



## Parent Handbook 2023

Welcome to Eco-Tots Early Learning Center (ELC)! We enjoy connecting parents, teachers, and children in a partnership to promote growth and development and build a foundation for lifelong learning. We hope to establish a good relationship with you and hope that you and your child will enjoy a trusting and long-lasting experience at our center.

At Eco-Tots Early Learning Center, we provide children with a nurturing and empowering approach to fostering self-esteem, self-efficiency, and self-confidence in each individual. We provide a safe, comfortable and eco-friendly environment where children can grow physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally, incorporating our philosophy, mission and values. We believe in the power of nature to awaken a child's senses, curiosity, and desire to learn, and that the best development occurs in groups where children are actively involved in creating their own learning and interests.

Eco-Tots Early Learning Center takes pride in the environment and encourages others to make environmentally responsible choices. We welcome you to Eco-Tots where parents can feel good about their child's journey to self-discoveries as they learn and share their own individuality with us!

### Admissions

The admission process at Eco-Tots Learning Center is as follows:

- ✓ Visit our website to review programs.
- ✓ Call and schedule a tour.
- ✓ Submit enrollment forms and appropriate fees.
- ✓ Introduce your tot with a scheduled visit!

### Hours of Operation

Eco-Tots Early Learning Center (Columbia) is open from 7:00am-6:00pm, Monday-Friday. Eco-Tots (Hanover) is open from 7:30am-5:30pm

### Registration

Eco-Tots Learning Center has an annual non-refundable registration fee of \$100.00/\$175.00 per family. All children must be re-registered each year by September, so we have all current parent information, updated immunizations, and all current custody documents, if applicable.

**Weekly Tuition (ALL meals and snacks included) PLEASE NOTE\*\*TUITION WILL INCUR AT LEAST A 3% ANNUAL INCREASE. THERE ARE NO REFUNDS**

- Tiny Tots (6 weeks-18 months)- \$405
- Lil Tots (18months-2yrs)-\$405
- Two-Tots (2yrs-)-\$335
- PK-Tots 3-(3yrs)-\$310
- PK Tots 4 (4yrs)-\$285
- Big-Tots-(Ages 5-12)-Aftercare-\$130 Before care-\$80, Both-\$160 (Columbia only)

- Summer Camp (Ages 5-12)-\$250/week plus \$275.00 Registration and Activity Fee (Columbia only)
- Before/Aftercare for Summer Camp-\$25.00/week (Columbia only)
- Full day drop in care (only when schools are closed): \$25/day

**Tuition Rates**

Eco-Tots Early Learning Center offers quality education and childcare services. We understand that for some families, childcare is an expense and a source of anxiety. We keep our prices competitive with our specialized programs, and we hope you can feel good about your investment in your child.

**Summer “Eco-Camp “Program**

Each summer, we have a fun-filled calendar of activities which include water play, gardening, in-house shows, and other activities. The summer camp registration and activity fee are \$275.00. The weekly summer camp tuition is \$250.00 and only applies to the Big Tots (ages 5-12). The summer camp program runs from 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Before and after-care is available at an additional cost. All summer registration fees must be paid with registration. Lunch, snacks, and field trip costs are included in the program fees. There are no refunds on Summer Camp fees or tuition. If you purchase weeks of summer camp and do not use them, you are not entitled to a refund.

program.

**Evaluation and Increase in Tuition Rates**

ELC reevaluates the competitive tuition market and new upcoming expenses for each fiscal year. We then base our tuition around those circumstances. Every year between the months of September and January, Eco-Tots will increase its tuition rates by 3% to cover new daycare insurance rates, and maintenance of our facility.

**Payment Options**

ELC offers families a few options for tuition payment. We accept checks, ACH Debit, PayPal, and credit cards. There will be a 3% convenience fee assessed for all credit card payments.

**Discounts.**

Eco-Tots Learning Center wants families to feel good about being a part of our school, so we offer siblings a 5% discount!

**Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF)**

NSF will result in a \$25.00 service charge fee. Parents are responsible for all additional fees accrued by a non-sufficient check return.

**Late Payment Fees**

Tuition is due on the Friday preceding the week of care. A late fee of 25.00 will be applied to your family’s account on Tuesday of the week of care if payment is not received, and your child will not be admitted to school. The administrative staff will attempt to contact parents regarding late payments

because sometimes we all can be forgetful, however, your family is still responsible for paying the late fee. We have many payment options for families: Check, ACH Debit, PayPal, & Credit Card.

### **Late Pick-up Fees**

For every minute that a parent is late, there will be a \$ 1.00 charge per minute. Payment will be made in cash or check to employee(s) caring for your child after 6:00pm. ELC reserves the right to terminate a family if they arrive late more than 3 times.

### **Parent Tax Information**

Parents will receive “end of year” tuition statements for their child by Jan 31st of the New Year. Parents may download statements from the Brightwheel App.

### **Children’s Files**

If your child has an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan) we request a copy for your child’s file. These documents are for teachers to work with your family and early intervention or special education service providers to support your child and families’ outcomes. Please also ensure that your child’s file is updated with emergency contact information, immunizations, health records and other pertinent information. Eco-Tots will notify you of any missing forms or information.

### **Fire Safety**

There will be 1 fire drill as well as 1 emergency evacuation drill conducted every month. We will follow the evacuation and shelter plans outlined in our Emergency Preparedness Plan. In addition, Eco-Tots facility is equipped with surveillance cameras for added safety and security.

### **Social Media Policy**

Sometimes, we take photographs, audio or video footage for publicity and advertising purposes. These photos may appear in our printed publications, social media, or websites. Before taking any pictures of your child, we will obtain your permission. A release will be included in your enrollment packages.

### **Nutrition Policy**

ELC is a participant of Maryland’s Food and Nutrition Program. We provide healthy and safe meals and snacks that meet the nutritional requirements established by federal and state law regulations. We provide all natural and organic snacks, and our menus emphasize nutrient-rich foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy, and lean meats. We offer vegan as well as vegetarian options. We also monitor food brought from home to ensure it meets nutritional guidelines. Please indicate all food allergies on the child’s enrollment forms and special allergy forms required by the State of Maryland.

### **Very Important – Please Read**

Promoting a healthy lifestyle is important to our educating staff at ELC. Supporting children with food allergies, recognizing cultural & religious beliefs, and trying to prevent childhood diabetes & obesity is a requirement from our staff and facility. Therefore, keeping a healthy guideline for meals and snacks is an obligation we have to our children, families, and ourselves. Sending children consistent health messages

and optimal nutrition around food is strongly promoted. We celebrate special occasions with healthy snacks and ask parents not to bring in cake, candy, pastries, and cupcakes. Our staff do not consume other foods or drinks in front of children during mealtimes, and we are a Peanut Free Zone.

### **Birthdays & Celebrations**

We love to help children celebrate their birthdays. Parents are encouraged to bring in healthy dishes such as or fresh fruit as substitutions for cake & candy. Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Valentines, St. Patrick's, Easter, Fourth of July, can be celebrated with stickers, erasers, cards, art activities, a book to read to the class, or any other creative healthy idea parents are encouraged! Thank you for helping us keep children healthy!

### **Toy Policy**

ELC's teaching staff wants to be sympathetic to the needs of children who need toys or blankets for those children who are experiencing separation or attachment anxiety while away from home and parents. Teachers and parents can work together on deciding if the child is having difficulty in these areas, however, if the child is not having experienced separation or attachment then we do have a "No Toy" policy. Unfortunately, we have had missing toys in the past, and the teacher's focus should be in the classroom, and monitoring toys is difficult, so we kindly ask parents to help children leave their belongings at home. Moreover, toys at ELC are eco-friendly and non-toxic, and we want to avoid getting toys mixed up.

### **Dress Code**

Please dress your children in weather appropriate clothing. ELC requires that all children that can walk wear closed toe shoes daily.

