



Helena's Early Learning Playhouse

HELPIng children learn and grow through intentional play

Family Handbook

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(Important changes in red)

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Parent App - Procure (an invite will be sent)

About Us

Helena's Early Learning Playhouse is a licensed home (#1720242) with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and owned and operated by myself, Helena Hortman. Being licensed means having many more rules and regulations to follow, and having regular inspections that listed and registered homes don't have. I will have 6 inspections in my first year. Most likely yearly after that. My home being licensed allows me to care for 12 children, ages 6 weeks to 12 years. (If by myself, the more younger children I have, the less total children I can have. If one of my early educators is working, the ages of the children don't matter as long as we still have no more than 12 children in care.) Being licensed allows me to accept CCS (child care subsidy), be on the federal food program, and work toward having my home accredited with Texas Rising Star. I have to wait a year before applying for TRS, but since I've overseen nothing but accredited centers and my home years ago was accredited, that's all I know and all of these extra standards are already implemented in my home. I also have a TX Child Care Director Certificate showing that I meet the education, training, and experience requirements. All family in my home have up to date background checks.

My oldest daughter, Briana Hortman, will be assisting me each day. For state purposes, she is considered a substitute caregiver for her to be able to count in the ratio, but I will often refer to her as my assistant. Having two early educators greatly lowers our ratio of children to each adult, which means more individual time with each child, and creates a safer environment. Having an assistant also lowers the chance of having to be closed under normal illness circumstances.

My middle daughter, Meghan Cruz, will be assisting as a substitute caregiver. She does have a full time job, so at this time she will be available to fill in when needed due to appointments or illness. Her husband, Chris, will possibly be around my home and maybe even volunteering, but never alone with the children.

My husband, Kevin, and other daughter, Kristen, will be involved in my home, but won't count in the ratio. Kevin's job is in Plano, but **he often works from home**. Kristen is in college, so she will be home on breaks between semesters and holidays. We also have 3 dogs (Cody, Buddy, & Chloe), 2 horses (John & Goldfrost), and a betta fish (Marley). View my "Educators" page on my website for more information about each of us, and the "animals" section in this handbook.

My Philosophy

I will provide your child with a safe and comfortable environment to play and learn with loving guidance. My early learning home will be play-based. My "curriculum" is integrated throughout the day using art, songs, stories, poems, games, indoor play, outdoor play, theme days, and a variety of other activities that will help stimulate your child's intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual development.

Curriculum and Assessments

I use the WEE Learn Curriculum, which is a play based Christian curriculum. It is designed to meet developmental milestones of each age group by providing activities in

the environment to support children's individual differences and learning styles, as they learn through play and interactions. WEE Learn is evidence based and supports best practice. It has been cross-referenced with multiple State's Performance Standards, including Texas.

I use the ASQ developmental checklist to help ensure children are progressing developmentally. This helps to place activities into the learning environment that are appropriate for the children to meet these skills.

Helpful Tips for Families

Have your child visit before their first day of care. Bring your child to the interview and when dropping off paperwork or supplies. This allows them to see my home, myself, and my family so they won't be as anxious about leaving you. Share with me ways you comfort your child at home to help the transition.

Be informed. I know the handbook is long, but everything that is in it is either required by state standards or are issues that have come up in my years of child care. It's best to have a policy or rule already in place. Put date reminders in your phone and highlight or mark items or sections you need to remember. Look over the lesson plans, menu, and days we will have celebrations. Discuss them with your child so they can look forward to their day. You could keep a copy of these in your vehicle to talk about on the way to my home each day.

Connect. We will use the Procare app to stay connected. I will send pictures and videos, and you can do the same. We can message each other and you can see details about your child's day. Although email won't be used as much, do pay attention to my emails when they come. Also "like" my Facebook page where I will share things such as recalls on children's items, local community activities, growth & development information, information to help you better understand the importance of play for your child, pictures of some of our activities, etc.

Enrollment Procedures

The following will be included in your enrollment packet. The forms are required by Texas HHS, CACFP, and Helena's Early Learning Playhouse, to be completed and/or signed and submitted at least 2 business days before the first day of care.

To be read, completed, signed, and/or dated:

- 1) Enrollment Forms/Contract (updated yearly or as needed)
- 2) Immunizations Submitted (as needed); Exemption Affidavit for not having or being current on immunizations due to medical reasons or religious belief
- 3) Getting To Know Your Child (beginning of care)
- 4) Discipline Policy (beginning of care and as needed)
- 5) Safe Sleep Policy (infants under 12 months only - beginning of care)
- 6) Infant Feeding Schedule (infants only - beginning of care and updated monthly)
- 7) USDA Forms (beginning of care and updated yearly)

Information to be read and kept handy:

- 1) Family Handbook (initial on enrollment/contract that each section has been read, understood, and will be abided by; updated yearly or as needed; printed copy given, and posted on Facebook page and website)
- 2) Daily Schedule (updated as needed depending on ages in care)
- 3) Calendar of Events (updated yearly or as needed)
- 4) WIC Information Flier
- 5) Building for the Future (food program)
- 6) Seatbelt law

Communication

Communication is important. I urge you to share any thoughts, concerns, or changes in your child's daily routine that may affect their day. Examples could include a late bedtime the night before, a busy weekend, no naps or a missed nap during the weekend, up in the morning earlier than usual, or family emergencies or situations that may affect behavior or mood. I will always keep you informed of your child's behavior (positive and negative) and will work with you in planning your child's stay here. This being said, if I've handled behavior issues, I will only inform you if your help is needed to get the behavior under control.

A parent board is located at the entrance with my license, inspections/observations, menus, upcoming events, closings, and other important information. Handouts or other paperwork will be put in your child's folder. This won't be daily and I will try to remind you to look. However, to conserve paper, important information, pictures, videos, updates, daily notes, etc. will be done through the Procure App or email.

If you have problems or concerns, set a time with me to discuss these issues. Quiet time or after child care hours are best so I can give my full attention to the children at drop-off and pick-up. Talk with me as things occur and don't let things build up. I don't know if there is a concern unless you tell me.

Twice a year I will give you the opportunity for us to conference. During this conference we will discuss a plan for the child for the upcoming year. It is very important that we have these conferences so that we will both know that our needs and the needs of your child are being met. However, if either of us think we should have a conference sooner, we can make arrangements to make this happen for your child's sake, especially to address any major concerns such as development or behavior.

At least yearly, you will be asked to evaluate my program, services, etc. and give feedback on what we are doing well and where we could continue to grow. This will be anonymous; however, I do ask that you bring up any issues or concerns when they happen so they can be resolved.

Local community resources will be on the parent wall if there is ever a time you may need assistance in any way. If you feel comfortable letting me know, I could also try to help or find other resources to help you.

Hours of Operation

Helena's Early Learning Playhouse hours of operation are 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. I will not always have children in my care for these hours; therefore, the times you contract are the hours your child is allowed to be in care. Changes to these times must be agreed upon and changed on your contract in advance of the changes occurring. If it is an occasional change such as an early or late meeting at work, it must be agreed upon in advance to ensure the slot is available.



Be respectful of my family, planning, cleaning, and alone time by staying within your contracted times.

Arrival and Departure

Park on the cement drive or directly behind, with enough space for others to back out. Leave the rock drive parallel to the house for backing up only. This will make it easier for families to get out and easier for you to come up on the sidewalk without getting your feet wet in the grass. Try to keep your vehicle off the grass to help keep our yard looking as nice as possible.

My home has 2 front entrances, but one has been dedicated as the child care entrance down the long sidewalk for both drop-off and pick-up. Coming up to my home is required due to signing your child in and out, and so we can communicate about your child. You will sign in/out on either your phone or my device if needed. You will sign in as you arrive to drop-off and you will sign out as you are leaving my home at pick-up. Coming to my door is also required since your child is not allowed to be unsupervised while on my property. Your child must be with you or within my care at all times. I understand there are things you may allow your child to do at your home, such as run to the vehicle or from the vehicle to your home or go to the bathroom alone to wash their hands, but these situations would be considered a safety hazard at my home. Other common situations that aren't allowed are leaving a child under 13 in a vehicle alone (maybe to quickly drop off or you forgot something in my home), allowing the child to be inside or outside while you are at the other (dropping off while we are outside and you step in to put something in their cubby), and allowing the child to open the doors to my home (they will be taught that only adults are allowed to open the doors for all of our safety).

