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| **Daycare** |
| **1658 Old Brook RoadCharlottesville, VA 22901** |
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**Welcome to Gentle Care Daycare**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide the parents with a guide to Gentle Care Daycare’s policies, philosophies and practices, so that both the parents and the provider are familiar with the expectations and services of this program. Here at Gentle Care, it is our goal to love and nurture each child and provide them with a “home away from home”, where they can feel safe and respected, learn new skills, try new things and grow to their full potential. We look forward to developing a close and caring relationship with you and your family!

**Table of Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Gentle Care Daycare Philosophy | Page 2 |
| Registration Checklist | Page 2 |
| State Licensing Requirements | Page 3 |
| Termination Policy  | Page 3 |
| Daycare Hours | Page 3 |
| Holidays and Vacations | Page 3 |
| Registration Fee/Payment Policy | Page 4 |
| Attendance/Late Pick-up | Page 4 |
| Guidelines for Illnesses | Page 4 |
| Child Absences and Vacations | Page 5 |
| Medication/Allergies | Page 5 |
| Medical Emergency Procedures | Page 5 |
| Reporting Child Abuse | Page 6 |
| Evacuation Procedures | Page 6 |
| Diaper Policy | Page 6 |
| Toys | Page 6 |
| Open Door Policy | Page 7 |
| Behavior Management and Discipline | Page 7 |
| Cleanliness | Page 8 |
| Arrival/Departure | Page 8 |
| Supplies Needed at Daycare | Page 8 |
| Meals and Snacks | Page 9 |
| Learning and Play Time | Page 9 |
| Nap Time | Page 10 |
| Daily Schedule | Page 10 |
| Our Staff | Page 11 |
| Communication | Page 11 |
| Resources | Page 11 |

**Gentle Care Daycare Philosophy**

At Gentle Care, it is my philosophy to provide to the children who attend a “home away from home”. I truly believe that life is too important to not do your best for your fellow man, and at Gentle Care giving your child a loving, nurturing, stimulating and homey environment is how I feel I can best give back to the world. This program, which is designed for infants six weeks old through three years of age, will give your children opportunities to interact socially with other children, explore new skills, learn empathy and love and to grow into the beautiful people they are destined to be. Our specially trained caregivers build bonds of trust with the child and with the families by stimulating the child’s cognitive, emotional, social and physical development.

I am committed to ensuring the best care possible using the latest early childhood training techniques, quality materials, home-cooked meals, and a highly-qualified staff. I am fully licensed by the Virginia Department of Social Services.

**Registration Checklist**

Virginia Licensing requires that we have certain paperwork on file for your child on the very first date of their attendance. You should have received a packet of papers when you enrolled your child that includes all the required documentation. All of these need to be read thoroughly and filled out completely. Incomplete forms cannot be accepted according to Virginia State Licensing. You can request copies of any and all forms at any time to keep for your own files if you would like. The forms that are required are:

• A copy of the child’s birth certificate or a certified birth letter

• A copy of the contract for child care, to be signed by both parents and the provider

• Child’s Record/Emergency Contact Information, to be filled out and signed (2 pages)

• Information for Parents, to be signed (2 pages)

• Policy for the Administration of Medications, to be signed (2 pages)

• Authorization to apply Non-prescription Topical Skin Product, to be filled out and signed

• Provision of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, to be signed

• Liability Insurance Declaration, to be signed

• Field Trip and Activities Permission, to be signed

• Commonwealth of Virginia School Entrance Health Form, to be filled out by parent/guardian and child’s physician (4 pages)

Please Note: Immunizations must be updated every six months until your child reaches two years of age. To help us make sure your child’s records are up-to-date, please provide us with a new copy of your child’s immunizations each time they are administered.

**State Licensing Requirements**

Gentle Care Daycare is fully licensed and complies with all current licensing regulations and standards. These standards regulate the Gentle Care environment, staff, health and safety procedures, nutrition, caregiver to child ratios, and record keeping. These regulations can be reviewed on the VDSS website (<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/child_care/licensed/fdh/>). The daycare is subject to inspections by state and city health, fire and licensing officials to ensure accordance with all regulations. At Gentle Care, we believe these standards are appropriate to guarantee quality childcare and we appreciate your consideration.

