



EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM GERMANTOWN JEWISH CENTRE

2019-2020
Parent Handbook

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Mission Statement and Educational Philosophy

Mission Statement

The Early Childhood Program of the Germantown Jewish Centre provides high quality Jewish education and child care, enriching both the families served and the congregation. The original Nursery School was expanded in 1980 to a full day program which emphasizes learning through doing in an environment where individuality is nurtured and respected. At the same time, the program develops a sense of community and friendship. Our talented, dedicated, professional staff provides age appropriate activities which stimulate the development of the whole child.

We encourage children at varying developmental stages to interact and learn from one another. Our staff and school and families are mutually supportive and strive to maintain a caring community, a stable “home” for our children.

Learning and experiencing Jewish culture and tradition are central to our program. Holidays are celebrated through classroom activities, family programs, and synagogue events. Children learn Jewish values through discussion, song, story, drama and puppetry.

We are proud to be located in the midst of the beautiful and diverse Mt. Airy section of Philadelphia. We are committed to teaching and promoting respect and understanding of all persons.

The Early Childhood Program of the Germantown Jewish Centre is a non –profit center licensed by the Department of Human Services of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We are open to all; priority for admission is given, however, to synagogue member families.

Education Philosophy

The Germantown Jewish Centre Early Childhood Program is a special place for young children from three months of age through five years of age and for their families. Through the lens of Jewish culture and tradition, our children learn about themselves and the world around them.

The Early Childhood Program is a Jewish Preschool that offers half-day and full day programs as well as early and late day care. We are open to all, with priority admission given to synagogue member families. The preschool environment, created by our dedicated and talented staff, is warm, nurturing and creative. The staff takes interest in all children and strive to create a family atmosphere throughout the school. We believe that every moment is a teachable moment and we are committed to instilling this belief in our children.

The preschool follows the yearly cycle of the Jewish holidays. Each week begins with a school-wide Havdallah service and end with a Friday Shabbat celebration led by the Rabbi. Jewish culture, traditions, and values are woven into our curriculum. Through *Mitzvot* (commandments), *Tzedakah* (charity) and *Tikun Olam* (repairing the world), children learn to respect themselves, others and the world they live in. The Rabbis of Germantown Jewish Centre meet with the children to help celebrate Shabbat and holidays. They can often be seen in the classrooms joining in a holiday celebration with the children or sharing a story with them.

The Germantown Jewish Centre Early Childhood Program is dedicated to encouraging children to develop self-esteem, know that they are loved, and that they have a special place in the world. We encourage students to respect all people and value their differences while embracing a strong identification with Judaism and the Jewish people. Students develop cognitive, social-emotional, language, and physical skills on which they can build a foundation for future learning. We encourage families to become partners with the school in the education of their children and participate in our school community

Our program stresses "learning through doing" using a multisensory approach and emphasizes the importance of play. We understand that children's work is play. The teachers utilize many learning styles to engage the children and allow for individual differences. Through this approach the staff assists in the development of cognitive, social-emotional, language, and physical skills.

The curriculum consists of the children learning:

- Shape Recognition
- Letter Recognition
- Spatial Concepts
- Conflict Resolution
- Science Units-Dinosaurs, Space, Ocean, Animals
- Numbers
- Color Differentiation
- Motor Skill Development
- Weekly Music/Yoga Classes

The Early Childhood Program has recently implemented *The Creative Curriculum*, which is designed to offer opportunities and growth based upon a children's developmental needs. Specific goals, objectives, and methods are written throughout the year with each individual child's needs in mind. Under the guidance of our dedicated staff, children will experience many opportunities to learn by using their sensory perception of looking, touching, hearing, tasting, and smelling. This facilitates the highest form of learning and is the basis for all of our activities. Our program is directed to help the children develop habits of observation, questioning and listening.

Programs and Classes

The ECP warmly welcomes children from the ages of three months to five years. We offer a variety of hours and programs to meet the needs of our diverse community. The following classes is a breakdown of our classroom communities:

- *Chaverim* includes children between the ages of three months through approximately one year, depending on developmental needs
- *Parparim* and *Kofim* include children who are one to two years old
- *Barvazim*, *Dubim*, and *Tziporim* include children who are two to three years old
- *Dagim* include children who are three to four years old
- *Yonim* include children who are four to five years old and will be attending kindergarten the following year

Classrooms are designed to encourage active learning where children are encouraged and assisted in choosing from activities such as blocks, painting, music, puzzles, other small manipulatives, books, art projects, cooking, dress up imaginative play, and so much more.