Children are to arrive clean and ready for the day. This includes diapers, clothes, hands and face. I understand if you have a long drive they will most likely need a diaper change. Allow time to help get your child to the bathroom or have their diaper changed and/or hands and face washed since I will often be busy with other children or possibly be outside and won't always be able to stop what I'm doing to help each time. Everyone coming into my home and staying for more than a few minutes are required to wash

their hands upon arrival. You are more than welcome in my home to help your child wash their hands either in the learning area kitchen or bathroom. (Be mindful if you're sick or if your shoes are dirty!) I never plan to send your child home dirty or needing to be changed, so help me with starting out the day the same way. Having the same routine each day will help your child adjust.

Children will not be allowed inside the home with food, candy, gum, or drinks from home. Have them finish these before coming up to my home. Otherwise, I will have them hand it back to you, while reminding you of the rules. (Since that's being said, don't threaten your child by using my name or that I will handle them. You can simply tell them what you need them to do, or you can remind them that my rule is that we can't do whatever it is. I won't use your name to threaten your child, so I'm asking for the same respect. I don't want them to be afraid of me. I want them to respect me and my rules.)

Children are required to be in care no later than 9:00am. The only exceptions are approved appointments, and a note is required. There is no grace period for this drop-off time. Allow time to say your goodbyes and leave by 9:00am. My daily schedule is arranged around all children (except school age coming after school) being here at this time. Coming in after this time affects us starting our activities, may interrupt group time, changes meal count for meal preparation, often means your child won't rest well because they've most likely slept late which in return means none of the children will get to rest well, and could change the need for an assistant to be present. This may not seem like a huge deal, but all of these reasons can be a huge deal in providing the best care for all my children. You will be denied care if you arrive after 9:00am (even 9:01am). Arriving late is inconsiderate and willfully not following the policy, and it could result in termination.

Arrival and departure times are transition times for your child. If the child is upset at drop-off time, it will be easier if you allow me to get the child started on our daily routine. The longer you hesitate, the more anxious you both will be. Try to be mindful of not putting your anxiety onto your child. Make a huge deal out of how much fun they are going to have, or that we are having their favorite food today, or whatever. After all my years in child care, I love to greet the children. It doesn't matter what's going on in my life, how I feel, or even what's going on between you and me, I will change my tone so your child will know I want them to be here. You can always text later and see how they are doing, or I will try to find time to send a picture especially if they had a hard drop-off. I've been caring for children for a long time, so struggling to separate from a parent is common. They will get better with time and as they start to feel safe and understand that you are coming back to get them. Sometimes this could be a long time - as long as 3-4 months. They also go through periods of separation anxiety, where they will need to learn all of this again. Don't assume something negative is happening. It simply means they have progressed to understanding that you are leaving and they have to learn again they are safe and you are returning. If your child is older and having trouble with another child this could make them anxious as well. Work with me by working with your child on handling themselves with the other child. Help them work through their

emotions so they aren't anxious about coming to care. They could also have a difficult time at drop-off simply because they love you and want to be with you.

Be in control of your child during drop-off and pick-up since this can be a time of testing when two different authority figures are present. I will remind you both of appropriate behaviors in my home if needed. If you are struggling with the child, I would be more than happy to model for you how to handle the situation. However, as mentioned above, don't make me the bad guy. I want your child to know that I have expectations of their behavior, but that I also care very much for them.

Children may not be picked up or dropped off during rest time, 11:45-3:00pm. This greatly interrupts rest time and affects the rest of the day for the children. Contracted times will be arranged around rest time. If your child has an appointment or you would like to pick-up early, you will need to do so before or after rest time. It must be approved for children to return to care after rest time due to an appointment, and it will depend on the individual child and their normal behavior and/or demeanor and how their returning will affect the rest of our day.

I am usually torn between helping you with pick-up by having your child ready to go when you arrive, or allowing you to come in and see your child interacting and having a good time. So, I will leave this up to each individual family as to what you would like me to do based on how well your child does during this transition. If we find that your child really struggles with leaving each day, then I will choose to be working on getting them cleaned up and ready to go before you arrive. If it is close to your contract time, I will have them ready to go for you. If you will be picking up earlier than your normal time, text me to let me know so I can at least get their diaper changed or have them potty before you arrive.

REASONS TO CONTACT ME:

- 1) IF YOUR CHILD WILL BE LATE (only due to an approved appointment and so I can remind you of meal and rest times)
- 2) IF YOUR CHILD WILL BE ABSENT FROM CARE (this affects our daily activities, food preparation, and whether an assistant is needed)
- 3) IF YOU WILL BE LATE TO PICK-UP YOUR CHILD (contacting me will NOT relieve you of paying the late fee, but it could keep you from being terminated)



Release of Children

Your child can only be released to the parents/guardians and designated pick-up contacts on the paperwork I have on file. (You can change designated pick-up contacts as needed.) Designated pick-up contacts must be at least 18 years old and must show their ID for it to be copied the first time they pick-up. They may be asked for their ID anytime if they are not recognized or remembered. You are required to make me aware in writing (text or email) each time they will pick-up so it can be kept on file. If this person will be picking up on a regular basis, such as a grandparent, then you must submit in writing saying you approve them picking up regularly and what days or that it is allowed anytime, for the child's file. I will not release your child unless you have made me aware of this in advance. If a designated pick-up contact shows up at my home to pick-up and you've not made me aware, I will contact you by text or email before I release the child. It is your responsibility to make sure all pick-up people abide by the rules within this handbook.

If there is a custody agreement on file, pickup is to always comply with what is stated in the agreement. There will be no switching of days unless authorized in writing and allowed by the agreement. If there is not a custody agreement on file and the parent is on the child's enrollment paperwork at any point, or if they have a copy of their birth certificate indicating they are the parent, I have no choice but to release the child to them. However, I will contact you immediately.

It is against minimum standards for me to keep a child, even if I suspect a parent/guardian is under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or anything else that might impair their driving. However, I will try to deter them while I contact you and the police to do a wellness check. I also can not keep a child because whoever is picking up does not have a car seat; however, knowing that I will contact the police to do a wellness check if someone picks up without a car seat or child is not put in the car seat before leaving my home. Due to insurance purposes, I am not able to allow anyone to borrow a car seat, nor can I put a child in their car seat for the person picking up.

Visiting and Open Door

I have an open door policy, meaning that if you need to speak with me, feel free to do so, and it also means parents are welcome to volunteer and participate in our daily routine, parties, etc.. However, I would appreciate parents not “hanging out”. I would prefer you to be involved and make a positive impact on the children, and allow me to continue to do my job while you are here. You lingering or visiting may make it difficult for your child. If this happens and doesn’t improve, then you will be asked to visit as little as possible.

Having an “open door” does not mean that my doors are unlocked. I can’t see the front door from the playground, so it will usually be locked during this time. As much as possible I will be on the lookout for families arriving, but you may need to knock or text to be let in. Please remember this is my home and I have family who may be asleep at any time during the day due to their work schedules. During the day, if we are in the learning areas, I may have a hard time hearing you knock, so text if I don’t answer the door in a timely manner.

Phone calls and texts are welcome; however, my first priority is the children so I will contact you back as time allows. I can’t do the job you are paying me to do if I’m constantly answering the phone or texts. My hope is to give a few updates throughout the day to let you know how things are going. This may be through your child’s daily sheets for meals, diaper changes, etc. or it may be pictures and videos. Any use of electronics that affects the supervision of the children is against Texas minimum standards. In other words, I can’t be on my phone any more than necessary.

Prospective family interviews will not be held during hours children are in care to both protect the children, and so my attention isn’t taken away from them. Another reason picking up on time is important is because I would most likely schedule interviews right at the end of the day so I can get to my family as soon as possible.

You have an open invitation to attend all parties and events. You will receive a yearly calendar of events and I will put out reminders, by text, of dates and times. Events will include holiday parties, birthday parties, yearly anniversary party, etc.

Positions, Tuition, and Fees

Full-time – reserved slot Monday-Friday; payment due in advance and regardless of attendance

Part-day/Part-time/Before and After School – reserved days and/or hours; payment due in advance and regardless of attendance; no makeup days or hours; additional days may be arranged based on slot availability and with an additional charge

Daily - must be scheduled in advance for specific days with drop-off and pick-up times; dependent on slot availability; payment is due in advance for scheduled days (child not attending will not be reimbursed); reserved days are not guaranteed until payment is made; late pick-up fees apply to this position

There will be a registration fee equal to 2 weeks tuition due at the time of enrollment and to hold your spot. This fee will be split up with the first half credited to the first week of care and the second half credited for the last week of care. Whether you give a 2 week notice or not, one week will still need to be paid. This registration fee is non-refundable. I will only hold a slot for two weeks after the registration fee has been paid. If the start date is more than two weeks after enrollment, then remaining tuition will be due to hold the slot for your child until they start. If the registration fee and/or tuition for holding the slot aren't paid, then the slot is not guaranteed and I will be trying to fill the slot with another child. This includes holding a slot for an infant. Payments already made are non-refundable if you decide that care isn't needed. If care is terminated, there will be no reimbursement, and if it is after the two week trial period, then the one week of the last two weeks will still be due.

