

Parent Handbook

Northampton Parents Center
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(413) 582-2636

www.northamptonparentscenter.org



Northampton Parents
Center

A Co-operative Community Center
for Young Children and Their Caregivers

WELCOME !

Welcome to the Northampton Parents Center, a co-operative community center that provides playtime and friends for young children, as well as companionship, support and information for caregivers.

Parenting is the most important job of all. We are here so that you can share the joys and challenges with other parents/caregivers and enjoy your children in an open and enjoyable play environment.

The Center is open to families with children from birth through Kindergarten. There is an attendance sheet for you to sign each time you visit the Center. There is a jar for daily donations. Tea and coffee are in the kitchen. Please take a moment to read this handbook and let the director (Swansea) know if you have any questions.

Play Program

The play program is relaxed and informal. Parents can play with their children or they can sit and talk with other parents. We also have craft activities and reading areas for parents and children to enjoy. We ask you to be responsible and keep watch over your children throughout the Center.

Parent Workshops

In addition to the daily play program, the Center sometimes sponsors workshops and discussion groups on topics of interest to parents. The schedule for these events will be posted in advance at the Center.

Our Library

We have a small lending library of books on child-raising topics and a few videos for children and parents. Sign them out in the book on top of the bookshelf; please be sure to return them within a reasonable time.

We also have pamphlets and flyers covering a variety of subjects such as parenting, nutrition, pre-schools, local resources, etc.

Clothing Exchange

Bring in clean season appropriate children's clothes and/or take what you need from our clothing box.

*When "parents" are referred to in this handbook, the term is understood to be inclusive of grandparents and other caregivers who accompany children to the Parents Center.

Thank you
for visiting the Northampton Parents
Center.
We hope to see more of you and your
family.

If you have any questions
about the information in this
handbook,
please do not hesitate to ask.
We value your input, and hope you will
let us know what you think we are
doing right,
and what you think we can improve.

Special Thanks to the Childbirth Center at Cooley
Dickinson Hospital and the Edwards Church for their
continued support.

Funding

The Northampton Parents Center is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization that operates on a small budget. Our funding comes from your memberships and daily donations, fundraising events, donations from community members and partially from a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care administered by Northampton Public Schools and the Collaborative for Educational Services.

It is important for all visitors to fill out a registration form and to sign in at each visit for statistical purposes, specifically for this grant (or any other grant or audit that may happen).

Volunteering

Parent volunteers are an integral part of the Parents Center. We welcome your talents, creativity, energy, and enthusiasm! You are invited to join the Parent Advisory Committee. Meetings take place once a month and last about an hour and a half (childcare is provided). Joining the Advisory Committee takes relatively little time and effort on your part, but is a source of major support for the Center.

Other ways you can help:

- Watch for newcomers, make them feel welcome, and explain how the Center works
- Come early to help set up
- Stay after circle time to help clean up
- Lead circle time
- Clean up the snack area and play areas
- Support our legislative appeals
- Get involved with the newsletter
- Help coordinate special events
- Wash dishes, make coffee, or prepare snacks
- Bring home doll and dress up clothes to wash/repair
- Bring in homemade play dough
- Clean/repair toys
- Donate items on our wish list
- Get involved with fundraising efforts

Daily Schedule

Monday through Thursday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., snacks are served at 10:15. Clean up begins at 11:10, circle time to follow, earlier for music classes on Thursdays.

Calendar/Snow Days

The Center is open from mid-September to late May. We usually follow the Northampton public school calendar for holidays and vacations. On occasion the church may need to use our space for its own activities. We will give as much advance notice as possible of such closings. If the Northampton schools are closed due to the weather, the Parents Center will not be open. Unexpected closings will be announced on our message line at (413) 582-2636 and posted on our website.

Donation Options

The Parents Center is self-supporting. Visitors are welcome to donate via the options listed below. Please see Swansea if the options below do not work for you—financial assistance is available; payment arrangements can be made—no one will be turned away because of an inability to pay.