**Termination Policy**

As is stated in the Childcare Contract, two weeks’ notice is required for a termination of services. More prior notice is preferred, as the number of available spots is limited to twelve children per day. I am flexible and always try to accommodate any changes in a parent’s plan for childcare, with the understanding that the more notice I receive, the better I am able to meet your specific needs.

**Daycare Hours**

Gentle Care’s operating hours are from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

**Holidays and Vacations**

Gentle Care Daycare is closed for the following holidays:

* New Year’s Day (January 1)
* Martin Luther King Day (in January)
* President’s Day (in February)
* Memorial Day (in May)
* Independence Day (July 4)
* Labor Day (in September)
* Thanksgiving Day (in November)
* Black Friday (in November)
* Christmas Day (December 25)

Gentle Care will also close for two weeks during the year, not including these holidays for vacation. I may also take up to two additional weeks during the year for vacation that Gentle Care will not be closed for. Appropriate staff will be available to run the program and I will be sure to give all parents at least two weeks’ notice before these vacations. As stated in the contract, all vacation days and holidays (including days Gentle Care is closed) are to be paid for by the parents.

**Registration Fee/Payment Policy**

As stated in the contract, a non-refundable registration fee equal to the cost of one week of childcare is required in order to reserve a spot. This fee will hold the agreed upon spot, but will not count towards the child’s tuition. Tuition is due on the first day of the month that the child attends daycare. Please see your contract for exact fees.

**Attendance/Late Pick-up**

Gentle Care is open Monday through Friday, 7:30 to 5:30. I would like to ask all parents to please note that after 5:30 is the time I spend with my family and your consideration of this by arriving to pick up your child on-time is most appreciated. I do not charge a late fee but I ask that in return, parents please be mindful of this and make arrangements with me should there be a need to pick your child up late. I would also like to ask parents to please notify me if your child will be absent or late (11:30 or later). This enables me to plan the day more effectively and allows me to make adjustments in our ratios when needed.

**Guidelines for Illnesses**

Virginia State Licensing requires that children be in good health in order to attend any licensed facility. This standard is in place to prevent illness and the spreading of disease. At Gentle Care, we do our best to accommodate all parental needs for childcare while still maintaining a healthy environment for the other attending children. There are several illnesses that require a child’s exclusion from daycare. The Virginia Department of Social Services lists the following symptoms as indicative of contagious illness and requires the child stay at home until they are symptom-free for 24 hours or a note from a doctor is obtained stating when the child will no longer be contagious and can return to daycare:

* Unusual or seeping rash
* Fever over 100 degrees
* Diarrhea
* Vomiting

If a child displays any of these symptoms during care, the provider will notify the parents or appropriate parties and ask them to pick the child up. The caregivers will keep the child secluded and comfortable until the parent arrives to pick the child up.

**Child Absences and Vacations**

As stated in the contract, the parents are responsible for paying for vacations or days when the child is absent. I would like to ask all parents to let me know any days a child will be absent so that I can plan daily ratios appropriately. I appreciate the parents working with me on this, so that I can try to accommodate every parent’s individual needs for care and give everyone the best available options. If your needs for childcare change please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to find a solution.

**Medication/Allergies**

We do not administer any medication at Gentle Care Daycare. We will only apply non-prescription diaper ointment as needed, but we cannot give any medication (over-the-counter or otherwise) to any child. If the child needs a dose of medicine during the hours of childcare, the parent may come during the day to administer the medication.

If a child has a severe allergy (such as peanuts), Gentle Care is required to have a doctor’s note on file stating the confirmed allergy and all approved methods of treatment (i.e. an Epi pen). In the event of an acute allergic reaction, caregivers can administer a dose of epinephrine to prevent anaphylactic shock, so long as the parent has given consent on the child’s School Entrance Health Form and provided the proper materials. Please see the provider for full details or any questions regarding allergies. Please Note: Gentle Care does not serve peanuts or other commonly known allergens. Children may, however, be exposed in other ways (i.e. a child had peanut butter on their clothes from breakfast and the allergic child touched a toy that touched the first child’s clothes), so it is important if your child does have an allergy to let the provider know and to prepare for an emergency accordingly.