Daily care will have a registration fee equal to twice the amount of the daily rate. Half the fee will go toward the first day in care, and the other half will go towards the last day in care. In the event of termination without a written 2 weeks notice, tuition and registration fee will not be refunded.

For families who will need to remove your child for the summer and be guaranteed a slot to return in the fall, or families who need to hold a slot for a new infant, you will need to pay a holding fee equal to 2 weeks tuition. This fee is simply to ensure you have a slot on an agreed upon date at time of paying. Any changes in start date may require full tuition to continue to hold the slot.

Tuition amount and payment plan of tuition will be arranged with each family individually. Options will be monthly (due on the 1st of each month) or weekly (due on the Friday before care is given). A late payment fee of \$25 per day, including weekends, will be charged. Your child may not attend until payment is made in full. Paying 2 days late, including weekends, results in termination and the slot being filled. Paying late or not at all affects my income, not only personally, but for my business, and it affects the funds I have to care for the children, including your child, my family, and paying my early educators. I understand situations happen; however, you are required to communicate with me in advance if there will be an issue with paying so I can show grace and we come to a short term agreement for payment. No communication about non-payment will result in termination.

Tuition payments can be paid through the Procare app, Zelle, cash, check, or money order. Pay attention to additional fees with the Procare app.

There will be a \$25 fee for NSF payments, plus any late fees until the NSF payment is paid in full, and any fees charged to me due to the NSF. After the first incident, termination will be considered.

Late pick-up fee of \$10.00 per minute per child will be charged for every minute after scheduled pick-up time and will be due before the child returns to care. This late pick-up fee is not intended to extend your child's hours of care, and abuse of this policy

will result in termination of our agreement. If picking-up the child on time becomes a problem, the scheduled pick-up time can always be discussed. Late drop-off does not justify late pick-up. My personal and family time is important to me; however, this time doesn't start until I've finished cleaning, planning, etc. at the end of the day after the children leave. Please be respectful of my time.

I do not offer a decrease in tuition for additional children from the same family since I don't decrease the amount of care to those children.

As needed, but usually yearly, an increase in tuition will be considered. Costs are constantly rising and with any job, a merit or cost of living raise is considered. You will always be given at least a 30 day notice of any increase. I'm always willing to discuss what your tuition covers, but just a few things to remember is that I will often have children in care for 60 hours a week plus hours spent in evenings and weekends for meal and curriculum preparation, cleaning and training.

Personal Days, Vacation, Holidays, Other Closures, and FREE Care Opportunities

You will be responsible for the regular scheduled payments when your child is absent since payment is for the reserved slot, not attendance. Any exceptions to this are mentioned below.

After six months of care, full-time families (paying for a full week Monday-Friday, and a full year January-December) may take up to one consecutive week (5 days) of vacation per calendar year with no tuition due for that week. At least a 1 week written notice (note, email, or text) of vacation needs to be given in order for this to apply. Full-time families will also get 5 sick days with no tuition due. Your child must be sick to use these days and they don't have to be consecutive days. You will need to give written notice that you would like to use a sick day. You may not use one of your last two weeks of care for your vacation or sick time. If more than the time given above is taken, full payment is due to hold your child's slot. Tuition will be credited, not refunded, if payment has already been made. If you make me aware of vacation far enough in advance, I can prorate the monthly tuition.

Families who are not full-time are already receiving a discount by not being required to pay full-time tuition for a slot. Therefore, tuition will be due regardless of attendance and can not be changed to other days without additional tuition being charged.

If I become sick, if at all possible, I will try to provide backup care in my home. However, if I do not have a backup provider, then you will be responsible for finding care of your own. I will have 5 days **paid** sick time for each calendar year – when taking this time, my home will be closed, a backup will not be provided, and you will be responsible for payment. If a backup is provided and you choose not to bring your child, tuition will still be due. Note that if I'm sick, I will still be in the home and be accessible for backup if needed, while staying away from you and the children.

I will take two weeks vacation – one week at Christmas (**unpaid unless paid holiday falls within this time**) and another week during the year (**paid**). If there are any other vacations or changes, they will be announced in advance and payment will be discussed at that time depending on providing backup care. Full-time families will be allowed to plan vacation the same week as my paid vacation and not have to pay tuition. This will be your unpaid vacation for the year.

You will be given a yearly calendar of events that will include holidays, closed days, and parties and events. My home **will be closed** on the following holidays each year: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and day after, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If the holiday falls on a weekend, a Friday or Monday will be taken. These days are **paid** holidays (all days taken each holiday) for all parents with these normal days reserved. You may not use vacation or sick time for a holiday.

Any month that does not have a closed holiday, I will be taking one **paid** day for a personal day. I will use these days for appointments as much as possible. Months that have no federal holiday and **paid** personal days will be taken are February, March or April (depending on Easter), August, and October. These days will be scheduled on the yearly calendar of events. There may be times that I choose to close only part of the day rather than the full day, and times that I may be able to have backup care provided in my home. **There may also be times that I decide to remain open and use the paid personal day when needed at another time throughout the year.** I will make you aware of these changes when necessary, but otherwise depend on me being closed. Again, if you choose not to bring your child when a backup is provided, tuition will still be due.

All days will be listed on the calendar of events in your enrollment packet and posted on the parent board. It is your responsibility to keep track of these days and find other care if needed. You will be notified in advance of any changes in dates.

I understand that if you chose to attend a child care center, you may not have to deal with some of these days mentioned above. However, I chose to provide home care so I could take better care of myself, both physically and mentally. In return I'm able to take better care of my family and your children. I have chosen to give you vacation and sick time, the opportunity to only have to pay for part-time care rather than full-time, to remove your child from care and only pay a holding fee, and 2 FREE care opportunities to show you how much I appreciate you allowing me to care for myself.

Each currently enrolled family will receive FREE child care for the enrolled child for three additional hours one night out of the year for an anniversary or birthday. You choose and arrange in advance when the contract is signed. Late pick-up fees will apply to this time of care outside the 3 hours.

Each currently enrolled family will receive FREE child care from 8am-5pm on a Saturday in December to use for Christmas shopping. This date will be on the calendar

of events. If slots are available, you may make arrangements to pay for other children to attend, and other families not in care may pay for their child to attend.

If there is inclement weather, such as snow, ice, severe storm, etc., I will follow Greenville and Celeste ISD's decision regarding remaining open. If their decisions differ, then I will make a decision based on what is safest for everyone involved. I will make you aware as soon as possible of these decisions, but be mindful that they usually wait until the last minute to decide. If schools close early, I will close early. These days will be paid days since you are paying for the slot. As a reminder, I'm almost always working whether your child is here or not since there is always something to prepare for the children - food, curriculum, cleaning, training, etc.

Referral Credit

Parents/Guardians will receive a \$100 referral credit for each family they refer who enrolls in Helena's Early Learning Playhouse AND pays first months tuition AND attends care. Be sure they let me know you referred them.

Trial Period and Termination

There will be a two week trial period from the time of the start date. During this time both you and I may decide to terminate care without the necessary 2 week notice. Any tuition and fees already paid **will not** be returned to you. After the 2 week trial period, you must give a written notice of termination 2 weeks in advance. At the time of notice, all final payments including last 2 weeks fees will be due at time of notice. If you paid the registration fee with one week going toward one of your last two weeks, then you would owe the remaining amount. This two week fee is due regardless of attendance.

I reserve the right to terminate immediately for the following reasons (but not limited to):

- *Lack of compliance with handbook rules, regulations, and/or contract
 - *Lack of parental cooperation
 - *Failure to complete required paperwork
 - *False information given by the parent/guardian either verbally or in writing
 - *More than one late (after 9am)/early arrivals or late pickups
 - *More than one failure to pay or not paying on time
 - *If child or parent/guardian isn't able to adjust to the rules and/or the environment
 - *My inability to meet the needs of the child or parent/guardian
 - *Disrespect to my family, myself, **pets**, or my home
 - *Physical or verbal abuse of any person or property
 - *Parent/guardian knowingly brings ill child to care
- Your last week's tuition paid with the registration fee will not be returned or credited, and any tuition or fees still owed are due immediately.

There are no chances of suspension. Parents and children can either learn to be respectful and kind, or my home is not the place for them. Everyone is capable of learning. If situations don't improve, someone is deciding termination or expulsion from my home.

