



St. Pauls United Church of Christ
Little Lights Early Childhood Education Program
Policies and Procedures Manual

Updated: August 2023

Dear Little Lights Families,

Welcome to the Little Lights Early Childhood Education Program which is part of the ministry of St. Pauls United Church of Christ. We, the Little Lights teachers, view ourselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide a caring, nourishing class experience and meaningful faith formation in our children's program where your child can play, learn, and shine.

The pages of this policy manual provides a general overview of who we are and what we believe as well as many practical details about our classes. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children. Together we want to create a community where we learn that we are all loved by God and we are all called to love God, each other, and ourselves.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign the agreement form on Church Center.

Gratefully,

Erin Fitzgerald
Little Lights Program Director

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***Guidelines and Protocols subject to change**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Our address:
2335 N. Orchard
Chicago, IL, 60614
Main Office: 773-348-3829

Email: littlelights@spucc.org
Website: www.littlelightslp.org
Director: 872-808-2047

LITTLE LIGHTS STAFF

Director; Rainbow Room Lead Teacher Email: littlelights@spucc.org	Erin Fitzgerald
Rainbow Room Assistant Teacher:	Iris Gonzalez
Sunshine Room Lead Teacher Email: littlelights3s@spucc.org	Danielle Mayfield
Sunshine Room Assistant Teacher	Kelly Herndon
Moonbeam Room Lead Teacher Email: littlelights4s@spucc.org	Aimee Holper
Moonbeam Room Assistant Teacher	Suzanne Slaughter

LITTLE LIGHTS BOARD

Associate Pastor	Liz Nickerson
SPUCC Liaison	Wayne Parman
President	Thomas Clancy
Vice President	Open
Secretary	Angi Miller
Marketing/Social Chair	Jamie Herndon
Event Planner	Lauren Sloan
Event Planner	Kate Albright

OUR PROGRAM

Little Lights implements a theme/play based curriculum. It is designed to facilitate learning through hands-on activities both teacher-led and student-led. We offer lessons and activities in the areas of language and literacy, math, science, creative arts, gross and fine motor, and social skills (character education). It is based on current research, state and national standards.

Little Lights strives to create a loving, safe, and progressive Christian environment that parents and children can trust. Little Lights nurtures each child's curiosity and strengthens their love for learning. We believe it is vital to stimulate independence and social interactions through play. We nurture your child's strengths and encourage skills that are still developing, realizing that every child learns at their own pace.

This program is designed to create a positive experience for kids separating from mom/dad/caretaker by promoting gradual separation with a parent or caregiver staying nearby until the children show that they are ready to be on their own. Parents and teachers will work together to make sure children can have successful separation.

We model and facilitate problem-solving strategies, build empathy and develop self-regulation skills. Through hands-on learning and play, children will gain a greater sense of themselves and the community/classroom surrounding them.

COMMUNICATION

Little Lights fully understands your desire to be aware of what your child is doing in class each day. In an effort to keep you updated, we will send a Friday newsletter which will have highlights from each classroom along with other important information. Please make sure we have the most updated email address to contact you.

We will have parent/teacher conferences once in the fall and once in the spring. We believe in having open communication with our families so if at any point you would like to meet, please let your child's teacher know and we will be happy to meet with you.

If your child becomes ill, is injured, or is having serious behavioral challenges, we will contact you right away.

SOCIAL MEDIA

We love taking pictures of our Little Lights as a way of showing parents and caregivers what we do each day. In an effort to communicate some of what your children may be doing during class, we have set up a private Instagram account (@littlelightsspucc). All photos and videos will remain private, and only allowed to be accessed upon approval from Little Lights staff.

We have a Facebook page that we will be using to post pictures, reminders, and useful articles.

Additionally, there is a private, closed group on Facebook called “Little Lights Families” that is only open to current families. Membership must be requested and approved by the group’s administrator, Erin Fitzgerald, Director of Little Lights. From time to time, pictures of the students in action will be shared on the Little Lights public Facebook page or on St. Pauls’ website. Please make sure you agree to the photo/video release form on Church Center so we can use your child photos with your permission.

DIRECTORY

Each Little Lights family is welcome to provide contact information to be included in an all-school directory. This will allow families the opportunity to connect with one another outside of school. We ask that each family provide names, phone numbers, and/or email addresses to be included. Directory information is private and will not be shared with anyone outside of Little Lights. The directory is completely voluntary, you are not required to provide any personal information if you wish not to be included.