### **Abuse and Neglect Policy**

ELC is **required** by the State of Maryland to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Health and Human Services as well as Child Protective Services without giving parental notification. If there is any suspicion of child abuse or neglect, we as mandated reporters are legally required to report it to CPS and the Office of Childcare.

### **Television Viewing Policy**

ELC does not offer television viewing as part of our daily program. However, we may show educational videos a few times a week. TV, computers, iPad, and other media devices may be used only when directly related to a teacher facilitated learning experience. Other than for recording information in tadpoles, our electronic daily reporting system, no electronics are used in classrooms with children under the age of 2. Our program focuses on keeping our learning environment interactive and hands-on.

## **Positive Guidance Policy**

ELC believes that understanding behaviors is important. As educators, we serve as a positive role model in your child's life. We encourage positive discipline to help children thrive and grow. Specifically, our program promotes positive behavior in children by using the following positive behavior strategies and supports:

### **Providing Choices:**

Children tend to be more cooperative, more engaged, and better behaved when they are involved with activities, materials, and individuals that they enjoy. Offering choices to children is a proactive behavioral support strategy that gives children a sense of empowerment and control in their environment. At the same time, choices foster children's development of responsibility and independence. Our children are provided with choices throughout the day. Types of choices may include choosing materials during an activity, choosing what activity will come next, and choosing a friend to sit with at lunchtime.

### **Redirection:**

Redirection is a positive behavioral support technique where the adult changes the child's focus or direction from a negative behavior or experience to a positive one. It may involve one of four distinct types of redirections: verbal, physical, verbal with a visual cue, and redirection of attention to a positive model. An example may include Redirecting a child who may be upset to a funny puppet.

### **Establishing Clear Rules and Expectations:**

We set clear limits and provide your child with positive guidance, redirection, and an opportunity to discuss behaviors and choices. In addition, children are presented with an opportunity to contribute to the creation of classroom rules and expectations. Teachers may reinforce this by posting classroom rules around class, reinforcing classroom rules and expectations throughout the day through lessons.

### **Reflection and Problem Solving:**

Children learn by watching the behavior of their parents, teachers, and peers, as well as by testing their own behaviors. Each behavioral episode is a chance to teach a child what is expected in that situation, providing opportunities to instill positive choices which the child will remember as they grow. Teachers will promote and encourage positive behavior through stickers, award, and praise. Children will remember that special sticker they received when they had good behavior or the contrary.

Through our partnerships with the Judy Center, Child Find, and the Infant and Toddler Programs in Howard and Anne Arund. County, we are able to offer an extension of services to families in need of additional support. We have also incorporated 123 Magic for Teachers into our program, a tool to help teachers encourage positive behavior in the center.

ELC believes in giving positive feedback and rewarding a child for appropriate behavior; this will only reinforce the desirable behavior. However, we do not expect children to always understand and to follow the classroom rules. We have age-appropriate expectations for our tots.

After offering positive discipline and promoting choices, and redirection, If a child is having a difficult day and the child's behavior were to create an unsafe environment for others we will call you to pick up

your child within a reasonable amount of time. If your child is sent home on numerous occasions for disruptive/aggressive behavior, further action may be required and may result in possible termination of childcare.

ELC teaching staff uses a term called a “Tranquility Room” with soft lights and soft music where a child is guided and redirected if a child were creating an unsafe environment for themselves or other children. Examples of unsafe behavior: kicking, throwing toys, hitting repeatedly, etc... If teachers are unsuccessful in helping the child to move to the “tranquility room, we will guide children to a safe area until parents are notified. We will work with parents/children to develop consistent appropriate behavior. We will work as a collaborative team and use incentives to achieve the best direction for each child. Parents are encouraged to discuss any matters or concerns about their children’s behavior with us, and we will plan together how to respond to certain behavioral issues. In this way, the children will be getting the same response from all caregivers in their lives. We will always continuously communicate with parents so we can be alert and attempt to help each child have a positive experience at Eco-Tots Early Learning Center.