**Medical Emergency Procedures**

At the time of enrollment, Gentle Care should have emergency contact information and medical records (including known allergies) on file for the child; consent to seek medical care for the child in the event of an emergency can be found on the child’s School Entrance Health Form. In the event of an injury or illness, a caregiver will treat the child to the best of their training and ability. Gentle Care will use the emergency contact information provided to keep the appropriate parties updated on the child’s status. An injury report will be written and copies can be available to the parent upon request. Should further medical attention be required, the proper authorities will be notified. **It is very important that all emergency contact and medical information is kept updated and current. If there are any changes, please inform us as soon as possible.** By ensuring we have the most current records, Gentle Care is able to get the child the emergency medical treatment they may need. Parents are responsible for all costs involved in emergency medical treatment, including emergency medical transportation if necessary. The following steps will occur in the event of a major, medical emergency:

* 911 is contacted and all recommended (if prior written consent from the parent is indicated on the School Entrance Health Form) emergency medical procedures are followed
* The child’s parents (or emergency contacts) are notified
* The child is separated and cared for by the caregivers until either the parent or emergency medical personnel arrive
* The parent, provider or ambulance take the child to the doctor or hospital

**Reporting Child Abuse**

Gentle Care Daycare adheres to all guidelines mandated by the Virginia Department of Social Services when there is suspicion of child abuse or neglect. For full details on Virginia’s policy on reporting child abuse, please see the VDSS website (<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/abuse/>).

**Evacuation Procedures**

In the event of an evacuation, the children will be removed to the relocation site listed on the Provision of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan document in the child’s enrollment forms. Parents will be notified once the children arrive safely at the relocation site and further arrangements will be made at that time.

**Diaper Policy/Potty Training**

The parents are responsible for providing all diapers, wipes and diaper crème for the child. We support the use of cloth diapers. Please Note: All materials must be labeled with the child’s name. The caregivers will inform the parents through the daily activity sheets when supplies are running low. Please be sure to check your child’s activity sheet every day for any needed provisions. It is Gentle Care’s policy to check every child frequently to ensure they are changed as it is needed. Proper diaper changing procedures are observed at Gentle Care including washing the child and caregivers’ hands and washing and sanitizing the changing surface.

We have a training toilet seat and toilet for children to use when they are potty training. If your child is potty training, we encourage you to let us know when you feel it is appropriate to start at Gentle Care and what methods you are using so we can continue the same processes here. We always allow children who show an interest in using the “big boys and girls’ potty” a chance to try. Please Note: When children are potty training, extra materials (diapers, clean clothes etc.) are needed to be brought to daycare so the caregivers are fully prepared to help your child successfully transition to using the toilet.

**Toys**

We have a wide variety of toys here at Gentle Care. In each room there are age-appropriate toys, books and learning materials designed to challenge the children in their cognitive and motor functions. While we allow children to bring toys from home to share with their friends at Gentle Care, we would like to make sure that all toys that come from home are toys the child is comfortable allowing other children to play with. At Gentle Care, we want to teach the children empathy and kindness and by delighting in sharing their possessions, we feel they learn important social skills. If there is a dispute over a toy from home, the caregivers will remove the toy to the child’s bag to take home at the end of the day.

**Open Door Policy**

We have an open door policy here at Gentle Care Daycare. The parents are free to come and visit their child throughout the day at any time they would like. We do ask for the parents’ cooperation in understanding that when a parent or family member visits, the other children in attendance can have a difficult time adjusting to the exciting atmosphere that a special visit can create. A short visit is often times the best because it allows the child some special time without disrupting the flow and routine for the day. We also encourage parents, if they would like, to “check in” during the day via phone or text message as well. As part of our open door policy, any time a parent would like to contact the provider with questions, they are always welcome to.

**Behavior Management and Discipline**

We believe at Gentle Care that patience, kind words, consistency and positive reinforcement are the best ways to handle challenging behavior. We understand that children learn best through observation and social interactions, so the caregivers strive to use their behavior as a model for the children to emulate when dealing with stressful situations. We emphasize the importance of words and communication as a means to solve disputes. We do not use timeouts.