Rest Time

All children, 5 years and under, are required by state standards to have rest time. They may not sleep more than 3 hours. They will be allowed to rest their body as they need so they can function the remainder of the day. The only time I will find appropriate ways to wake them is if they are at their 3 hour limit. In other words, don't ask me to wake up your child or not allow them to sleep. I plan to have a good nap routine for the children and you could do the same at home so they will sleep for you as well. Children will be taught to respect rest time, even school agers. Children who do not fall asleep may read or do a quiet activity after an appropriate amount of rest time, about 20-30 minutes. This gives other children time to go to sleep. School agers will be asked to use rest time for reading or writing practice, to draw or do other art, or to play quietly. Depending on the weather and staffing, they may even go to the playground. They are welcome to rest if they would like. We have a set rest time, **11:45am-3:00pm**, so drop-off and pick-up will not be allowed during this time (see Arrival and Departure).

Infants that aren't walking or under a year old will each have a pack'n play. If your infant is part-time, it's possible they may share a pack'n play with another child on different days; however, it will be disinfected in between use and sheets will be changed daily for all infants. Children who are walking or over a year old will be provided a cot and blanket, and those over a year old will be given a choice of a cuddle buddy for the week. These items will be washed/sanitized each week, or as needed, at my home.

Clothing

Three extra sets of clothing is required for each child and will need to be season appropriate. A change of clothing includes a shirt, pants or shorts, underwear, socks, and at least 1 pair of older shoes. (Pick these items up at yard sales or thrift stores to make it easy and cheap.) These clothes will stay at my home to be washed unless they wear them home. In this case you will need to bring another set back the following day of care. Clothes will be sent home to be changed out as needed for change in seasons or child's growth.

Do not send your child in clothing or shoes that you do not want to get dirty. We will be going outside and doing other activities that may end up on the clothes. If your child doesn't have the proper clothing to be outside for the entire time then they will not be able to remain in care for the day. Shoes need to completely cover the child's feet to protect them and to make their outside activities more enjoyable. (Flip flops and sandals are not allowed. If there are holes, their feet are not completely covered.) Other items that you may want to consider depending on weather are a hat, gloves, bathing suit, house shoes, and rain boots. You have the option to leave these items in the child's cubby until needed, or you can bring them each day.

State minimum standards require I take your child outdoors, even if they don't have the appropriate clothing. I will try to keep some extra things available, but I may not always have enough for everyone. Help me keep your child comfortable when outdoors.

Diaper bags, backpacks (except school age attending school), and car seats will not be allowed in my home. Diapers, clothing, etc. will be placed in the child's cubby either in the living room or in the bathroom for easy access. A bottle bag or cloth diaper wet bag may be left and will be sent home each day. Make arrangements for car seats with additional pick-up people. (This policy helps keep my home free of roaches, bed bugs, and other critters that would cost for additional extermination and cleaning; therefore, resulting in higher tuition.)

Potty Training

I am more than happy to help with potty training if your child is showing signs of interest and being ready. I will not bribe a child to use the toilet and I will not punish or demean a child for having an accident. It doesn't make sense to start unless the child is able to stay dry for several hours, is aware of wetting diapers, can pull their clothes up and down by themselves, and can verbalize his/her toilet needs. Never bring your child in underwear without prior discussion and agreement since potty accidents can cause sanitary issues, and a huge cleaning bill that will be given to you to reimburse.

It is best to start potty training your child over the weekend or several days off at home. If they are ready, this is all the time it will take. Once potty training begins, dress the child in clothing they can successfully handle on their own, and they should arrive at my home wearing a pull-up or diaper. Make sure they have the extra 3 full sets of clothing in their cubby. Once they have shown that they are potty trained while at my home, they can transition to underwear.



I use a small seat fixed to the adult toilet, which is more sanitary than using a potty chair. The child learns to wash their hands after using the toilet. Consistency at home will help instill this essential healthy habit.

Possessions

To avoid breakage, loss, or sharing problems, NO toys or other items are to be brought from home, except for supplies that have been asked for. The only exception is if there is a planned "show and tell" or other planned special day. Items will be kept in cubbies or a special box until "show and tell" time. After all my years in child care, it's easiest to teach your child to leave it in the vehicle so it will be waiting on them when they are picked up. I would appreciate that you not wait to handle that once in my home, leaving me to have to handle the situation with both you and the child.

Respectful treatment of my property, toys, furniture, and animals is expected. Accidental or willful destruction of property will be charged to the parent at the cost to replace the item, or the parent can have the child find something to bring to replace it to help teach the child to take responsibility.

Permission for Pictures and Video

Helena's Early Learning Playhouse will often take pictures and videos of the children playing, interacting, participating in activities, parties, etc. These pictures and videos are simply to be used around my home and to send to the families of children in care. They will not be used on either the Facebook page or website without permission for the specific picture or video from each family involved. There may be times the picture or video may be edited to never show the children's faces to be used on these social media. For example, if a picture is taken of the children doing an art project, I may crop the picture to show only their hands and the art to post on social media.

Other families in my care may not have signed for permission of pictures or videos to be taken, or I may have foster children enrolled; therefore, you will only be allowed to take pictures or video of your child, even if you know another family or are friends with them. Let's work together to keep our children safe. This includes not posting pictures I share of the children with you on social media. If you are wanting to show grandparents or aunts and uncles, text it to them instead.

Meals

All meals and snacks are provided at no extra charge. This includes breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, and an evening snack. All meals and afternoon snacks must meet Texas Minimum Standards and USDA criteria, with servings from all food groups. The evening snack will be a quick, easy snack to help tie children over until dinner time. If a child has a special diet, make me aware since a note from a doctor may be required. I will make all substitutions with prior arrangements.



I will be offering to do baby led weaning, but I can offer pureed infant food and/or pureed foods from daily meals if you prefer. I will also provide Parent's Choice formula at no additional cost. If you decide to provide formula or breastmilk, you have the option of bringing bottles already prepared or a can of formula or frozen breastmilk and I prepare them as needed. I have bottles, but if you are using a specific brand then you will need to provide those. I prefer making the bottles as needed because the bottle doesn't need to be heated and I can prepare the amount I think the baby needs and not have to waste what the baby doesn't drink. I will let you know when you need to bring more formula or breastmilk. If you prefer bringing the baby's bottles already prepared, then each bottle must be labeled with name, date (prepared & expressed), amount, and what is in it (formula, breastmilk). All unused portions of formula will be thrown away after 1 hour of point of service and **breastmilk after 2 hours of point of service.**

I will be following USDA guidelines when feeding your child, so if you feed your child differently or if they have an allergy, a doctor's note is required with specific information. Soy and lactaid milk are approved milk substitutes for 1 year and older without a doctor's note. An infant must be on formula or breastmilk until at least their first birthday; otherwise, a doctor's note is required. Food substitutions may require a doctor's note. Doctor's notes must indicate the reason for any substitution and examples of acceptable substitutions. Discuss getting a doctor's note before an appointment so we can discuss what is needed.

USDA guideline handouts will be part of your enrollment packet. The components and amounts served are required – they may eat more or less than this amount. Extras will always be available.

We will be serving family style meals as much as possible, where children will learn self-help skills (scooping, pouring, clean-up, etc.), they will be allowed to choose what they want to eat and how much (within limits), and we will sit together and communicate during the meal. **Children being in care with a cough, sneezing, etc. will mean family style dining will not be used during that time to help cut down on the spread of germs. Ages of children in care could also decrease the amount of family style dining being used just due to lack of developmental skills needed.**

If a child comes in after a scheduled meal, it will be your responsibility to make sure the child has eaten before arriving. It is important that you pay attention to meal times and allow your child time to eat. In other words, don't wait until the last minute of the meal to drop-off. Dropping off at the end of meal time may mean you need to sit with your child while they finish so that I can continue the day with the other children. I will not serve anything that is brought from home (other than infant formula/breast milk) unless it is snacks or ingredients for a snack for a party that has been previously approved. This includes food and drinks. So, make sure the child finishes these before entering my home. Keep snacks on hand for your child in case you bring them too late for a meal. **They will not be allowed to stay if they haven't eaten and you will need to bring them back before the 9am cutoff after you have gotten them something to eat. A child will never be allowed to stay and required to have to wait for the next meal.**

Breakfast - **7:45-8:30am**

Lunch - 11:00am-12:00pm

Snack - **2:15-3:15pm**

Evening Snack - 5:00-5:30pm

Breastfeeding your child is always welcome in my home. You may find a quiet place away from the children anywhere in my child care space, or you may join us in the activities we are doing. You are welcome to contract to come a little early so you can nurse before leaving your child or nurse when you pick-up. You are also welcome to come on your lunch break, if feasible; however, I just ask that you be mindful of rest time.