Arrival and Dismissal

Early Care

Early care is available for all the children in our programs five days a week from 7:30–8:00 am. This option is available 1-5 days a week for the entire year. If early drop-off is needed for an individual day, a per diem rate is charged.

School Day

Our school day is 8:00am-4:00pm. Part time options are available. Infants, Young Toddlers, and Older Toddlers require a minimum of 12 hours per week; Preschool and Pre-K require a minimum of 5 half days (8:00am-12:45pm).

Late Care

Our late care program runs Monday through Friday, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. This option is available 1-5 days for the entire year. If late care is needed for an individual day(s), as a per diem, or as an add-on for the remainder of the year, please communicate this with the office. From mid-October through mid-March, there is no late care on Fridays due to the observance of Shabbat.

Late Pick Up Penalties

Our staffing patterns are based on the number of children who are registered for the program. In order for us to maintain our staff:child ratios, we ask for you to pick up your child promptly. Students who are not picked up by their scheduled time will be charged the following fees:

- After 12pm – extended hour rates apply
- After 4pm– extended hour rates apply
- After 6pm – \$10 for the first 5 minutes; \$5 for each additional 5 minutes

Designated Pickup

As part of our continuing concern for the welfare and safety of all of the children, each parent is required to designate on the Emergency Contact Form those people who have permission to take your child at dismissal times. Please include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of anyone who cares for your child and may pick them up. It is extremely important that every section of the Emergency Contact form be completed in full. Please do not use "same as above" and if a section does not apply, please state "none."

If the need arises for someone other than a designated person to take your child, please let the ECP office know in writing. This form is necessary to keep all the children safe while in our care. **Please remind your designated person to always have ID as a staff member will insist on proper ID before releasing the child.** If your child is invited to a friend's house after school, we will let your child go home with the friend if we receive a written note from you or a telephone call.

For an urgent situation, please call the office and provide the name of the individual picking up your child.

Field Trips/In-House Programs

Providing a variety of experiences to our children is an important aspect of our program. We will bring special programming in for all our children to enjoy, including puppet shows, musicians, animals, etc. Children also take walks throughout the neighborhood; we will communicate ahead of time if we leave the property. On occasion, our older children (three to five-year-olds) may go on a field trip. Due to state regulations, children are required to be transported by school bus if not transported by their own parent.

Security Measures and Policies

The safety and security of our school and building are of the utmost importance to us, and ECP and Germantown Jewish Centre have implemented numerous security measures aimed at keeping our students safe. One of our most visible security measures is our fob system. Each family receives two fobs upon enrollment in ECP which gives parents and caregivers to access the main GJC entrance as well as the ECP hallways. Please note that parent fobs will not allow access to the ECP hallways through the Canteen room door or stairwell entrances.

Each person entering the building should use their own fob to open the door. Please do not allow others to “piggyback” into the building. It is not rude to close the door; remind them to use their own fob, or to ring the doorbell if they do not a fob. If someone other than a parent or guardian is dropping off or picking up a child, they may only borrow a parent's fob if they are listed on the student's *Key Fob Permission* form. Those persons who are not listed, but will need access to ECP, should ring the doorbell.

If families would like an extra fob, or need to replace a lost fob, can purchase new ones for a fee of \$15. Please contact the ECP for additional fobs.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

The ECP has an Emergency Evacuation Plan in place, which provides instructions for all types of emergency situations, including procedures for evacuation in the event of fire, severe weather or even a dangerous situation which indicates evacuation of the building and the grounds. Teachers receive annual training and are well advised as to the procedures to follow in all situations. They also review the proper evacuation procedures with the children in the form of regular drills. A modified Emergency Evacuation Plan is posted in each classroom and the full copy of the Plan is available in the office for your review.

Communication

Communication concerning your child is always welcomed. Please feel free to speak with your child's teacher first if you have a question or a concern. We use several methods of communicating with our families. For our Infant, young toddler and older toddler classes, daily information sheets are completed by the teachers and sent home daily in your child's bag. Weekly newsletters will be sent via email or through classroom websites summarizing the weekly events of the class.

ECP uses *Remind* to deliver emergency notifications through text messages to parents. You may have received a text message letting you know that your phone number has been connected to this service. You may choose to opt out but you will no longer receive emergency communications. If you are not receiving *Remind* alerts, but would like to, please contact the ECP office.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

We want to keep you informed about your child's progress. During the year, your child's teacher will contact you in the late fall and in the spring for a conference. If you choose to not attend conferences – whether by phone or in person – your teacher will provide you with a *decline conference form* and a copy of your child's assessment which we ask you to sign for their file.