Specific Disciplinary Action Steps: -

1. Children will be re-directed to a more appropriate behavior or activity.
2. Child will spend time in the tranquility room, where we talk with the child (at the child’s eye-level) about making good choices, considering others’ feelings, and remind the child of acceptable behavior.
3. Staff will speak with child’s parent about the inappropriate behavior and ask for suggestions and best practices.
4. The Director will schedule a meeting with the teacher and parents to discuss solutions.

### **Drop Off Policy**

ELC has a drop-off time for children of no later than 9:30 a.m. Unless the child has a doctor’s appointment or there is an emergency, children will be unable to attend school for the day if parents drop children off later than the required time. Late drop-offs are often disruptive and the transition for children arriving late is challenging. In addition, we also arrange enough staff/children ratio for the required children so please try to have your child at ELC by 9:30 am.

### **Pick Up Policy**

ELC is required by law and for the safety of our children that all students that leave our facility are to be with custodial parents or individuals that have been listed on your child’s allowed pickup list. Please be aware that ELC will ask for personal identification for anyone picking up a child to confirm their identity. ELC reserves the right to not allow a child to leave our facility with an individual that is not authorized to do so.

### **Attendance Limit**

It is recommended that your child's attendance in childcare is limited to no more than 10 hours a day, particularly if they are under the age of 2.

### **Part Time Enrollment**

Part time families must attend only on the days registered/enrolled for. Families are not able to switch days in the event their regular enrollment day falls on a holiday or when the center is closed.

### **Absences/Vacation Weeks**

Parents are responsible for payment even when you take a vacation or are absent for any reason, since your child's space will be reserved for you. We ask a parent/guardian to call ELC if your child is absent for any reason. Families are allowed 1 vacation week per child annually, where only half of the tuition is due for that week. You must inform the office 10 days in advance of your vacation in order to utilize your vacation weeks. There are no refunds on absences or unused weeks.

### **Workshop Days**

With State and Federal laws requiring employees to be more educated and having on-going training hours, ELC will use up to 4 days during each calendar year for training workshops for ELC staff. The center will be closed on those days and parents will receive at least 60 days' notice of workshop days.

### **Holidays**

ELC will be closed on the following holidays:

- New Years' Day Observance
- Martin Luther King's Jr. Observance
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Juneteenth or Day Observed.
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the day after Thanksgiving
- Christmas Week

### **Sick Policy**

Our center policy states that you should not send your child to school if he/she has:

- Fever in the past 24 hours
- Vomiting in the past 24 hours
- Diarrhea in the past 24 hours
- Sore throat
- Strep Throat (must have been taking an antibiotic for at least 24 hours before returning to school)
- Bad cold, with a very runny nose or bad cough, especially if it has kept the child awake at night and or the child cannot breathe properly.
- Head lice – until your child has been treated according to the nurse or doctor's instructions.
- Eyes/nose has a yellow/green discharge.



- Significant cough that makes a child uncomfortable or disrupts the class.
- Honey-crusted sores around nose or mouth.

If your child becomes ill with a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or to the point where they are too sick to benefit from school, or is contagious to other children, ELC will contact you immediately. If this is the case, we ask that you pick up your child within 1 hour and your child may not return to school for at least 24 hours or until they have been cleared by the doctor. ELC ensures a healthy and safe environment, and we want to keep all our “tots” healthy!

### **Medication Administration**

If your child is on medication, we can administer it at the center with the proper documentation. Please obtain a medical administration form from a member of management. The form must be filled out and signed by your doctor. ELC will not administer over-the-counter medications, only prescriptions.

### **Community Involvement**

What is ELC doing to support our community? Our facility puts an enormous emphasis on buying local goods and supporting local businesses. Most importantly, we have fun doing our part by recycling, reusing, and reducing to help impact our community. We encourage families to join us in these efforts.

