



# Parent Handbook



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## **Philosophy**

Our philosophy is based on the belief that each child is a worthy individual endowed with unique capabilities and talents. A warm, loving environment, combined with well-trained and creative staff, stimulates a child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Our program is intended to provide a unique learning environment that benefits both typically developing children as well as children at-risk for, or diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Through complete integration of children at-risk for ASD, we have the opportunity to instill acceptance of individual differences from an early age.

We believe in a developmental learning philosophy in which learning is encouraged through play. Within the program's daily schedule, each child has the opportunity to create, explore, and learn problem solving, social interaction and critical thinking skills through self-initiated and teacher-supported activities.

We believe parents are the most important adults in a child's life, and work to strengthen those relationships. Our program is intended to reduce stress for parents by encouraging them to become an integral part of our program. Together we can provide positive experiences for young children.

We provide a world that is child-oriented and planned so children can develop at a rate meeting their individual needs. We also establish routines that children can cope with and understand.

We teach children to understand and accept each other and to resolve difficulties without feelings of anxiety or guilt. We develop each child's positive self-concept through an environment designed to foster a sense of independence and responsibility.

We provide an environment where the physical health and well-being of children are promoted and protected.

Our staff represent the heart and soul of our philosophy, so we employ and retain the best in the field. We support our teachers with the necessary training and encourage them to continue to grow professionally – benefiting them personally and professionally while further developing our programs.

## **Licensing & Funding**

Alexa's PLAYC is licensed by the Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division and conforms to all state laws regulating the operation of day care centers. Alexa's PLAYC is a vendored infant program for California Early Start to support toddlers with or at risk for ASD, and our older children with or at risk for ASD are often funded by their mental health insurance.

## **Program Description**

The program, schedule and grouping of children at the Center may shift slightly throughout the year to accommodate the number of children enrolled and to meet the individual needs of children. The long-range curriculum plan, reflecting the school's philosophy and objectives, assures that the program is designed to benefit each individual child.

## **Toddler Program**

Our teachers understand the development stage of a toddler. They provide individual attention and help toddlers in positive ways to accept limits and frustrations. Our toddler classroom includes a variety of toys, activities and equipment to help build motor skills, develop communication and social skills, encourage literacy, independence and imagination. When children reach toddler age, they discover the freedom of mobility. Much of their day is spent walking, running, and climbing.

## Preschool Program

Our preschool program creates an environment that encourages curiosity and offers challenges to stimulate development. The daily schedule provides activities that include indoor/outdoor play, quiet and active times and projects that enhance large muscle/small muscle development. The curriculum helps children build social and self-help skills as well as advance their physical, creative and intellectual development.

## Introduction to Our Inclusion Programming

Alexa's PLAYC is an educational and therapeutic program that provides young children with enriched learning experiences in the context of a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment. The curriculum, developed by an interdisciplinary team of experts, focuses on teaching developmentally appropriate communication, cognitive and social skills and fosters independence in activities of daily living for all children involved. The program is based on the philosophy that children learn best when they are having fun, so our teachers are specially trained to use children's natural interest in their environment as teaching opportunities. A combination of developmentally appropriate programming and ASD specific techniques provide excellent education for all children.

## School Readiness and Pre-academic Skills

State preschool standards and developmental assessments are used to ensure school readiness skills for all children in the program. Children will learn pre-academic skills at their developmental level. In addition, they will practice school readiness skills such as learning to work in a group, to raise their hand, listen to instructions, wait for their turn, and follow a structured routine including tolerating transitions. Many academic tasks are incorporated into play based activities throughout the school day. Children may also work on specific areas of need with a teacher depending on individual goals.

## General Policies

### Hours of Operation

Alexa's PLAYC is open for child care Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm.

### Inclusion Programming Hours

- Children at-risk for ASD in the Toddler Intervention Program through California Early Start are enrolled in either the morning (8:30am to 12:00pm) or afternoon (2:00-5:30pm.) session.
- Preschoolers aged 3-5 with ASD attend Monday-Friday in either the morning (8:30-12:00) or afternoon (2:00-5:30) program. Children must be picked up at the end of their programming or a late fee will be incurred.

