive coughing and sneezing.
- The child is wheezing or having difficulty breathing.
- The child has experienced a fever (temperature of 100 degrees or higher) in the last 24 hours.
- The child has experienced diarrhea or vomiting in the last 24 hours.
- The child has yellow or green phlegm or nasal discharge.
- The child has a sore throat.
- The child has an earache.
- The child shows symptoms such as excessive tiredness, nausea, irritability, lack of appetite, or unusual behaviors.
- The child has a yellow or green discharge from the eyes, or their eyes indicate possible conjunctivitis ("pink eye").
- The child has a rash or is experiencing severe itching of their body or scalp.
- The child has wounds or sores that are draining fluid and cannot be covered.

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- The child has lice or nits.
- If an antibiotic is prescribed, the child must be on the antibiotic 24 hours before returning to school.

Our staff will follow these same guidelines when deciding if they are healthy enough to come to work. SMPC Nature Preschool reserves the right to refuse admission to any visibly ill child. We request that parents (or legal guardians) notify their child's teacher at once after their child has developed a known or suspected communicable disease/infection (i.e. pink eye, strep throat, chicken pox, measles, influenza, covid, conjunctivitis, lice, impetigo, hand-foot-and-mouth, fifth disease, etc.). Children with communicable diseases are not permitted to attend school for the following specified intervals according to the rules and regulations mandated by state law:

Disease	Return to School
Chicken Pox	Six days from the last crop of vesicles (scabs must be dry and temperature normal for 24 hours)
Conjunctivitis, Acute Contagious (pink eye)	24 hours from institution of appropriate therapy
COVID-10	As determined by CDC guidelines and health department requirements
Diphtheria	Two weeks from onset or until appropriate negative culture tests
Impetigo, Contagious	Until judged noninfectious by the child's physician
Measles	Four days from onset of rash
Mumps	Nine days from onset or until subsistence of swelling
Pediculosis Capitis (head lice)	Until judged noninfectious by the child's physician
Pediculosis Corpora (body lice)	Until judged noninfectious by child's physician
Pertussis	Four weeks from the onset or seven days from institution of appropriate antimicrobial therapy
Ringworm-all types	Until judged noninfectious by the child's physician
Rubella	Four days from the onset of rash
Scabies	Until judged noninfectious by the child's physician
Streptococcal infections (including Respiratory and Scarlet Fever	Not less than seven days from the onset or 24 hours from institution of appropriate antimicrobial therapy
Tonsilitis	24 hours from institution of appropriate therapy
Trachoma	24 hours from institution of appropriate therapy

In cases of communicable disease, a doctor's certificate must be returned as proof of the child's physical fitness for Preschool.

In cases of a fever, vomiting, or diarrhea, students should remain home until they are free of these symptoms for at least 24 hours.

When there has been an exposure at school, we promptly notify all parents (or legal guardians) and staff, with details about symptoms and incubation periods, etc., as appropriate, excluding the identity of the child. If a child becomes ill during the school day, staff will contact a parent (or legal guardian) and request that the child be picked up immediately. If a parent (or legal guardian) cannot be reached, we will call the names listed on your child's emergency contact form.

Medications

No medications will be administered by staff at SMPC Nature Preschool. Please do not send medication in your child's backpack. If your child has a physician-issued EpiPen, please be sure the office and his or her teacher are aware.

First aid kit

The first aid kit will be inaccessible to children, but readily available for adult use. Following each use of the first aid kit, the contents will be inspected and missing or used items will be replaced immediately. The first aid kit is taken to the outdoor play area as well as on field trips and outings away from SMPC Nature School.

Sanitizing

At SMPC Nature School, we maintain a clean, safe, and sanitary environment for your child. Our staff routinely cleans, sanitizes, and disinfects high-touch surfaces throughout the day. This includes toys, doorknobs, light switches, sink handles, toilets, desks, chairs, tables, cubbies, and playground structures.

Handwashing

Frequent hand washing stops the spread of germs. Children, teachers, and volunteers must wash their hands upon arrival, after using the restroom and before serving or eating snacks.