### **Parent Participation**

Parents are encouraged to participate whenever possible in field trips and activities at the center. Parents have access to all areas of the center used for childcare during operation hours. Teachers are available to discuss a child’s progress or needs at any time, however, making an appointment is encouraged.

### **Eco-Friendly Pledge**

ELC encourages families to take the Eco-Friendly Pledge: “Today, I will be kind to the earth, I will eat healthier foods for my body, and I will encourage others to make better choices for the environment and for themselves. By living eco-friendly each day, I will create a safer, healthier, greener life for myself and in the lives of others”.

### **Inclusion and Non-Discrimination Policy**

Eco-Tots Early Learning Center welcomes all children including those with disabilities and special health care needs, and is committed to providing developmentally appropriate learning experiences that support the full access and participation of each child. All children are provided with the opportunity to interact with their peers in a developmentally appropriate environment. We offer a balance between child driven and teacher-initiated activities. We believe that each child is unique and works in partnership with families and other professionals involved with the child to provide the support every child needs to reach their full potential. We work in partnership with organizations such as Infants and Toddlers, Child Find, and the Judy Center to provide resources to meet the needs of children who may have special health care needs, and IEP/IFSP support.

**Admissions/waiting list**-Children of all abilities are accepted at Eco-Tots Early Learning Center and families interested in having their child attend the program will be given an equal opportunity for

admission. A waiting list may be maintained, and children will be accepted from the list on a first come first served basis.

**Inclusive Environment-** Early childhood educators at Eco-Tots Early Learning Center use developmentally appropriate practices and consider the unique needs of all children when planning. Staff will make every attempt to make any adaptations or modifications necessary to meet the needs of the children. Schedules, routines, and activities are flexible and early childhood educators will work with therapists, special educators and other professionals to integrate individual accommodations, modifications and strategies into classroom routines and activities. Any adaptations will be reviewed with families and other professionals supporting the child. Through our partnerships with the Judy Center and Infant and Toddler Program, we can offer an extension of services to support families.

**Confidentiality-**Confidentiality applies to all verbal and written information about potential, enrolling and previously enrolled children and their families. All staff will be briefed on the need for confidentiality and will be expected to fulfill their obligation to respect the protection of privacy. Written records will be stored in a secure location with access limited to the director and the child's teacher. No information will be released about a child and the parent/legal guardian during enrolment or transition to another receiving program or school without first receiving the written permission of the parent/guardian. This excludes the responsibility held by early childhood educators as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect as outlined in Maryland law or when information is subpoenaed by the court.

**Family-Centered Practices-**Eco-Tots Early Learning Center acknowledges and respects the priorities each family has for their child. Families are encouraged and supported to collaborate with staff to ensure that each child has an opportunity for optimum success. Our staff communicates with each family daily and has regular meetings to discuss the child's successes and challenges.

**Professional Development and Support for Staff-**Training and support is provided to ensure that all staff are comfortable, confident and competent to meet the developmental and educational needs of all children. All staff receive an orientation on inclusion policies and attend training focused on effective inclusion and/or other disability topics whenever possible. The director provides additional support and resources as appropriate.

**Collaboration with Other Professionals-** Many children with disabilities or other special needs are supported by developmental and educational professionals such as therapists, teachers and others. Eco-Tots Early Learning Center welcomes those professionals and works with them to assure the child's success. The service provider is encouraged to provide services to the child in the context of the early childhood classroom environment and the child's teacher and the service provider work collaboratively to determine the best strategies to support the child in the group setting. Eco-Tots supports the teacher's participation in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

### **Curriculum and Lesson Planning**

Our lesson plans include age and developmentally appropriate activities that are reflective of each child's interests and abilities. Our lesson plans are developed to address the developmental needs of every child. Our lesson plans are developed considering information from an IFSP or IEP.