Inclement Weather or School Closings

In the event of an emergency closing, early closing, snow closing/delay or any other unexpected closing, the following procedure will be followed:

ECP uses the *Remind* phone message service to deliver emergency notifications through automated phone calls to parents. This notification service delivers phone messages within minutes, allowing us to notify parents of school closures or delays, or in the event of an emergency. Once the parent or emergency contact has been notified, the child must be picked up according to the new dismissal time for the day.

Enrollment Forms

Before a student's first day at ECP, we must have a signed Enrollment Agreement, Emergency Contact form, and Health Assessment signed by the student's doctor and accompanied by a record of immunization. Parents are also required to submit a Key Fob permission form, About Your Child form, and Photo Permission form.

Classroom Guidance

Our goal is to provide a child with meaningful and intentional experiences. When addressing classroom management needs, we typically implement conflict resolution through reasoning and redirection. Although we strive to minimize the need for disciplinary action by trying to anticipate troublesome situations and prevent them before they occur, this is not always possible. Each situation is handled independently with the needs of each individual child taken into account.

Discharge Policy

The ECP reserves the right to request a family to leave our program when reasonable arrangements cannot be agreed upon. The following represents the most common issues for discharge, but are not limited to the following:

- Failure for the child to adjust
- Extreme behavior issues
- Inappropriate behavior of the adults responsible for the child
- Non-payment or excessive late payments of fees or tuition
- Excessive late pick-ups
- Non-adherence to school policies

Transfer of Children's Record

If you would like your child's next school to have his/her records, please note that we require a written request from you, along with the name and address of the school, in order to process your request.

Divorce & Custody Arrangements

In the event of a separation or divorce, in order to ensure the safety and welfare of each child in the ECP, we must be aware of the court's current custody decision. We require that a copy of the court's decree or written agreement related to custody be kept in the child's file. We may not restrict access to a birth parent without a court order on file. Furthermore, we request that this parent/guardian also notify the Early Childhood Director, in writing, of any change of the designated person(s) authorized to pick up the child, whether it is on a temporary or permanent basis. If a designated person is added, the staff member will require proper ID before releasing the child. The ECP staff will not release the child to any undesignated person before contacting you by telephone.

Lunch Program & Food Policies

For lunch, please send in a clearly labeled lunch box with a **vegetarian or dairy meal**, including a drink. Do not include meat, poultry or shellfish in your child's lunch. Your child's meal should be food which is easy for them to handle. If your child is a toddler, please encourage their independence by sending a lunch they can feed themselves (for example: a sandwich cut into quarters). Please do not send in extra lunch food for your child to share with their friends; in consideration of children with food allergies, teachers will make sure children do not share their lunches. All foods brought into our school must be and **NUT and TREE NUT FREE**.

Please send utensils and bibs if needed; they will be sent home daily. Your child's name should also be clearly written on all food containers, including tops. All food will be refrigerated; we do not heat any food. If you would like to send warm food, send it in an insulated container marked "WARM" and leave it with your child's teacher. Please send food that is ready to eat and does not need further cutting, peeling, coring, etc.

If your child stays in the afternoon, include enough food and variety in the lunch to provide an afternoon snack for your child. Please advise us of any specific foods your child may not have.

All food brought to ECP must conform to **GJC's Kashrut policy**. Lunches are "Personal Food" and may not include any meat (even kosher meat), poultry, seafood or shellfish.

Germantown Jewish Centre Kashrut Policy

SCHOOL BUILDING

(Maslow Auditorium, Temin Canteen Room & kitchen, all classrooms, offices, and hallways)

Personal food (eaten only by the individual)

- No meat, no poultry, no seafood, no shellfish (even kosher meat is not permitted)
- Fish must be of kosher types (permitted: tuna, salmon, whitefish, lox, herring; not permitted: swordfish, catfish, eel, seafood, shellfish); for fish not listed, ask the ECP office

Communal food (shared with others)

- No meat, no poultry, no seafood, no shellfish (even kosher meat is not permitted)
- No products with animal fat, lard, or animal shortening
- Check ingredients OR check for kosher certification (dairy or pareve)
- Fish must be of kosher types (permitted: tuna, salmon, whitefish, lox, herring; not permitted: swordfish, catfish, eel, seafood, shellfish); for fish not listed, ask the ECP office
- All fruits and all dairy and vegetarian foods are permitted
- Both home-prepared and commercially-prepared foods that meet the above criteria are permitted

Please make sure that any special treats bought for our classes has a kosher symbol and is not made with peanuts or in a facility that process peanuts and/or tree nuts. We suggest fruit, ice cream or any Entenmanns Cake or Tasty Cake that is free of peanuts and/or tree nuts.