### Admission

Alexa's PLAYC accepts children age 18 months through 5 years or until a child is eligible for Kindergarten (this includes Transition Kindergarten). The Center is designed to care for typically developing children as well as children with or at risk for ASD. Eligibility for the program is based on parent and child interview and assessment to determine appropriateness of placement. Typically developing children will receive a brief developmental screening before admission. Toddlers with ASD or risk for ASD are referred through the San Diego Regional Center, CA Early Start Division, and also participate in a developmental screening with our program Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) to determine appropriateness of the program. Eligibility is based upon readiness for the curriculum and group learning. Children will be eligible regardless of race, color, sex, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, provided the established program meets the needs of the individual child with reasonable accommodations.

## Enrollment

Children must pre-enroll before the first day of attendance. Pre-enrollment requirements include:

- Have an entrance/developmental evaluation. If the screening raises any developmental or behavioral concerns you will be informed of these concerns and appropriate referrals will be made.
- Meet with the administrative assistant after the child's initial screening.
- Pay non-refundable registration, tuition deposit, and the refundable security key tag deposit. You will be given the enrollment packet at this time.
- Complete the enrollment forms and return them at least one week before the child starts the program.
- Adhere to the minimum of a one month enrollment for all families.

## Attendance

Consistent attendance is essential for your child's success in the program. If your child is going to be out of school for an extended period of time, we ask that you communicate this to your classroom teachers and program administration. If your child is enrolled in the Regional Center, Insurance or Socialization program you are required to maintain an 80% attendance rate. This includes absences due to illness as well as family vacations. If your child is not attending consistently, we will schedule a parent meeting to discuss appropriateness of the program for your family and determine whether Alexa's PLAYC is the best setting for your child.

## Sign-In/Out Procedures

You are required to sign your child in and out of the program each day. This record is proof that your child is on site and is used in emergency situations. This is required by Community Care Licensing. If you or the person authorized to pick up your child fails to sign in or out, there will be a \$5.00 fine for each time a signature is missing. This fine will be added to your monthly tuition. If a child is to be picked-up by someone other than a legal guardian, prior written notification is required. As legal guardian, you must provide the Center with at least two names of persons authorized to pick-up your child in case of illness or emergency that live within San Diego County. A photo ID is required for anyone picking-up a child. If either parent is not allowed to pick-up the child, a court order must be part of the child's file.

## Child Care Fees/Schedules

Fees for children enrolled for child care are charged based on your monthly schedule. You are charged whether or not your child attends, including absences for illness, vacation or center closures (both scheduled holidays and unscheduled closures).

- We ask that you notify the Center by 8:00 am when your child will be absent.
- You are required to provide 30 days written notice when making changes in your schedule, especially changes that reduce your child's attendance or terminate attendance.
- All schedule changes take effect on the first of the month.
- Parents are responsible for contracted fees.
- The Center does not provide a bill prior to the tuition due date. Parents may request to receive email notifications regarding tuition.

## Tuition Payments

Full tuition is charged monthly, whether or not your child attends school every day. Your monthly tuition is due on or before the 10th of the month. Any additions to your schedule will be charged the following month. A late fee will be charged to all accounts not paid in full by the 11th of the month. The late fee is \$35 for the first instance, and \$100 each time thereafter. If your tuition is not received by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, we will schedule a parent meeting to discuss timely payment.

All unpaid bills are sent to collections. The parent or guardian is responsible for all collection costs associated with collecting any unpaid bills, including charges associated with collection agency fees. These charges will be added to the account for payment.

Though tuition fees typically change July 1st of each year, tuition as well as any other fees incurred may change at any time at the discretion of the program leadership. A minimum of 30 days notice will be given prior to any change.

### Extended Hours Fees/Late Pick Up Fees

Extended hours are calculated for tuition-based children who attend longer than their scheduled 9.5 hours. A child who attends longer than 9.5 hours/day will be charged \$5.00 for every 15-minute increment over 9.5 hours. If you pick-up your child after 6:00 pm, you will be charged a per-minute late pick up fee of \$5.00 for the first minute and \$1.00 for every minute thereafter.