Illness and Exclusion

I will be extremely strict about illnesses, to protect the other children and their families, myself, my family, and to ensure that your child is getting the medical care and attention they need. It's important that you have a plan for taking off work or someone who can watch your child while they are sick.

If your child becomes ill while in my home, you or your emergency contact must pick-up within 1 hour of being notified. Your child will be kept as comfortable as possible away from the other children. Not picking up within the hour, or at least communication about when they will be picked up, will result in immediate termination.

If an illness arises that isn't mentioned below, contact me so I can research that illness and your child returning to care. If I don't know for sure, then I will contact a local Health Nurse.

Knowingly bringing your child to my home sick and exposing the children and my family will result in termination of care. (If your child can talk, they will usually let me know they had medicine before coming to care.)

***Fever.** A warning that all is not right with the body. Child has a fever of 100 degrees or higher, child may not be in care. Child must be out of care for at least the following day, AND for 24 hours after fever goes down to 98.6 degrees without fever reducing medication. (This includes teething or any other reason.)

***Stomach Ache.** Vomiting, severe cramping. Child must be out of care for at least the following day, AND until symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication.

***Diarrhea.** Sudden onset of diarrhea characterized by an increased number of bowel movements compared to their normal pattern – 2 bouts within one hour, 3 bouts in 24 hours, or 1 uncontained bout (will not stay in a diaper). Child must be out of care for at least the following day, AND until symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication. (There is no exception, even if your child has eaten or drank something, is teething, or if taking antibiotics that may have caused the diarrhea. Sometimes it's more about them not feeling well, needing to be bathed, and/or needing to be with the parent, than that they are contagious.)

***Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye).** Suspected redness or discharge from one or both eyes. Very contagious. Child may return 24 hours after treatment has begun, or with a doctor's note stating the child does not have pink eye.

***Flu/Covid.** Fever, aches, chills, tiredness, coughing, sneezing, sore throat. Child may return with a doctor's note stating the child may return to care AND all symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication.

***Vomiting.** Chronic. Vomited more than one time today. Child must be out of care for at least the following day AND until symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication.

***Coughing.** If the cough is chronic, deep, or hacking, it might mean an infection. Child may return with a doctor's note stating when they may return to care AND when symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication.

***Sore Throat.** Child may appear to have one of the following: swollen tonsils or glands, white spots in throat, hurts when swallows and/or complains of not feeling well. Child must be out of care for at least the following day, AND until symptoms are not present for 24 hours without medication.

***Head Lice.** Nits or lice. Child may return after he/she has been treated with a medicated shampoo and ALL THE NITS ARE REMOVED. I must check the child's hair in a private room before they will be allowed to stay, and I will continue to check for 7 days. Allow enough time at drop-off for this to happen.

***Communicable diseases.** Chicken pox, pertussis (whooping cough), mumps, measles, rubella, hepatitis A, strep throat, haemophilus, influenza B, tuberculosis, impetigo, shingles, or meningococcal infection. A doctor's note is required AND the child must no longer be contagious to return.

***Inability to participate in daily activities.** If a child can't comfortably participate in child care activities including outdoor play, then your child is not allowed in care. Child can return to care when they feel well enough to participate in daily activities. (Some reasons for this exclusion – drowsy from medications, didn't sleep well at night, doesn't feel well, broken body part hindering movement, or anything preventing hand washing, etc.)

***Illness requires a greater need for care** than the early educators can provide without compromising the health, safety, and supervision of the other children in care. Child may return when it is felt the extra care is no longer a problem.

***Sinus.** Greenish discharge from the nose might be a sign of infection. Child may return after symptoms are not present AND with approval from the doctor stating the child is not contagious and 24 hours after a prescription was started if prescribed.

***Rash.** We are unable to determine what it is. A rash can sometimes be a sign of an allergic reaction. Child may return after symptoms are no longer present AND with approval from the doctor stating the child is not contagious AND 24 hours after a prescription was started if prescribed.

***Diaper Rash.** Excessive redness or bumps in the diaper area. If a prescription is prescribed, it must be applied for 24 hours before returning to care.

***Thrush.** White patches in the mouth and on the tongue. Child may return after symptoms are not present AND with approval from the doctor stating the child is not contagious AND 24 hours after a prescription was started if prescribed.

***Ear Infection.** Suspected, complains of ear hurting. Child may return with a doctor's note AND 24 hours after a prescription was started if prescribed.

***Ringworm.** Fungal infection of the skin. Child may return 24 hours after treatment and with approval from the doctor. Area must stay covered with clothing or a bandage.

***Hand-foot-mouth.** Small blisters on feet, hands, and in mouth. Usually symptoms occur a week after a fever. Child may return after fever goes down to 98.6 degrees without fever reducing medication AND with a doctor's note of diagnosis **AND dried blisters.**

Medication Procedures

The only medication I will give is for severe allergies, asthma, or seizures. These medications must be in its original container with a prescription label containing the child's name, date, exact dosage, doctor's name, number of times and route to be given. There will also need to be an action plan from the doctor saying when to give the medication based on symptoms. These medications will be kept in an emergency bag out of children's reach, so be sure you give it to me and not leave it in the child's belongings. You must fill out a form stating the medication that will be given and I will complete the form with the times I give the child the medication if needed.

When taking your child to the doctor, be sure to ask them to give medication that can be given once or twice a day. This way you can give it around child care times. **Children must remain out of care for 24 hours after the first dose of an antibiotic.**

I can use over the counter products such as teething ointments, sunscreen, bug repellent, and diaper rash ointments (to prevent diaper rash). There is a form for these products that must be signed and filled out once a year or when an item changes, such as brand or expiration date. I will provide sunscreen, bug repellent, and diaper rash ointments. The brands will be listed on the form.

Care will be denied if immunizations aren't kept up to date or if a current affidavit isn't on file. Be sure to give me updated immunization records and affidavits to keep your child's file current.

A vision and hearing screening is required for all 4 years olds and older by Texas Minimum Standards, and I must report this each year. If a child is attending school, the parent must sign that the school has this documentation or submit it to me.

Medical and Dental Emergencies and First Aid

Emergency information is kept on file in all my emergency bags and children's files. It is very important and your responsibility as the parent/guardian to update me with any changes regarding emergency contact information. Parents are responsible for all costs involved in emergency medical treatment, including emergency transportation if required.

For children who sustain a minor injury that does not require medical attention, the following steps will be taken:

1. First Aid will be administered, as necessary;
2. Parents/Guardians will be contacted for more serious injuries, as necessary;
3. Injury report will be completed, with a copy sent to you by text and the original placed in your child's file.

For children who sustain a minor injury that may require medical attention, the following steps will be taken:

1. First aid will be administered, as necessary;
2. Parents/Guardians will be contacted;
3. If a parent/guardian cannot be reached;
 - a. The child's physician will be consulted for assistance;
 - b. 911 will be activated, if necessary;
4. An injury report will be completed, with a copy sent to you by text and the original placed in your child's file and called in to Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

For children requiring prompt medical attention, the following steps will be taken:

1. CPR and/or First Aid will be administered, as necessary;
2. 911 will be activated if the injury is serious or life threatening;
3. The parents/guardian person will be contacted;
4. If the parents/guardian cannot be reached, the physician listed on the child's emergency information will be contacted.
5. An injury report will be completed, with a copy sent to you by text and the original placed in your child's file and called in to Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Discipline and Guidance

Your child will be disciplined in a consistent way, based on an understanding of individual needs and behaviors at varying developmental levels. Simple, understandable rules will be established so that expectations and limitations are clearly defined.

Discipline (which means to teach) will be constructive in nature, including such methods as redirection, breathing methods, use of a safe place, learning about feelings, learning words to use, separation of child from situations, and praise of appropriate behavior.

Each family, early educator, and household member are required by Texas Health and Human Services Commission to read and sign the discipline policy.

Research shows positive physical contact with children is important for their development, their nurturance, and their guidance. Responding to a child's need to be held and touched develops a sense of trust and emotional security in a child's dealing with adults that they will need to have positive relationships as they grow. Expressions of affection such as hugs, holding hands, lap sitting, cuddling, and back rubs are appropriate forms of touching that will occur at my home. Children will not be made to "cry it out". This does not mean that a child won't be allowed to cry, but it will be because we are not able to get to them at the moment or what we've tried isn't working. We will continue to try to comfort them by words and/or touch, if allowed. Forced greeting/goodbye kisses or hugs or kissing on the lips are not appropriate touches in my home. Allow your child to decide to hug us on their own when they are comfortable. Children will be taught to ask to give hugs or kiss on the cheek or hand so they are

mindful of others personal space. Soft touches and individual space will always be encouraged.