GENERAL INFORMATION

ABSENCES

When your child will be absent, please fill out our [Report an Absence Form](#).

INCLEMENT WEATHER/SCHOOL CLOSURE

In the event of inclement weather, or other school emergency that would require Little Lights to close, you will be contacted by the Little Lights Director via email and on our social media pages. We will always try to give you as much advance notice as possible if we ever need to cancel a class, but we want you to know there may be times when this is not possible.

SCHOOL BREAKS

We align our breaks with the Chicago Public Schools calendar. Below is a list of scheduled days off and holiday breaks.

2023-2024 Days off:

September 22 Professional Development Day

October 9 Indigenous Peoples’ Day

November 11 Veterans Day

November 20 - November 24 Thanksgiving Break

December 22 School Improvement Day

December 25 - January 5 Christmas Break

January 15 Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February 19 Presidents' Day

March 25-29 Spring Break

April 1 Easter Monday

May 27 Memorial Day

ARRIVAL OF CHILDREN

When dropping off at Little Lights, please come toward the central doors on Orchard, accessible by ramp. A teacher will be there to greet you.

In order for children to enter the building:

- We require parents to **screen children for symptoms at home**. If your child has *any symptoms*, they are excused from class until symptom-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication.

Students will wait in a designated area inside for their classmates.

Rainbow Room (2 year olds)

Class: 9:15 am - 11:15 am

If your child is comfortable with outdoor dropoff, you may leave them with the teacher at the outside door on Orchard. For those who require a parent to walk in, please walk your child to the cubbies outside the classroom door and have them put their backpack, coat and any other belongings in their cubby. If necessary, you may come into the classroom with them and help them find an activity to engage in or a friend to interact with. Once they seem settled, you can say goodbye and leave the classroom. As they get more comfortable separating, you can bring them to the door of the class and say goodbye. It can be helpful to develop a goodbye ritual, such as using special words you say each time.

Sunshine & Moonbeam Rooms (3&4 year olds)

Class: 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

The 3&4 year old classes will enter through the doors on Orchard. Parents of this age group are not expected to enter the building for dropoff unless your child is having a hard time.

If you drive, you may park in the church loading zone on Orchard. If you are parking in the loading zone, you cannot leave your car there for more than 10 minutes. You are always welcome to park in the parking lot, which is located on Kemper. Please do not park on the right (east) side of the parking lot or you may get blocked in. Spots 1-14 are available during school days/hours.

*Strollers may not block the doors or walkways.

If you walk with a stroller, you may leave it in the courtyard during the brief time you drop your child off. If you have to bring it inside, it should be stored downstairs under the coat rack in the hallway outside of the gym.

*If you are late and miss your dropoff time, you may use the doorbell at the courtyard entrance to gain access into the building.

DISMISSAL OF CHILDREN

After every Little Lights class, staff members must release students to designated parents/guardians, or another **documented** caregiver, family member, or friend.

At dismissal, each child must be signed out by an authorized adult on our sign out sheet. If the person picking up your child is not listed on your Little Lights registration, you must provide written documentation allowing the release of your child in advance. Little Lights staff may require a photo ID if unfamiliar with the noted person.

Rainbow Room dismissal: 11:15 am

We will dismiss from the central doors on Orchard. Parents, please wait outside the door and the teacher will send students out as she sees their caregivers or parents have arrived.

Sunshine & Moonbeam Rooms dismissal: 12:00 pm

The 3&4 year old class will dismiss from the central doors on Orchard. Parents, please wait outside the door and the teacher will send students out as she sees their caregivers or parents have arrived.

If the child is not picked up within 15 minutes of the dismissal time a late pick-up fee of \$25 will be charged.

WELL-BEING

Promoting good health and safety is one of our goals. To prevent the spread of illnesses, please do not bring your child to Little Lights if they are sick. Your child must be fever free

for more than 24 hours without medicine before they return to class. Your child must not have vomited in the past 24 hours before they return to class.

If your child becomes ill please notify us right away if it is contagious and in turn, we will notify other parents. The child who is ill is not identified. Children with a contagious illness will not be allowed to return until they have been properly treated.