Children enrolled in the inclusion program attend either a morning or afternoon session. Parents must pick up their children by the end of their session in order to avoid late pick-up fees. Late fees are accumulated when your child is picked up after their session (12:00 or 5:30). If you pick your child up after the end of their intervention program, you will be charged a late pick up fee of \$5.00 for the first minute and \$1.00 for every minute thereafter.

### Returned Checks

A \$100 fee will be charged for a returned check. The director will have the option to refuse further payment by check.

### Holidays

The Center is closed on the following holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and the Friday following, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day,. We will be closed on the Friday preceding or Monday following a holiday that falls on Saturday or Sunday. Full tuition is expected the week in which a holiday occurs. The Center typically closes two days a year for staff development training, and advance notice of these days will be provided.

San Diego Regional Center Clients will be affected by the following additional holidays: Veteran's Day, the day after Christmas, Columbus Day, and 2-3 floating holidays. The center director will provide San Diego Regional Center parents with a list of the additional holidays.

Although we operate according to a planned calendar, the Center may be closed on any given day of the year for any reason at the discretion of the Site Manager and the Program Director. Among these days would be holidays, days surrounding holidays, staff development days and unplanned events. We will give as much advance notice as possible. Your child's monthly tuition will not be adjusted for these days.

### Clothing and Supplies

Children should wear washable play clothing. We request you keep an extra set of clothing in your child's cubby in case of spills or accidents (pants, shirt, underpants, socks and shoes). Please be sure to dress your child appropriately for weather conditions. **All clothing must be labeled with your child's name.** Shoes should be tennis shoes or other soft-soled, closed-toe shoes, but not sandals.

You will also be asked to supply the classroom teachers with the following supplies (if applicable):

- Milk alternative (milk or juice is provided by the Center)
- Replacement foods (if the child cannot eat provided snacks)
- Disposable diapers or training pants
- Wipes
- Ointment to be used when diapering. (A signed permission slip must be given to the Center.)
- Sunscreen
- Your child's favorite blanket or stuffed animal (this is for napping and is not considered a "home" toy (see next section). The blanket or stuffed animal must fit in the child's cubby)
- A crib size sheet that will remain in the cubby for the week, and go home for washing on Friday
- A nutritious lunch served in a reusable container that can be microwaved if necessary. Glass containers are not allowed.
- A labeled reusable cup/water bottle for water

## Toys

Many children like to bring in toys from home to keep at school. We understand a child's need to have a transition object to assist in saying good-bye, however the toys often create challenges during the day. This can result in hurt feelings and, sometimes, unnecessary conflict between children because there is only one of each item and it's novel.

Sharing is a difficult concept for young children and it takes a tremendous amount of adult facilitation, especially in a group environment. Children are typically able to share school toys because these are common items in the environment. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you keep "home" toys at home. If a "home" toy is brought to the classroom, it will be kept in your child's cubby. However, the Center is not responsible for any misplaced or lost "home" toys. If your child needs a transition object for the first week of school, you can make arrangements with your child's classroom teacher.

## Pacifiers

Children may use a pacifier during naptime, if necessary. These should be clearly labeled with the child's name and kept in their cubby during the day. We discourage the use of pacifiers at other times during the day, as they may discourage communication and can become dirty or misplaced.

## Disenrolling Your Child

When disenrolling your child, a 30-day written notice is required or a full month's tuition will be charged. Rady Children's Hospital reserves the right to immediately disenroll any child. Disenrollment may occur when a child becomes a threat to him/herself or others or for refusal of any family member to follow Center policies.

## Child Development

Child development involves learning and mastering skills starting in infancy and continuing through early childhood and beyond. These early skills include sitting, walking and talking (at a basic level), and progress to more complex skills such as skipping, tying shoes, and communicating in sentences.

Children learn these skills, called developmental milestones, during predictable time periods. The skills children develop fall within five main areas: 1) cognitive (thinking and problem solving), 2) social/emotional, 3) speech and language, 4) fine motor and 5) gross motor development. Adaptive skills (self-help) are also developing as children gain independence.