My behavior management goal is that children learn to make and change their behavioral choices. I will discipline based on an understanding of individual needs and behaviors of children at varying development levels. The positive discipline strategies I will use are:

Set up appropriate environment - well organized and clearly defined play areas; clear traffic areas; individual cubbies for personal belongings; politeness and respect

Use words to provide positive guidance - accept child's negative feelings; focus on the behavior and not the child; describe what happened and how it affects others; state what is acceptable as described in our rules; give logical consequences for inappropriate behavior

Choices and consequences - words of praise for good behavior; redirection; parent conference

The rules for my home are the most common things that the children need to be reminded of. I do expect courtesy and respect in my home from both the children and us as adults. If your child is doing something that I don't think is appropriate in my home in your presence, I will remind them of my rules if you haven't done so. My rules do not change because someone has walked through the door. The general rules for my home are as follows:

*Use your walking feet, inside voice, & listening ears.

*Be kind and respectful to others.

*Do and be your best.

While on my property, the discipline policy also applies to parents and guardians. You are not allowed to spank, yell at, demean, etc. your child or anyone else while on my property. Others may not know you are a parent and may assume you are an early educator in my home, which puts me and my home at risk. Again, I am a mandated reporter of child abuse.

Biting

Biting is an age-related concern that usually happens during the older infant and toddler years. Some children bite often while other children never bite.

Why Young Children Bite: They are very oral and everything goes into their mouths (including other children's fingers). They do not have the mental ability to tell the difference between things that are real and things that are not (they may bite another child's plump arm instead of a teether). They have not developed social skills, may not be able to talk yet, or express themselves verbally. They are territorial and do not want others in their space. They are hungry, tired, not feeling well, or generally want to be left alone. They may be teething and biting relieves the pressure they are feeling from

the new teeth coming through their gums. They may want attention, even though it is negative attention. They may feel overwhelmed or are intimidated by another child who may be too close or who is being too rough.

Steps That Will Be Taken to Help Prevent Biting:

*We will maintain our teacher to child ratios throughout the day to keep class size smaller.

*We will provide teethingers, rattles, and toys children can chew on when they are teething or are frustrated. These items will be washed and sanitized before used by another child.

*We will encourage toddlers to use their words to express themselves.

*The early educators will stay as close as possible to any child who has a history of biting, so they can quickly intervene. (Sometimes this is not possible, such as diaper changes.)

Action If Biting Occurs: The focus will be on the child who was bitten, not the biter. The bite will be cleaned with soap and water and covered with a band-aid. Ice may be applied, if necessary, to minimize bruising and swelling. The biter will be encouraged to comfort the bitten child. Parents will be notified if the bite breaks the skin or is immediately noticeable. The incident will be documented on a report for both children.

Actions That Will Not Be Taken: Child will not be bitten back or physically punished. The biter's name will not be given out to the parents of the child bitten due to confidentiality.

Since bites that break the skin can create health issues and much distress for other children, early educators, and parents, a child who constantly (several times a day or week) bites may be temporarily withdrawn from the home at the owner's discretion. Withdrawing the child for a period of time will give them time to mature and get through this developmental stage.

Infant Safe Sleep

*Infants will always be put to sleep on their backs.

*Infants will be placed on a firm mattress, with a fitted sheet, in a pack'n play that meets the Consumer Product Safety Commission safety standards.

*No toys, soft objects, stuffed animals, pillows, bumper pads, blankets, positioning devices, or extra bedding will be in the pack'n play or draped over the side.

*Sleeping areas will be ventilated and at a temperature that is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult. Infants will not be dressed in more than one extra layer than an adult.

*If additional warmth is needed, a one-piece sleep sack or footed pajamas will be used.

*The infant's head will remain uncovered for sleep. Bibs, hoods, and headbands will be removed.

*Sleeping infants will be actively observed by sight and sound.

*Infants will not be allowed to sleep on a couch, chair, pillow, car seat, swing or bouncy chair. If an infant falls asleep in any of these they will be moved to the pack'n play.

*Infants will have supervised "tummy time" when they are awake.

Texas Health and Human Services provides an Infant Sleep Policy that all infant parents and all early educators are required to sign, and Helena's Early Learning Playhouse is required to follow.



Indoor and Outdoor Activities

Children learn more in their first 2000 days of life (birth through Kindergarten), than the rest of their lives. They learn best through active, engaged, meaningful experiences. The goal is to have children ready for school, but there is so much more involved than simply knowing their alphabet or other cognitive skills. Studies show that children learn best if they know how to handle social emotional situations, have communication skills, have approaches to learning such as curiosity and persistence, and have fine motor skills and physical health. Therefore, my home is a play based environment. We will be using the Wee Learn Curriculum, which is a play based Christian curriculum, that focuses on all domains and gives children a variety of experiences while allowing me to meet them where they are developmentally. Since

state standards require written lesson plans and a daily schedule, both will be posted on the parent board.

Although a large portion of my home is used, there is a dedicated learning centers area. There are two rooms, wide hallway, bathroom, and small kitchen area that are used exclusively for Helena's Early Learning Playhouse. The two rooms have been divided into loud and quiet areas. The loud area consists of dramatic play, blocks, and music. The quiet area consists of a loft library area for children who are developmentally ready for the stairs and responsibility of the space, library area specifically for infants and toddlers, writing, science, manipulatives, and a dedicated young infant area under the loft. The large hallway is set up as an art area, and a safe place, to be used as needed for calming our bodies and learning to deal with our emotions. We will use the living room for play during arrival, departure, and rest time if needed, so there are learning toys set up in this area as well. The living room area will also be used for group time and other large group activities.

The outdoor learning area is on the side of the house and is set up specifically for the children. There is a large grassy area to be used for balls, hula hoops, running, tricycles and scooters, and games. I've tried to create more of a natural outdoor learning area that consists of:

- *a pea gravel construction pit with vehicles and wood pieces to build

- *sandbox with playhouses, small creek, bridge, **mud kitchen** and accessories for sand, mud, and dramatic play

- *mulch area with a logs to walk, balance, and sit, **seesaw, and telescope**

*garden area with areas for planting, large chalkboard, reading area, and weather station

*a hill for children to climb, jump, play “king of the mountain” or sit and relax

*bike/car track with picnic tables and water table

*music wall, viewing bubbles, large waffle blocks, and a sensory tub

*infant/toddler climbing and riding area

If it's raining during outside time, if possible, we will use the large front porch. Here we can do activities such as sidewalk chalk, bubbles, ride trikes, balls, bring out toys from inside, and relax and watch the rain. We will use the front porch and the tables on the playground to have picnics on nice days. If it isn't possible to use the front porch due to blowing rain or lightning, then we will do active time indoors. This may be one of the times an exercise video or movement songs will be put on the TV, depending on ages enrolled. However, we have a list of activities to do including dancing, yoga, exercise cube, tunnel and balls, etc.

As mentioned in the “clothing” section, children should come dressed properly for indoor and outdoor play. Shoes need to completely cover the child’s feet to protect them and to make their outside activities more enjoyable. (Flip flops and sandals are not allowed. If there are holes, their feet are not completely covered.) Other items that you may want to consider depending on weather are a hat, gloves, bathing suit, house shoes, and rain boots. The state requires me to take your child outdoors, with no exception if they don't have the appropriate clothing. I try to keep a few extra jackets, hats, and gloves, but I need your help to keep your child comfortable when outdoors.

Minimum standards require children to engage in outdoor and active play for 60-90 minutes a day, broken into two daily opportunities. Since we will have a variety of ages and we have created an outdoor learning environment, we have two hours a day scheduled for outdoor learning. On really nice days we may stay outside longer, and there may be occasional times we nap outside. What?! Yep, you heard me!!

Since we are in Texas and it can get extremely hot, we will use the Child Care Weather Watch chart to determine when we need to shorten our outdoor time, play in the shade or on the porch (it’s usually shaded) or come inside and do an active activity. It occasionally gets extremely cold and we will still go outside according to this chart. The cold does not make children sick. Being inappropriately dressed for the cold is what can make us sick. Children love to be outside and we will watch for their cues of getting too cold or hot and bring them inside.