Health reports

Parents (or legal guardians) must provide an initial health report no later than 60 days following the first day of attendance at SMPC Nature Preschool. The initial health report must be dated no more than 1 year prior to the first day of attendance. Thereafter, an updated health report must be provided to SMPC Nature Preschool every 12 months. The health report must be written and signed by a physician, physician's assistant or CRNP. The signature must include the individual's professional title.

Vaccine exemptions

If, as a parent (or legal guardian), you choose not to vaccinate your child you must provide the Preschool Director with a written, signed, and dated statement, on the first day of class, documenting the child's exemption from immunization for religious belief or strong personal objection equated to a religious belief. Parents (or legal guardians) seeking exemption from immunization based on their child's medical need(s) must provide a written, signed, and dated statement from the child's physician, physician's assistant, or CRNP.

Child confidentiality

Child records are confidential and will be stored in a locked cabinet. Our staff may not disclose information concerning a child or family, except in the course of inspections and investigations by agents of the Department.

Snacks

Before snack time, children are invited to join in a short prayer: "Thank you God for our food and friends."

We want to foster healthy eating habits at an early age. Each family will be asked to provide healthy/dye-free snacks for their child's class on a rotating basis. Please refer to the Healthy Snack Choice List contained at the end of this Handbook.

Please mark your name on any containers you wish to have returned to you. Please be mindful of children with food allergies in your child's class and make every effort to avoid snacks with known allergens in them. Teachers will notify parents which allergens to avoid.

Birthday treats

If your child would like to bring a birthday treat for their classmates, individually wrapped treats may be placed on top of cubbies to be enjoyed at home. We do not serve birthday treats to the students during school hours. Again, please be mindful of allergies in your child's class.

Allergies

Nut-free? Dairy-free? Gluten-free? No matter the allergen, SMPC Nature Preschool ensures that each classroom is a safe space for all students. Your child's teacher will communicate any allergies or food intolerances in their class. All snacks, for all children, follow the needs of the class. If one child is gluten-free, then all communal snacks must be gluten-free. If a child with allergies brought their own separate snack, these children would lose the opportunity to enjoy some of the same foods as their peers in a shared social setting. Since food allergies can be life-threatening, SMPC Nature Preschool takes all reasonable precautions to keep your child from harm. Teachers are trained to recognize the signs of an allergic reaction and respond appropriately.

Class Celebrations

Faith-Based holidays including Christmas and Easter will be celebrated with special activities, stories, and crafts centered on biblical teachings. Teachers will notify families if volunteers or supplies are needed. Due to room size, younger siblings may not attend class parties.

Field Trips

To supplement the learning our nature-based curriculum provides, field trips may be scheduled and/or guest speakers may be invited into our classrooms. Parents will be notified in advance, in writing, of all field trips or guest speakers. Parents (or legal guardians) are responsible for attending the field trip with their child and arranging transportation for the child to and from the field trip location. We request "no siblings" on field trips, when possible, though we understand this can be difficult in some cases. Parents with infants small enough to be carried or kept in a car seat may bring their babies on field trips. If a parent (or legal guardian) is unable to attend, they must provide written authorization for another individual to do so.

Volunteers

Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate in SMPC Nature Preschool activities. Volunteers may organize family service projects or charity drives inspired by Christian teachings on compassion and generosity with approval from the Preschool Director.

All volunteers involved in classroom activities must supply the Preschool Director with the following:

- PA State Police Criminal History Record Check (free for volunteers)

  https://epatch.pa.gov/home - go to "New Volunteer Record Check"

- PA Child Abuse History Certification (free for volunteers)

  https://www.compass.dhs.pa.gov/cwis

If you have not been a continuous resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 consecutive years you will also need to complete the following:

- A DHS fingerprint-based FBI Background Check ($22.95)

  IDEMIA, the Commonwealth's fingerprinting vendor, requires applicants to pre-register for fingerprinting prior to visiting an IdentoGo center one of two ways:

  Online: visit www.Identogo.com

  Telephone: call 1-844-321-2101 and listen to the options menu.

  Applicants must provide a service code (1KG6ZJ) when pre-registering for fingerprinting.