- Membership \$100 for the whole year!
- Punch Card \$40 for 10 visits / Reduced Rate \$20
- Pay Per Visit \$2-5 per day

Additional tax-deductible donations are always welcome. We also appreciate donations of snacks, books, art supplies, toys, etc.

Location

Edwards Church, corner of Main & State Streets in Northampton. Thanks to the generosity of the church, space is rented for a nominal fee. (The Parents Center is not church-affiliated.) Please follow these guidelines established as part of our arrangement with the church:

- No parking in the church lot
- Use the rear entrance off State Street
- Strollers must remain outside the back door
- The stage and piano are for church use only

Parent Participation

We see the Parents Center as a parent co-operative—everyone who uses it owns it. The Center has a director who manages the daily activities. We also look for your help in making the Center an enjoyable place to be. Please do your part to help keep the environment friendly, healthy, clean, and safe.

Hints About Children's Behavior

One of the advantages of bringing your child to the Parents Center is that it offers opportunities for children to develop social skills in a supportive and supervised space. Most toddlers and preschoolers are still learning how to play with other children. It is normal for them to play by themselves or next to, but not with, another child.

It is also normal for children to grab toys and become upset if they cannot have what they want right away. You can help your child through this stage. If you see your child behaving aggressively or unfairly at the Center, please intervene. We encourage you to intervene in a quiet, calm, and fair way to help your child learn how to share and play with other children.

Safety Policy

The goal of the Parents Center is to be a comfortable, safe, and healthy environment for all visitors. It is everyone's responsibility to actively support this goal. If you need help or guidance with this please talk with Swansea.

- Parents must supervise their children at all times.
- Parents with more than one child may team up with another parent, so that one supervises the older children and the other supervises the younger ones. If you need help, let us know!
- When a child is behaving in a way that is harmful to self or others, the parent is expected to physically remove her from the situation and help her calm down. When the child is able to resume playing safely, she can be allowed to rejoin the others, under the close supervision of the parent. If the child is not able to rejoin the play in a safe manner, the parent should take her home with the expectation that they can try again next time.
- Under no circumstances is physical punishment appropriate at the Parents Center. Young children are learning social skills and positive teaching techniques (such as redirecting and modeling positive interactions) are recommended.
- Please be respectful of individual parenting styles. The Center is a place where parents can offer support and information to each other. Occasionally an adult who is not the child's parent may need to step in to prevent harm. All parents should have an opportunity to respectfully express their feelings and wishes about other adults guiding their children in this way.

Keeping the Center Healthy

We take every possible measure to prevent the spread of illness at the Center. Toys are washed on a regular basis, but we need everyone's cooperation to keep the Center as germ-free as possible. Soap buckets and sanitizing wipes are available to wipe down toys that children have put in their mouths.

Please limit diaper changes to the restrooms, and take dirty diapers home with you rather than disposing of them in our trash. Please wash hands (yours and child's) after diaper changes or using the restrooms.

To promote general cleanliness and to discourage insects, all drinks and snacks should be limited to the snack tables. Please clean up after your child at the snack table to avoid the spread of germs. Please wash your own coffee and tea cups.

Illness

Children and parents who are sick should stay home to protect themselves and others at the Center. If there is any doubt about whether a person is contagious, please consult your physician.

Please do not visit the Center if you or your child(ren) have been recently exposed to or ill with any communicable disease such as:

- Chicken Pox
- Measles
- German Measles (Rubella)
- Whooping Cough
- Mumps
- Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)
- Impetigo

Or you or your child(ren) are currently ill with:

- Cold with a cough
- "the Flu"
- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Unusual Behavior: If your child is displaying any unusual behavior and you think they may be developing an illness, please err on the side of caution and stay home. This is the time when illnesses are often in their most contagious phase.

Remember that illness is a part of childhood and building your child's immune system.