The daily schedule is meant to give you an idea of your child’s day. We will follow this schedule as much as possible to keep things consistent for the children; however, there may be days the schedule may vary depending on the time of year, age and temperament of the children, weather, or an unexpected situation. Age appropriate activities are always available which allows us to respond to each child’s individual needs. Here is a schedule example (see parent board for current schedule):

Daily Schedule

6:00-7:45	Arrival, Rest, & Quiet Learning Centers Prep for Breakfast
7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:45	Indoor Learning Centers Group Time (Depends on ages in care) Prepare for Outdoors/Active Outdoor/Active Learning Centers (*Order of above learning time differs depending on weather. Outdoor/Active Learning Centers will be at least 45 min.)
10:45-11:00	Indoor Learning Centers Prep for Lunch
11:00-11:45	Lunch Prepare for Rest Time
11:45-3:15	Rest & Indoor Learning Centers Prepare for Snack Snack
3:15-4:00	Group Time (Depends on ages in care) Indoor Learning Centers
4:00-5:00	School Age from Bus Stop Outdoor/Active Learning Centers Prepare for Evening Snack
5:00-6:00	Evening Snack Indoor Learning Centers Prepare for Going Home

**Pottying and diaper changes are done throughout day as needed*

***Hand washing is done throughout day as needed*

****Infants under 12 months will sleep and eat on demand*

*****Schedule may vary when school agers are in care*

Water Activities

We will enjoy water activities such as sprinklers, water tables or buckets, and the small creek on the playground. Children can keep swim suits in their cubby; however, as long as they have extra clothes and shoes we can participate in these activities any time. There is never a time when there will be a pool or enough water to make play a dangerous situation. There may be a time we go to a local splash pad, but this would be considered a field trip and you will be made aware in advance. Review "field trip and

transportation” section. My ratio would also change for the splash pad so I would need more early educators or parent volunteers to attend.

TV Viewing and Other Electronics

There will be very little TV viewing. Children must be 2 years and older to have access to electronics, such as TV, Ipads, computers, etc. TV and other electronics will only be used for education purposes, such as videos about the theme or workouts or music videos for exercise. These will be posted on the lesson plans or added on rainy days, along with a related activity as regulations require. If there are children under 2 years, then these items will never be used unless there is the capability of an early educator taking the older children away from the younger children to use the electronic devices. Children are never required to sit and watch TV. They will always have other activities available to them. If there is an older group such as school age, there is the possibility of a movie on a full day out of school, possibly during rest time in another area. Viewing a movie will still require everything mentioned above to be followed. Children have a 1 hour per day limit on electronics, this includes them watching another child on the computer or Ipad.



Birthday and Holiday Celebrations

We will celebrate most holidays and all the children’s birthdays. For holiday parties, a list of ingredients will be posted for parents to volunteer to bring an item for our cooking activity for the parties. I would love to have you join us for any holiday event or other celebrations.

I would prefer parent or even grandparent involvement for birthdays to make it even more special. We will actually celebrate the children’s birthday as much as we can throughout the day. If you would like to bring a treat for your child’s birthday, make me aware in advance. The treat must be store bought and when you make me aware we will discuss any allergies children may have so we can decide on an item. I prefer small cupcakes or yogurt – which the children love. If we can plan several days in advance, you could provide a cake mix, ingredients, icing, etc. to give us an extra cooking activity for the children to learn more skills.

If your family does not celebrate holidays or birthdays, you will need to make other arrangements for the day. If your family celebrates a holiday I may not normally celebrate, let me know because this would give us an opportunity to learn about a new holiday and culture. It's even more fun if you are able to celebrate it with us.

Field Trips and Transportation

Field trips may be taken occasionally with prior notification to you. You must notate on the enrollment forms that your child may participate and you must sign on the individual notices about each field trip. If the child isn't going to attend, you must make other arrangements. If there is an admittance fee associated with the activity, I will take care of the amount.

Ratios for field trips are determined by the age of the youngest child and could be as low as 1:3. Therefore, if there are younger ages in care, additional early educators or parent volunteers would be needed to help.

When necessary, school agers will ride the bus to my home. We will often take walks or have children ride in a stroller or wagon to the end of the driveway to pick up school agers or just for something different. Due to how fast vehicles drive on our road and the fact that not everyone keeps their dogs in their home or yard, we wouldn't take walks past the driveway.

All children will be properly restrained in a car seat depending on their age and weight according to TX law, no matter what they are allowed to do with you. I say this because sometimes school agers can feel like it makes them seem like a baby, when really it's just about keeping them safe.

When a child is enrolled, their admission form/contract is added to the emergency bags. An emergency bag will be kept in any vehicle used to transport children.

Departure

1. I will start the vehicle to run the AC or heat.
2. Children will line up at the door and will be accounted for by using the daily sign in for school pickups and the field trip permission form for field trips.
3. An early educator will be at the front and back (if possible) of the line to ensure everyone makes it to the vehicle.
4. The children will be put into the vehicle and accounted for again with the daily sign in or permission form.
5. Early educators will assist each child into their car seat, booster seat or assist in putting seat belts on.
6. Each child will be accounted for again, and time of departure and mileage will be notated either on field trip permission form or mileage log.
7. Early educator will get into the driver's seat, buckle up, and depart to destination.
 - A) If we exit the vehicle, I will exit my side with a list of children, and walk to the side door, and open. Each child is released from their seats and remains seated until the infant car seats are taken out. Then children are called and checked off the list as they exit and stand next to the early educator. They will do a sweep of

the vehicle to ensure everyone is off. Once each child is accounted for we will walk to our destination where another head count will be taken and marked on the permission form. During the trip, a constant head count is being done. When it is time to depart we follow steps 1-7 going back to the home and inside. B) If we are not exiting the van, then when we return to my home, we will follow step 7A to exit the van to come back into the child care home.

Health Checks

A visual or physical assessment upon arrival will be done on your child to identify potential concerns about your child's health, including signs or symptoms of illness and injury, or in response to changes in the child's behavior since the last date of attendance. It would be helpful if they have a bruise, scratch, bug bite, didn't sleep well, etc., that you make us aware so we can make a note of it.

Liability Insurance

I maintain liability insurance to meet requirements for Texas Minimum Standards. Insurance information is posted on the parent board above the stairs at the entrance.

Animals

We have dogs in our home and horses in the field. They all receive yearly vaccinations and have signed veterinary documents that they are free of diseases. Cody will be the only dog around the children. Due to Buddy and Chloe's temperament and size, I've chosen to keep them in a separate part of the home away from the children at all times. The outdoor play area is separated from the dog area and the field. The children will be able to see all the other animals through the windows and fence.

Health and Safety Practices

Every effort has been made to child proof my home and make it a safe environment by doing, but not limited to the following: locks on cabinets and drawers where required, outlet covers, gates, sturdy furniture, easy access to toys, smoke free environment, all chemicals, cleaners, and medications put out of reach and/or locked up, and daily safety checks conducted. I've had a full inspection by the state, which is recurring as they see fit. During the first year there will be the planned initial inspection and then 5 more unannounced visits. After that, visits will be at least yearly. Since I will be on the federal food program, my USDA sponsor will visit my home within the first 2 weeks of opening and twice a year following.

Hands will be washed before and after "everything" – seriously - meals, bathroom, wiping noses, sand or water or play dough, outside time, etc. Anytime water isn't available, adults will use hand sanitizer and children will use a wipe until we can get to soap and running water.

Hands will be washed after changing diapers. The changing mat is disinfected after each group use and a different paper or cloth liner is used for each child. Soiled diapers will be disposed of in a closed and sanitized container.

Toys and equipment will be sanitized as needed, but at least daily and when mouthed by children. On weekends, a more thorough cleaning of all child care areas will be done.

Practice fire drills will be conducted once a month. Tornado and intruder drills will be conducted once a quarter. Smoke detectors are spread throughout the home and several are connected to our alarm system. A carbon monoxide detector is located in the home as required.



First Aid will be administered to a child needing care. **Each incident will be recorded in Procare unless it warrants the state form being used.** Courtesy calls or texts will be done for accidents I feel warrant notice before pick-up. All early educators are required to maintain a current CPR & First Aid Certificate.

Children will absolutely NOT be released to anyone except those authorized to pick up the child on the enrollment form. Identification is required of those authorized that are unfamiliar and parent/guardian must make me aware of who will be picking up in advance so I can verify they are on the pickup list. Authorized pick up people must be at least 18 years of age, and have a car seat if required for the child.

Smoking and alcohol use are not allowed on the premises of Helena's Early Learning Playhouse, to include the driveway or parking area, even outside of operating hours. Smoking in a vehicle with children is illegal and will require me to report it. Do not leave cigarette butts anywhere on the premises. If at any time a parent or guardian attempts to pick-up a child while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or any other reason you seem unable to safely drive, I will attempt to arrange alternate transportation for your child to your home. If it isn't possible, I am legally bound to release the child into your custody and alert the police of the situation. Personal weapons are required to remain in locked cabinets inaccessible to children. The only other weapons allowed on my property are those of a peace officer as listed in 2.12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and security officers commissioned by the Texas Private Security Board..