Symptoms

Little Lights will not allow any child who exhibits any of the following to attend class:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees or higher (Needs to be fever free for 24 hours).
- Congestion or runny nose (if allergy-related, a doctor note must be provided)
- Cough
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting or Nausea
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or Body Aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Eye discharge-pink eye or from a cold-**must be gone before returning**
- Communicable disease: chicken pox, measles, etc. **must be gone before returning**

Injury

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, these steps will be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, staff members will provide first aid (for example, applying bandages) and will notify the parent or guardian of the injury at the time of pick up.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will be immediately summoned in addition to the Little Lights Director. If warranted by circumstances, 911 will be called.
- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed and shared with the parents.

Cleaning and Disinfection

We will implement the national standards for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection of educational facilities for children.

- Little Lights Staff will routinely clean, sanitize, and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched, especially toys and games. This will also include

cleaning objects/surfaces daily such as doorknobs, light switches, classroom sink handles, countertops, toilet training potties, cubbies, and gym equipment.

Healthy Hand Hygiene Behavior

- All children, staff, and parents will engage in hand hygiene at the following times:
 - Arrival to the facility
 - Before and after preparing food or drinks
 - Before and after eating or handling food
 - Before and after diapering
 - After using the toilet or helping a child use the bathroom
 - After coming in contact with bodily fluid
 - After handling garbage
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If hands are not visibly dirty, alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol can be used if soap and water are not readily available.
- Children will be supervised when they use hand sanitizer to prevent ingestion.

Ventilation

- We will increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors and using fans.
- When applicable, classes will utilize outdoor spaces for learning and activities.
- We will utilize portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to help enhance air cleaning.

Health Forms

The [Medication Authorization Form](#) must be filled out in order to give our staff permission to administer medication to your child.

Upload your child's immunization records [here](#), or email them to littlelights@spucc.org
Hard copies are also accepted.

***HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS: COVID-19 SAFETY & PANDEMIC GUIDANCE**

Other guidelines will be implemented in cases of pandemics or health outbreaks in accordance with the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH). Due to the fluid nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, Little Lights families will be notified of policy and procedure updates via addendums to the current written policies.

**These guidelines are subject to change and Little Lights will always follow the current guidelines*

Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 or any illness should stay home while sick.

- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate from all school activities for five days and report the positive case to the school. Contact the director at littlelights@spucc.org. Upon return to school, with two sequential negative tests 48 hours apart, you may remove your mask sooner than day 10.
- Absent a negative test, recently positive students must mask for days 6-10 and social distance at when eating. (A separate table will be available in order to social distance during lunch or snack.)
- PCR tests, professionally administered antigen/rapid tests, and home tests are allowed in any situation requiring a test. Note that PCR tests are not recommended when returning to school post isolation, as their sensitivity will likely result in positive readings post infectious period.
- If the parent chooses to not test their child, or the child continues to test positive, the student may return to school after the five-day isolation, but must wear a mask through day 10. This is per the current health department guidance. Alternatively, the student may stay home through day 10 and return on day 11 mask optional.
- Based on data collected since removal of the mask mandate, contact tracing is no longer required. Close contacts will no longer be identified, and thus no longer be required to mask, quarantine or social distance at when eating.
- Schools should inform families of all in-classroom, positive COVID-19 cases. Families are encouraged to take any precautions they consider appropriate.
- When there are three cases in a classroom within a 10-day period, all students in that classroom must mask for 10 days.
- While vaccinations are recommended to help prevent serious symptoms, there is no vaccination requirement for either students or staff.

Little Lights also asks the following of our parents and guardians:

- Remind their child/ren of good hygiene practices including frequent hand washing and regular use of hand sanitizer.

- Remind their child/ren to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or an elbow when sneezing or coughing to be followed immediately by hand washing or sanitizing.
- Understand that your child's entire class may be required to mask for 10 days if there are periods of concentrated exposure (3 or more cases in a 10-day period).
- Understand that Little Lights Covid protocols are based upon CDC and local health department guidance and, as such, are subject to change throughout the school year and agree to adhere to Little Lights Covid protocols.
- Understand that Little Lights may contact parents/guardians to pick up their child if they are experiencing any symptoms of Covid or illness.

Travel

Families will comply with all travel guidance advised by the Chicago Department of Public Health and State of Illinois travel restrictions. Parents will consult with Little Lights about quarantine or testing requirements on return from travel, if applicable.