Birthday Celebrations

Birthday Celebrations are welcomed within the classroom. Refreshments consisting of doughnuts or cupcakes may be served, although healthy treats are encouraged. All baked goods must be purchased from a recognized (by GJC) kosher bakery or bought from the supermarket in a sealed, kosher-labeled package. We recognize families have birthday celebrations outside of school as well. When scheduling these important dates, please be considerate by affording ALL of the children an equal opportunity to enjoy the birthday party with your child. Remember, by agreeing to send your child to ECP, you have committed yourself to the understanding of the holiness of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. Therefore, we request that you plan birthday parties after school hours or on Sundays. Birthday invitations can only be hand-delivered through the children's school bags when every child in the class is invited and when the party respects the holiness of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays.

Health and Illness Policy

Please do not send your child to school if he/she is ill. If your child is exhibiting any of the following symptoms, please keep them home until they have **been symptom free without medication for at least 24 hours**:

- temperature of 100.4 or above
- vomiting
- two or more bouts of diarrhea
- unable to participate in their regular routine

If we exhibit any of the above symptoms during the day, we ask that you arrange for your child to be picked up within an hour of us contacting you. Your child will need to stay home for the remaining part of that day and the following day. Of course, if you have any questions or concerns you are more than welcome to check with your child's teacher or the ECP Director.

Please remember to wash your child's hands upon arrival. Doing so helps to stop the spread of germs throughout the building and teaches children proper hygiene and hand washing skills.

Staff will call you if your child becomes ill through the course of the day. If your child is injured or becomes ill while at the ECP, we are permitted to:

- take a temperature reading
- use ice to prevent swelling
- apply pressure to stop bleeding
- wash a wound
- apply a band aid
- call 911 in the event of an emergency

If your child requires medication to be given at school, you must send the medication in its original container with proper dosing dispenser (syringe, measuring cup, etc.) accompanied by a Medication Log outlining the proper dosage and timing. All prescription medications must be accompanied by a signed doctor's note. Remember that children must be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to school; symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and other communicable illness.

Immunization Policy

ECP follows the vaccine schedule put forth by the Centers for Disease Control and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Aside from children who are diagnosed with medical conditions requiring an altered vaccine schedule, all children are required to be vaccinated according to the CDC/AAP schedule. If your child is diagnosed with medical conditions requiring an altered schedule, we require a letter from your child's pediatrician and an updated vaccine schedule. **All students will be required to proof of immunization upon enrollment. Students must also provide proof a flu vaccination no later than December 1st.**

Billing and Tuition Policies

All students must have, upon their first day at ECP, a signed Enrollment Agreement with a chosen payment plan; agreements are generated by the ECP and outline families' financial responsibilities. Invoices for families who choose to pay in installments are distributed to students' cubbies on the first business day of the month, and payment is due on the last business day of the month. GJC accepts payment in the form of check (made out to "GJC"), cash, credit card (subject to 4% processing fee), or ACH payment. Payments not received by the last business day of the month are subject to a \$25 late fee.

Per Diem Additions

Families may add "per diem" days or hours to their child's schedule based on availability. Additional days and hours are granted at the discretion of the ECP Director, and all requests must be sent, in writing, to the ECP office. Extended days and hours are billed at the per diem rate and are billed on the following month's invoice.

Change of Hours

The tuition stated in a student's Enrollment Agreement covers the days and hours for which they have registered. These hours cannot be reduced after the first day of a student's enrollment at ECP. Families are allowed one schedule change without penalty; subsequent schedule changes are subject to a \$25.00 processing fee

Cancellation of Agreement

Families may cancel the agreement by giving written notice to the school any time prior to the student's first day of enrollment at ECP.

Transition Information

When your child moves to another class, or graduates to Kindergarten, we want to ensure the smoothest transition possible. When a child moves into another classroom, we make sure the child visits the new class and meets the teachers.

At the beginning of the school year, each child along with their parents, are invited to ECP's Open House which is held on the afternoon before the first day of school.

When a child is graduating from our program and moving to kindergarten, we also help to make this transition as smooth as possible. Activities we may implement to prepare the children and families include:

- Lesson plans geared toward kindergarten.
- Books read to students about kindergarten.
- A parent meeting with local kindergarten teachers, principals, and our own pre-k staff to explain the transition process.

Clothing & Supplies

Outdoor play is an integral part of our daily routine. Please dress your child ready to play outside daily. The classrooms are air conditioned in hot weather and are rather warm in winter. It helps to keep a sweater or sweatshirt in your child's cubby at all times. Please dress in weather appropriate inner and outerwear. Remember to send snow pants and boots and rain boots as needed. Children are required to wear sneakers or other closed-toe shoes are required for safety on the playground. Sandals are not permitted.