There are several steps Gentle Care caregivers use when handling behavior difficulties. The first is to speak to all the children involved. We make sure to give each child a chance to speak so they learn their voice has meaning. The caregiver helps the child/children to find words to express how they are feeling and how others involved may be feeling so the children learn to express themselves through words instead of actions. Depending on the situation, the next step will be to either help the child/children resolve the issue or to direct a child/children to a new activity. The final step, if the child is continuing to have a difficult time, the situation is dangerous to the child or other children or the child becomes very distressed, is for the caregiver to ask the child to sit with them for a quiet moment. This is not a timeout, but rather a time when the child can sit with the caregiver and take a moment to calm down and get some individual attention. We have found that quiet moments allow the child to talk about their feelings in a safe and non-stressful environment and to allow the caregiver the time to address the child’s emotional needs. Once the child has had a moment to calm down, the caregiver will positively reinforce that calm behavior by reengaging the child in an appropriate activity.

**Cleanliness**

At Gentle Care, the well-being of your child is one of our most important concerns and we strive to keep a clean and healthy environment for your children to live in. The caregivers are committed to keeping the daycare and the children in attendance as clean and free of germs as possible. We follow Virginia Licensing guidelines for hand washing, diaper changes, surface sanitizing and we follow a meticulous, weekly cleaning schedule for the classrooms. All of the eating surfaces are cleaned and sanitized before and after each use. The toys and floor are cleaned daily and sanitized weekly (or as needed in the event of illness) and the children and caregivers’ hands are washed before and after touching food and diaper changes and also when coming in from being outside.

**Arrival/Departure**

Please send your child dressed and ready for the day (fed, sunscreen applied if necessary etc.) with all the supplies they need (bottles, extra clothes, baby food etc.). We have found that a brief drop-off works best; prolonged goodbyes tend to cause anxiety and confusion as to the expectations of the transition from home to daycare. As indicated on the Child Record Form in the child’s enrollment documents, Gentle Care cannot allow adults other than those listed as authorized parties to pick up the child, unless prior arrangements have been made with the provider. Anyone picking the child up, other than the parents will need to bring photo identification the first time, so the caregivers can confirm authorization.

**Supplies Needed at Daycare**

Parents are responsible for providing the following items on their first day of attendance at Gentle Care Daycare:

* Diapers, wipes and diaper crème
* Extra set of clothes (weather appropriate for the time of year)
* Bottles or sippy cup
* Formula or food (as needed/preferred)
* Shoes (as needed)
* Comfort objects (as needed)

Please Note: All belongings must be labeled with the child’s name and filled bottles (containing breast milk or formula) and food must have the date as well.

Gentle Care will provide cribs, crib sheets, blankets and mats that are washed and sanitized every five days of use. Gentle Care also provides milk, water, snacks and lunch for children that are eligible to participate in our food program.

**Meals and Snacks**

Gentle Care offers a morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack for the children. We encourage all children to take part in our food program when they are at an appropriate age. Gentle Care Daycare participates in the USDA food program for children. This program is designed to give children protein, wheat, fruits, vegetables, and calcium in balanced and age-appropriate, healthy portions. We understand how important nutrition is during the first few years so we use these guidelines to create a weekly menu, rich in the foods that help young children to grow. All of our meals are home-cooked, made with fresh, never-frozen ingredients that are of the highest quality. The milk and meat that we serve has been certified to not contain synthetic growth hormones or antibiotics.

A weekly menu is posted on our Facebook page and in the classroom for reference throughout the week. A daily menu is also included on your child’s Daily Activity Sheet. Parents are welcome to bring food from home if they do not wish for their child to participate in the meals served for that day. Please Note: We do not serve foods containing common allergens (peanuts, soy, etc.) and we ask that if you bring food from home and it does contain common allergy-inducing ingredients, that you inform us so we can handle and serve the food appropriately.

For infants, we support the use of breast milk or formula and “beginner foods” and will happily serve them to the younger children in our care. Parents are responsible for supplying infant nutrition products including formula, breast milk, baby food, and baby cereal. We encourage the parents to start a child on solid foods at home and then introduce it to their diet at daycare.

We do not serve milk to any child less than 1 year of age and we do not serve juice. Water is given as an alternative to milk.

**Learning and Play Time**

Learning through play and exploration is an important part of the Gentle Care philosophy and we foster this goal through activities and interactions with the children. Our space is divided into two rooms. One room is for infants and younger toddlers and the other for the older toddlers and younger preschool-aged children. Each of these rooms offers a wide variety of toys, books and equipment designed to challenge the cognitive and physical development of the children.