***These guidelines and protocols are subject to change.**

SNACKS

Each child is responsible for bringing their own snack and water bottle. We ask that only **ONE** snack item be brought that is **easy for your child to open on their own**, i.e. in a ziploc bag.

Some great ideas for snacks are:

- Fresh Fruit
- Fresh veggies
- Pretzels
- Crackers (Wheat thins, Saltines, plain Triscuits)
- Rice cakes
- Goldfish/Cheddar bunnies
- Sunchips
- Pirate's Booty
- Graham crackers
- Teddy grahams
- Nilla wafers
- Fruit leather

The Little Lights classes are **NUT-FREE so please do not bring any snacks that contain nuts.** The church as a whole is not a nut-free building so if your child has a nut allergy we

cannot guarantee that they will not encounter a contaminated surface in the public areas of the church.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Little Lights loves celebrating your child's birthday. Birthdays will be celebrated during the last 20 minutes of class with a birthday dance and a book.

Due to food allergy concerns, we cannot allow homemade treats. Parents may provide store-bought (no homemade) mini-cupcakes or cookies for their child's class. While we love sweet treats, please limit them to a size appropriate for a 2-4 year old child. Fresh fruit and other healthy treats are preferred.

We recommend alternative treats/goodies such as books, crayons, stickers and non-food treats. Parents or caregivers are encouraged to read their child's favorite book to the class as part of their birthday celebration.

We suggest that you consider donating a copy of your child's favorite book with their name written in it to the classroom as a way to celebrate their birthday. Summer birthdays can be celebrated on their half birthday.

DISCIPLINE

A very important part of the Little Lights experience is helping children learn how to get along in the world, enjoy being with other children, and follow the direction of an adult other than their parent(s). A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding behavior and discipline. The teachers will focus on the positive behaviors of the children and reinforce those behaviors as often as possible. Our goal is to help the children develop self-control and responsibility for their actions.

Our discipline procedures will consist of the following strategies:

1. Connecting with the child.
2. Giving the child individual attention separate from the group.
3. Encouraging children to use their words to express their feelings and communicate when having a disagreement with another child.
4. Facilitating children in their attempts to settle their own disputes.
5. Helping children learn ways to calm and soothe themselves.
6. Redirecting behavior when this seems potentially effective.
7. Communicating with parents about concerns and creating a plan together on how to address the concerns.

ASSESSMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS

If your child's teacher(s) believes he/she would benefit from an assessment or intervention, Little Lights will work together with parents/guardians to facilitate this. Teachers and parents will work together through the process. The child's teacher will share what they observe in the classroom and check in with parents to enquire about the same behaviors at

home and to ask if they share similar concerns. Teachers will share with parents any accommodations or interventions they will implement in the classroom. If the teacher observes that the child is still struggling, after trying the accommodations and interventions for a reasonable amount of time they may decide with the parent to contact the school district to ask for a screening, observation, or assessment. If the child is recommended for an assessment, the parent will be asked to be part of the team to decide whether the child qualifies as a child with a disability under federal guidelines. Little Lights does not provide assessments but will help support the family in the process of obtaining one if needed. If an assessment cannot be obtained in a timely manner and the child is not thriving in the classroom it may be recommended that the family pursue other avenues of support such as occupational therapy or counseling for emotional support.

If a student is regularly disrupting the class, frequently unable to engage in the activities, harming himself, harming another student or teacher, or engaging in persistent dangerous behavior, an evaluation will be recommended and must be completed as soon as possible. If disruptions continue without improvement the student may need to leave Little Lights and find another program that is better suited to their needs.

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Little Lights desires to continue to provide a safe and healthy environment at St. Pauls United Church of Christ in which our children and their leaders can learn about, experience, and share God's love. We have a zero tolerance policy for abuse in our programs and activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member at St. Pauls to act in the best interest of all children in Little Lights.

In the event that the staff observe any inappropriate behavior (i.e. policy violation, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspect abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is the responsibility to immediately report their observations to the Little Lights Director, as directed by the Illinois Mandated Reporter Training Guidelines.

INCLUSION POLICY

Little Lights is an equal opportunity early childhood education provider. While we are a Christian based program, enrollment is open to all children, regardless of religion, gender or cultural background. We actively promote inclusive practices in order to best meet the needs of the children, families, and staff at St. Pauls. We strive to serve a vibrant and diverse community of families, and promote positive attitudes of both similarities and differences in each other.