Everyone in my home is required to report immediately to Child Protective Services (CPS) any reason to suspect child abuse, neglect, or exploitation. I am not obligated to inform parents or guardians of this report. CPS is allowed to question your child without your permission and either of us being present. Again, everyone in my home are mandated reporters.

Accommodations for Families

This policy outlines my policies and process in supporting families and children who may need additional accommodations, to include home language, differing abilities and cultural backgrounds. Parents have the right to be informed of all procedural safeguards and rights of appeal in a language easily understood by the public and in the parents' primary language. Please notify me if you or your child require accommodations and I will ensure that I do my part in making sure your needs are met.

Below are ways that my program will partner with your family:

1. If specific therapies are needed during the day while the child is in my care, I will provide space to accommodate sessions.
2. I will participate in all comprehensive meetings if needed.
3. I will complete supporting documentation from authorized medical professionals for any accommodations related to the child's physical or developmental needs.
4. I will provide materials and resources in parent/child's primary language.
5. I will provide opportunities for cultural inclusiveness by hosting cultural events throughout the year.

More Information About My Home

*As the primary early educator, I'm required to have 30 hours of training a year for my Texas license, and several other hours to remain on the food program and child care subsidy program. All other early educators are required to have 24 hours of initial orientation training within their first 90 days and an additional 24 hours of training within the first year and each year thereafter. Texas is specific in the areas this training must fall. **Once we are Texas Rising Star accredited, I will be required to have 36 hours and other early educators will be required to have 30 hours of training.**

*All early educators must have training in FA/CPR, SIDS/Shaken Baby, Medication Administration, and transportation yearly or as required, which do not count in the 24 hours mentioned above.

*All early educators and household members have an updated background check and they are resubmitted every 5 years. If anything shows up on their record during that 5 years, I will be notified.

*I am required to report to parents if a child is injured and if they require medical treatment, if child shows signs or symptoms of an illness that requires hospitalization, if a child is involved in any situation that deems them unsafe, if child has been exposed to a communicable disease, if there has been an outbreak of lice or other infestation, or if my home has been found deficient in safe sleep standards or abuse, neglect, or exploitation standards.

*Donations of craft supplies, unused diapers or wipes, and unopened snacks are always appreciated. I will occasionally ask for you to collect items such as paper towel tubes, shoes boxes, scrap paper, etc. As for paper, as long as it doesn't have anything confidential on it, we can always use it.

Emergency Preparedness

These written policies and procedures for emergency preparedness are practiced with the children, early educators, and household members. There are several emergency bags around the home and vehicle with child and early educator information, and supplies needed. Parents will be notified of any emergencies as soon as children are safe by phone at the telephone number that is on file with me. Evacuation plans and proof of drills are posted by the parent board. During an evacuation, relocation, or sheltering/lock-down my first responsibility in any emergency is to move the children to a designated safe area or alternate shelter known to all household members, early educators, parents, and volunteers. During all emergencies your child will be treated as my own and surrounded with positive words of encouragement until all children are reunified with parents.

Evacuation:

Fire/Gas: My barn in the field is the meeting place and further if needed.

By foot: After each child is accounted for, by using the parent sign in on Procure app, the children birth-24 months will be carried or held by hand and led to the barn and the older children will walk. I then can assist children into strollers, harnesses, get my emergency contact documents from the emergency bag and lead them away from the area. Once we are all safe, 911 will be alerted, parents will be notified by my phone and so will the Texas Department of Family Services if required.

By vehicle: If we must evacuate by vehicle it will be done if possible with Mrs. Helena. The vehicle has children information for emergency contacting. After each child is accounted for by using the parent sign in on Procure app, children birth-24 months will be carried or held by hand and led to the vehicle and the older children will walk to the vehicle as our normal transporting routine. The transportation guidelines will be in place: attaching name tags, face checking/counting children, placing each child in car seats, doing attendance with transportation sheet. Reverse steps when exiting. 911 will be notified as soon as children are safe. Parents and the Texas Department of Family Services will be notified by phone once we are at a safe location.

Sheltering/Lock-down: Hallway in learning area (emergency bag is located here). After each child is accounted for by using the parent sign in on Procure app, I will grab the emergency bag and assist children birth-24 months by carrying or held by hand and leading them to the hallway and the older children will walk. 911 will be notified of my home child care if need be and parents will be notified by phone once we are safe of the situation. The Texas Department of Family Services will be notified if need be.

Relocation: Relocation is at our neighbors home located at 3351 CR 1033, Greenville, TX. A notice by text with all information on the alternative site will be sent. Directions to their home are as follows: From my driveway entrance take a right onto CR 1033, right into the next driveway and pull up to their home.

Contract and Handbook Changes or Updates

A two weeks notice will be given regarding changes and updates to the contract or handbook. The exception to this would be anything that would affect the health and safety of anyone involved in my home child care. Changes regarding tuition and fees will be given a 30 day notice. Tuition will be looked at each year to determine if an increase is necessary, usually in September, but could be anytime necessary.

Parents should give at least one week written notice if their enrollment days or hours need to change so we can discuss if it's possible and any changes in tuition. Increasing days or hours can be effective immediately depending on slot availability. Decreasing days or hours may be dependent on slot availability. For example, if you are full-time and you want to go down to 3 days a week, if there is no slot available for you to do this then you will have to continue paying the full-time rate until the 3 days is available. I won't be able to take up a full-time slot for a part-time child. Communication regarding the change is important so I can do my best to accomodate you.

If parent contact information needs to be updated, this can be done any time by sending an email or text with new information.

Non-discrimination Statement

No person, on the grounds of race, color, sex, religion, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, physical handicap, or sexual orientation is excluded or otherwise subjected to discrimination in receiving services at Helena's Early Learning Playhouse.

Licensing and Other Entities

I chose to have my home licensed and participate in the child care subsidy, federal food programs, and Texas Rising Star accreditation because I know and understand the importance of the rules and regulations they have on my home, and the benefits they bring to my home and what I offer to my families. They all bring a lot of extra paperwork and time required to continue to meet their requirements, so I need you to do your part by helping me to follow the requirements and get paperwork completed as needed.

The state required me to post my most recent licensing inspection report, so it will always be posted on the parent board for you to review. You are also able to find this report on the Health and Human Services website; however, there are deficiencies that I would be required to make you aware of if they were found in my home such as abuse or neglect or a safe sleeping standard. Other required postings are the Keeping Children Safe notice with the contact information to report abuse or neglect, important phone numbers, list of employees, and food allergies.

I must keep my state license current and in good standing to participate in the child care subsidy program (CCS). I believe all children deserve quality care and I want to offer this to families who may need to participate in the program. I will only have limited slots for children on the program and it will be the parents responsibility to keep up with their paperwork to get on and stay on the program.

The federal food program (CACFP) not only helps to ensure children are receiving nutritious meals, but they also reimburse a small portion of what is spent on food cost to help me continue to provide the best possible care for your children. I am required to ensure you receive information about the Building the Future poster, which will be in your enrollment packet and the parent board.

Texas Rising Star is a quality rating and improvement system for Texas early childhood programs. It offers three levels of quality certification, and the level received determines the reimbursement amounts for CCS. Programs that achieve Texas Rising Star accreditation offer quality care that exceeds the Texas Health and Human Services Commission Child Care Regulation minimum standards. By participating in this program, it also opens doors for many opportunities of grants for supplies and materials, as well as free training for early educators, all of which will enhance the environment and learning for the children in care.

Child Care Licensing Office: 214-302-4216

Minimum Standards for Child Care Homes:

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/doing-business-with-hhs/provider-portal/protective-services/ccl/min-standards/chapter-747-homes.pdf>

Texas Health and Human Services Commission Website:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Search_Texas_Child_Care/default.asp

Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 800-252-5400

CCS (child care subsidy) Office: 2500 Stonewall St., Suite 201, Greenville, TX 75401;

greenvilleworkforce@dfwjjobs.com; 903-454-9350; Hours: 8am-5pm; website:

<https://dfwjjobs.com/child-care/guidelines-to-apply-for-child-care-services>

WIC Office: 4907 Stonewall St. C, Greenville, TX 75401; 903-454-4888; website:

<https://texaswic.org>

Federal Food Program (CACFP): 1-800-873-2263

Texas Rising Star (TRS): P.O. Box 5888, Arlington, TX 76005-5888; 1-888-548-9675; website: <https://texasrisingstar.org>

As a provider, I came up with these policies to best fit my business. My policies are strict and non-negotiable. If I feel you are having trouble following or understanding my policies, I will sit down with you and verbally go over the policies you are unclear of or having trouble following. If I feel you are still testing and/or violating my policies, your child's enrollment may be at risk of immediate termination.

Failure to enforce any term or provision in this handbook does not invalidate that provision, term, or any other provisions or terms of this handbook.