Paper copies of your completed PA Child Protection clearances must be on file in the Preschool office before you can volunteer. We accept copies of clearances completed for other schools or businesses that are less than one year old. PA Child Protection Clearances are good for 5 years.

CHANGE OF INFORMATION

It is the parent (or legal guardian's) responsibility to inform the Preschool Director of any change in information that relates to our ability to contact you (i.e. address, email address, and phone number).

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs of the students may be taken throughout the school year for parent communications, SMPC's website, preschool advertisements, etc. Parents who do not want their child to be photographed must indicate so on a permission slip that will be sent home.

CLASSROOM GUIDELINES

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind…Love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:37, 39

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Galatians 5:22

We believe that children develop self-control and respect when they are treated with dignity and guided by positive discipline. Our staff never shames or uses corporal punishment of any kind. To nurture each child's social-emotional growth, our educators actively:

- Set clear expectations and limits
- Model and teach positive social behaviors and self-regulation
- Frame mistakes as valuable opportunities to learn and grow
- Guide children through natural and logical consequences when appropriate
- Recognize and reinforce positive behavior

Discipline

SMPC Nature Preschool is committed to providing a safe and positive environment for all children. To ensure the safety of school community, we expect children to demonstrate respectful behavior. Unacceptable behaviors that disrupt this environment or compromise safety include but are not limited to biting or attempting to bite others, hitting, kicking, throwing or forcefully taking objects, damaging materials, spitting, using inappropriate language, screaming, and openly defying classroom rules or staff directions.

An uncooperative child will be counseled about their behavior by one of the teachers. If necessary, the child will be removed from the situation. When the child demonstrates they are ready to join the group appropriately, they will be encouraged to participate. During all group activities, all children are expected to remain as part of the group. Serious problems will be discussed with parents (or legal guardians). We expect parents (or legal guardians) to work with us to develop appropriate strategies to address the behavioral concern(s). If corrective actions have been implemented to help rectify the problem behavior and the behavior is not corrected, parents (or legal guardians) may be asked to withdraw their child from our program.

Developmental screenings

Our students will have the opportunity to participate in free developmental screenings annually.

Fire / Emergency Drills

Practice evacuations of the building are held regularly. Fire drills are conducted at least once every 60 days. Emergency drills will be conducted annually. Children and teachers practice evacuating the building in a quiet, orderly fashion, and meeting in our designated safe location, to help assure our safety in the event of a real emergency. We may need to use a lock-down procedure when the teachers and students are in the classrooms. During a lockdown, all doors will be locked immediately. We will contact parents and legal guardians as soon as possible with emergency updates, all-clear notices, and safe reunification instructions.

Safety

The safety of your child is our highest priority. Our teachers hold current training in first aid, CPR, and EpiPen response. During any emergency involving your child, we will assess the situation and if necessary, contact 911. Staff will respond as necessary until emergency help arrives. If the emergency requires professional medical care, a staff member will accompany your child to the hospital. Parents (or legal guardians) will be contacted immediately. If staff is unable to reach you, we will call the individual(s) you have designated as your emergency contact(s). For any significant injury an incident report will be submitted to the parents (or legal guardians) for signature and a copy will be filed in the office. For minor injuries, we will send home documentation detailing the injury and treatment provided (i.e. ice, band-aids, etc.).

Building Security

After drop-off the Preschool Director will conduct a security check and will make sure doors are locked and students are safe. Visitors must sign in and out before entering the building. If there is a threat of violence or gunfire, classroom doors will be shut and locked. Teachers will use cell phones to contact 911 and wait until emergency responders arrive at school.

Mandated Reporters

Our teachers and staff are considered mandated reporters and are required by 55 Pa. Code § 3270.19 to immediately report suspected child abuse to ChildLine if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse. Within 48 hours, a written report regarding the suspected child abuse shall be submitted by the operator or designated staff person to the CPS unit which has responsibility for investigating the report.

We are here to serve your family in any way we can. Our Pastor is also available to meet any spiritual needs your family may have.

If your family is interested in worshipping at Saxonburg Memorial Presbyterian Church, We would love for you to join us!

We look forward to meeting your family!