The older children participate in a morning routine that includes circle time, art and science projects and dancing and physical movement. We offer our own curriculum of monthly themes that include dramatic play, storytelling, shapes, numbers, alphabet, art, and group activities. A monthly newsletter is posted on Facebook that discusses and expands upon that month’s theme.

In the infant room, the caregivers focus primarily on gross motor functions for the children. “Tummy time” is a popular activity and our soft play structure encourages cruising and climbing. We also encourage language skills by teaching children who do not speak “baby sign language”. We believe it is important for children to learn good communication skills early in life and through our sign language program, we are able to teach young children to converse and “make their voice heard”.

The caregivers read stories, sing songs and do finger play with all the children daily to promote intellectual growth and reasoning. We believe being outside and getting fresh air is an important part of every child’s day so we try to (weather permitting) allow each of our children outside time. Our outside play area is designed for movement and exploration, with bikes, cars, play structures and a play house. Through these materials and our highly trained staff we further our mission to teach and foster the growth of the children enrolled in our program.

**Nap Time**

Each child, infant and toddler, has their own mat or crib with sheets and blankets that are provided for them to use. The sheets and blankets are washed by the provider and the mats and crib mattresses are cleaned and sanitized every five days of use. We encourage children to bring a comfort object from home (a special lovey or blanket) to help them rest.

Our nap schedule depends on the age of the child and their individual need for rest. The toddlers and twos room naps after lunch starting around 1:00. We also have a quiet area (the book area) the children can rest in if they are feeling tired during the morning. We always allow children who want to rest a quiet, comfortable space to do so in until they feel ready to rejoin the group.

The infants nap according to their individual schedules. Our caregivers learn each child’s sleepy indicators and also the schedule (if they have one) they use at home. We use a combination of daily routines and signals from the children themselves to determine a daily napping plan. If you have found a certain way to put your child to sleep that works (i.e. rocking, singing a certain song, rubbing back, bottle etc.), please communicate that with the caregivers so we can be consistent.

**Daily Schedule**

Our general daily routine for the preschool room:

7:30-9:00 Arrival/Free Play
9:00-9:30 Wash Hands and Snack
9:30-10:30 Diaper Change
10:00-11:00 Circle Time, Story Time and Art
11:00-12:00 Outdoor Play, Music and Movement
12:00-1:00 Diaper Change, Wash Hands and Lunch
1:00-3:00 Nap Time
3:00-3:30 Wash Hands and Snack
3:30-4:30 Diaper Change and Indoor Play
4:30-5:30 Outdoor Play/Pick Up

**Our Staff**

Virginia Licensing mandates that all daycare programs maintain specific child-to-adult ratios. At Gentle Care, we maintain these ratios by having three experienced, highly trained and qualified staff members, including the director. We strive to have all of our staff hold current First-Aid and CPR certifications and there is always a certified staff member present. Gentle Care is committed to providing the best childcare and our staff attends training year-round to learn the latest childcare methods and practices. If you have any questions regarding licensing staff qualifications, please see the director.

**Communication**

Communication is key to a successful childcare program. At Gentle Care, we endeavor to have a close relationship with all the families, where open communication and respect can flourish. There are many opportunities, aside from the daily interactions with the director, for our families to connect and share their thoughts on the daycare. Our website (<http://www.gentlecare-daycare.com>), offers a blog where parents can anonymously post and discuss our program. Parents are also free to communicate on our Facebook page or with the director directly via phone, email or text message. It is my wish to offer the best care for your children and I am always open to advice and suggestions to better our program here at Gentle Care Daycare.

**Resources**

Here is a list of childcare and local parenting resources I have found useful and would like to pass along.

* Parenting Network of Charlottesville (PNOC): An online, Charlottesville parent network where local parents can share ideas and information about local child programs.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/pnoc/info>
* Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS): Find licensed daycares, resources for childcare and licensing requirements for daycares.

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc.cgi>

* Virginia Department of Education, Special Education and Student Services Department:

A list of government benefits and resources available to families in Virginia.

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/>

* Charlottesville Family Magazine: A list of local family support clubs, groups, classes and events.
<http://www.albemarlekids.com/>
* Virginia Department of Health: A resource guide for families through pregnancy and parenting.

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/ThomasJefferson/documents/2013/pdf/ipo_resource_guide62910.pdf>

Thank you and I look forward to sharing in your child’s joys and achievements!
-Mozhdeh Monjezi, director of Gentle Care Daycare