RESPECT

We care deeply for children and want to protect them. Little Lights requires all staff members agree to:

1. Respect and take care of the students.
2. Respect and take care of ourselves.
3. Respect and take care of our church, classrooms, and materials.

4. Follow the safe church policy guidelines as set forth by the United Church of Christ Leadership Team.
5. Pass a background check.

SUPERVISION AND INTERACTIONS

Staff members of Little Lights are expected to provide supervision for children in their care while working in the program. In addition, Little Lights staff will not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, degrading, or humiliating. At no time should a Little Lights staff member yell at a child. Little Lights staff will keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of sharing God's love and care.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

Because young children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members will observe the following policies:

Diapering

1. Only Little Lights staff will undertake the changing of diapers during the Little Lights classes.
2. Changing of diapers will be done in plain sight of other Little Lights staff.
3. Children will never be left unattended on the changing table.
4. Any special instructions given by parents will be followed (as noted at drop off).
5. Children will be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon completion of changing their soiled diaper.
6. Children will be changed on the changing table only.
7. Extra diapers and wipes should be provided and clearly marked in a Ziploc bag.

Toilet Training

1. No child is forced to toilet train.
2. Only Little Lights staff will participate in toilet training efforts.
3. When children are taken to the bathroom, the door will be left partially open.
4. Young children will not be left unattended in the bathroom.
5. Any special instructions given by the parents/guardias/caretakers will be recorded and followed.
6. Children will be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the classroom with the other children.
7. "Accidents" will be handled by reassuring the child and completing a change of underwear and clothing. Extra underwear and clothing are to be provided for your child, clearly labeled in a Ziploc bag.

BUILDING SAFETY

All the outer doors of the building remain locked at all times. In order to enter the building you must be let in by a staff member. The main doors are equipped with cameras to

monitor activity. While you are entering or leaving the building, if a stranger tries to come in please do not let them in if you do not know who they are. Please tell them to contact someone in the church office if they need assistance. If you notice any suspicious activity, please let the church main office know right away.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In the case of fire, tornado, child injury, or lockdown, Little Lights staff are trained and prepared to handle the situation according to policies sent forth in our procedures manual. All staff are instructed to follow the appropriate steps toward safety. The staff is Red Cross Certified in CPR, AED, and First Aid.

Fire drills teach our staff and children what to do in case of fire. Since the alarm is loud and can be frightening, Little Lights staff will make a point to prepare children for a fire drill. All evacuation routes are posted in the classrooms.

TUITION

A non-refundable registration fee of \$250 is due upon acceptance to hold the child's spot and cover the cost of supplies. Tuition may be paid according to the selected payment plan (monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually). Tuition is based on a yearly rate, payable according to the application agreement upon enrollment. Families are responsible for full payment of the yearly tuition. **There are no refunds if your child fails to attend due to absence, illness, or voluntary withdrawal.**

Without payment of tuition, Little Lights cannot function. Allowing some families to avoid their tuition obligation is unfair to those families that take their tuition obligation seriously and pay in full and on time.

If financial assistance is needed or a payment plan is needed, please contact Erin Fitzgerald at littlelights@spucc.org

Tuition payments should be made:

- by check payable to St. Pauls UCC with Little Lights in the memo
- by credit card through Church Center
- or by using Zelle.

If using Zelle, payments can be sent to giving@spucc.org with Little Lights in the note.

EVENTS

Little Lights organizes and hosts several social events throughout the year as a way to connect our families and to watch our Littles Shine.

Some annual events hosted in the past to note:

- Fall Open House (September)
- Halloween Party (October)
- Christmas Concert & Art Show (December)
- Spring Open House (February)
- Spring Fundraiser (March/April)
- Spring Fling Family Dance (May)
- End of School Picnic (June)

We are open to creative minds and hands to find ways to keep our community close at heart. We are always looking for ways to interact together and contribute to our program.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT/FUNDRAISING

Parent involvement and volunteering is a vital part of our program. While Little Lights does not require volunteering or fundraising, we do appreciate and encourage any level of involvement. Current areas for opportunity - room parent, social event committees, and fundraising. If interested, please contact Little Lights Program Director, Erin Fitzgerald.