## Curriculum

ELC is staffed with experienced teachers who specialize in Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, and Child Development. We offer a Creative Curriculum and early childhood education program which challenges each child individually and allows them to work at their own pace. The children will experience how to work in groups, which will provide a powerful bond in their learning experience. Children will have every opportunity to learn and engage in their very own interests, while we focus on numbers, colors, shapes, self-help skills, gross & fine motor skills, tracing, coloring, cutting, classroom etiquette, opposites, special patterns, socialization, stories, crafts, and preparing your child for kindergarten! We provide personalized daily feedback to help you understand what activities your child participated in each school day.

In addition to offering a Creative Curriculum, ELC will offer several other cultural, health, and enrichment programs such as:

**Creative Fine Arts**-Children will discover different art techniques. We provide opportunities for children to create art that interests them.

**Language Arts**-Children will expand their understanding and appreciation of different types of language and cultures.

**Music Appreciation & Dance**-Children will expand their understanding and appreciation of different types of music, spatial awareness, movement, balance, and coordination.

**Children's Yoga**-Children will experience and learn to understand the basic "poses" in yoga. This will help with fitness and help facilitate and channel children's energy.

**STEM, STEAM, Science, Discovery & Ecology**-Children will learn through the observation of living animals, insects, plants, exploring gardening projects, STEM activities and discovering weather and the solar system. ELC will also educate children on the importance of environmental awareness through recycling, conserving, and reducing.

## Developmental Screenings

Developmental screenings are conducted on all children within 90 days of enrollment by your child's teacher. There is a parent portion of the developmental screening that we will ask you to complete. Within 6 months of enrollment, your child will be assessed using the ASQ Ages and Stages Development Tool.

## Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent conferences are conducted 2 times a year, in April and in November. Parents will be notified of conference days by way of our monthly newsletter and posts to the brightwheel app 30 days before conferences are due to begin. Sign-up sheets will then be posted outside each classroom and parents will have an opportunity to sign up for a time to meet with your child's teacher. Please note, alternative arrangements will be made to accommodate parents that are unable to meet in person, including virtual or phone conferences. We currently use the Maryland State Approved ASQ Ages and Stages Development Tool for our semi-annual assessments. Parents must complete a portion of the assessment, and then return it to the teacher to complete her assessment of the child. Once the

teacher completes the assessment, the assessment will be scored and discussed during the parent teacher conferences. Next steps and action plans will be discussed with parents during this time.

### **Statement of Observation**

Conducting observations helps us develop a realistic curriculum and goals for each child. ELC observes all children in order to study specific behaviors and abilities, and to challenge and support each child's individual developmental needs.

### **Emergency Management Plan**

ELC has established a safe evacuation place to take the children should the need arise. If a state emergency were to occur, teachers would alert parents and guardians via phone. ELC will rely on the public safety departments to aid us and supply transportation to a secure site if needed. Each staff member has a cell phone available as another form of contact in case the landline is interrupted. All staff members have received training in CPR and First Aid to respond to minor accidents or injuries.

### **Storm Delays/Closings**

ELC understands that parents do not like to travel with their children in severe inclement weather, so in case of severe weather conditions, or possible closings we will post through text messages and email...

### **Confidentiality and Security of Children's Records**

ELC teachers are the only personnel that have access to children's files. We keep our records in a locked file cabinet for extra security.

### **Amendments**

Eco-Tots reserves the right to amend policies under special circumstances with notice to parents.

### **Parent Checklist**

- Complete Registration Form
- Complete Health History
- Allergy and Medication Administration Forms (if applicable)
- Emergency Contact Form
- Updated Immunizations for your child
- Custody Documents (if applicable)
- Registration Fee
- Infant or Toddler Information Form
- Signed Parent Handbook Acknowledgement Form

**PARENT HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understood Eco-Tots Early Learning Center's Parent Handbook and Policies. I am aware of what is expected of me as a parent and understand the importance of my cooperation and understanding. I acknowledge that Eco-Tots Early Learning Center is an eco-healthy facility and will respect the eco-healthy guidelines to ensure my responsibility of providing a healthy and safe environment for all children.

Child's Name (print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_