Creativity is an important component of our program. The children work with tempera paints, finger paints, watercolors, markers, crayons, chalk, pastels, glue, play dough and other creative materials. While children do wear aprons, it is difficult to prevent all contact between clothing and art supplies. Please dress your child in clothes that can "take the rigorous workout our young artists give them."

Teachers will let parents know what students should keep in their cubbies, but students should generally keep seasonally appropriate changes of clothes, as well as any diapers/pull-ups/wipes/etc. that are needed. **All items should be clearly labeled with the student's name.** Please be sure to check your child's cubby to ensure that there are enough supplies, and that extra clothes are the correct size and seasonally appropriate.

Students who are in school for naptime, and infants who nap throughout the day, should have keep nap supplies at school, including a fitted sheet (teachers will let you know which size), a blanket,

Diapering

Young infants and toddlers using diapers will need to supply diapers and wipes to their child's classroom. Any type of one-use disposable is acceptable as long as it is the proper size for your child. Due to health regulations we cannot permit the use of reusable cloth diapers while your child is at the center.

Toilet Training

We realize that toilet training is a process, and we are committed to working together with you and your child. During this transition we request that you communicate with your child's teacher to discuss the most successful plan for your child while at school and at home.

Parent Involvement

Active parent participation is critical to the success of the program and is an important part of what makes the Early Childhood Program special. There are lots of ways to get involved, and we are always open to hearing your thoughts and ideas about how you would like to participate. If in your schedule there is time to share yourself and your interests, please arrange to do so with the teachers. If you sing, dance, paint, tell stories, or just enjoy being with the kids... WELCOME!

You will value the opportunity to get to know other parents and to contribute to your child's "home away from home", and your children will appreciate your participation. There are a number of ways you can get involved including:

The Early Childhood Parent Committee

The Early Childhood Program Parent Committee functions as a Parent-Teacher Association. The Committee's chairperson(s) work in close collaboration with the ECP Director. Parent Committee meetings are scheduled and publicized well in advance, and all are welcome to attend. The Committee coordinates many activities and is always looking for more volunteers. The Committee is

also interested in how the program and other parents can support you and your family. Committee members contact new families to welcome them to the ECP, assist with the orientation and educational activities for parents, and help organize holiday and pot luck family meals.

Work Parties

It is a custom for parents to help repair toys, books, classroom furniture and furnishings. We hold "fix-up" days several times a year, usually on Sundays. Information on dates and projects will be e-mailed and/or left in your child's cubby. We count on your participation on those days to help make your child's schools home a pleasant place to be.

About GJC

Our Mission

The Germantown Jewish Centre (GJC) has been the heart of the Jewish community in Northwest Philadelphia and the surrounding suburbs for 75 years. We are a vibrant, pluralistic and egalitarian synagogue located in Mount Airy and committed to sustaining and strengthening Jewish life in greater Philadelphia.

Affiliated with the Conservative movement and receptive to the wisdom of many sources in Judaism, we engage in life-long Jewish learning and strive to make Judaism relevant and important to our members' lives. As a welcoming community, we embrace a wide diversity of Jewish lifestyles and households. Encouraging a variety of styles and setting for religious practice, we foster multiple prayer communities. We sustain each other by celebrating holidays and life-cycle events, and by sharing in cultural and social activities, social activism, and community building.

We support the State of Israel and Klal Israel. We work to strengthen Northwest Philadelphia through civic and interreligious activities. To these ends, we maintain a fiscally sustainable institution. We welcome anyone who shares our values and our commitment to Jewish community life.

Synagogue Resources

Various groups in the Germantown Jewish Centre community sponsor activities and provide resources which you are invited to use. Religious services are held every Monday & Thursday morning, on Shabbat and holidays. A family friendly Shabbat service, *Shabbat Together*, is held monthly on Friday night at 6:00 PM. Special children's services are available on Saturday mornings from 11:00-12:00 p.m.

The Women of GJC run a wonderful gift shop on the second floor of the school building. It is a great source of Jewish gifts, books and kosher wines. Check with the GJC office for "Little Shop" hours. They run periodically run special sales for ECP. All Little Shop proceeds help to fund children's programs at GJC, including ECP.

The synagogue library has strong collections of Judaica and children's books. The library is being remodeled so it is more family friendly. Wireless internet access will be available. The Adult Education program sponsors an excellent selection of classes on weekday evenings and on Sunday mornings.

Shabbat & Holidays

ECP will periodically promote children's services and programs throughout the year. All families, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are invited to participate. You can find more information about our Shabbat and holiday services, as well as our different *Minyanim*, on GJC's website.