The teaching staff observe all children to determine their progression with expected developmental milestones. If a concern arises, the teacher will provide you with information that could be discussed with your pediatrician. Alexa's PLAYC staff may request a release of information so we can share information with other professionals who could evaluate and provide recommendations and early and specialized intervention for your child.

If your child has special health or learning needs, or develops other needs, it is important that you share any related information with the staff so that respectful accommodations can be considered. Open communication with consulting providers (school districts, the San Diego Regional Center, early intervention services, physicians) will ensure coordination of care.

## **Discipline**

Our positive guidance practices will help children learn appropriate behavior. Children are presented with positive models of acceptable behavior. Behavior guidance standards are based upon the developmental needs of the child. Staff utilize redirection and constructive solution techniques to promote safe and pro-social behaviors. Children are taught to use acceptable alternatives such as communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skills in an effort to reduce conflict. All children and staff members will be protected and provided a safe and secure environment. If your child has a specific behavior issue that is of concern to you or to the staff, a conference will be set up to discuss a positive behavior plan.

## **Biting Policy**

Biting is common in a childcare environment. Reasons for biting include teething, sensory exploration, autonomy and control, peer interaction, imitation, frustration, anxiety, and curiosity. It occurs most frequently when a child is tired, frustrated, or over-stimulated.

What do we do when it happens?

- Attend to the recipient first. The biting child will be redirected to appropriate activities.
- Complete an accident report for every incident. Report broken skin to the director and to the child's parents as quickly as possible.
- Parents of the children involved will be notified. However, neither the parents of the bitten child nor the parents of the biting child will be given the name of the other child involved in the incident.
- When a child has bitten several times in a short period of time, an intervention plan will be developed by the teacher(s), the director, and the child's parents.

If a child continues to bite with little or no sign of improvement, the program director may temporarily exclude that child from school.

The child will be excluded if it is determined the safety of other children is being compromised or the child is unable to handle the stress of being in group care and needs a smaller group or individual care environment.

## **Health and Safety**

### **Wellness Policy**

In a group care environment, it is inevitable that children will become sick. Since Alexa's PLAYC is not licensed as a sick care facility equipped to handle ill children, for their safety and the safety of others, we require that all sick children be picked up within one hour of a parent or guardian being called. Fees may be assessed if a child is not picked up within the allotted one hour time period. We want to make sure that all of the children in our Center remain healthy and get the best possible care.

If a child becomes ill while at the Center, he/she will be taken to the front office and a parent will be contacted. It is essential that you keep the information on your Emergency Information Card up to date so you can be reached if your child becomes ill. Any child experiencing the following symptoms will be sent home:

- A fever of 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
- Diarrhea three times in the course of two hours, or any diarrhea that is loose and therefore not contained in the child's diaper
- Vomiting
- Profuse thick or colored nasal discharge
- Symptoms of severe illness such as unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, irritability, persistent ongoing difficulty breathing, or other unusual symptoms

***Your child must be symptom free for 24 hours with no medications before returning to school.***

If prescription medication is required to treat your child's illness, they must be on the medication for 24 hours before returning to school. If the staff of the school feels that a contagious symptom is present, a doctor's note is required before the child can return to school. Please notify us if your child becomes infected with a contagious disease such as whooping cough, measles, mumps, chicken pox, diphtheria, pinworms, conjunctivitis, strep throat, etc. The director will notify parents of other children who may have been exposed. Rady Children's Hospital follows the guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics and staff consult with Rady Children's infection control team as needed to determine the most effective steps when responding to contagious diseases. As necessary, these steps will be communicated to parents.

## Medication

The staff will dispense prescription medication, sunscreen, and over-the-counter medicine with written authorization from the child's physician and a parent. Medications must be in original containers. We cannot administer any medication that has expired. Prescription medication must be accompanied by dosage instructions on the container and written doctor's instructions. We recommend you ask your child's physician to prescribe a 12-hour dose of medication when appropriate. This allows you to control the administration of medication at all times. All medications must be given to a staff member upon arrival and will be stored a locked medicine cabinet in the child's classroom. No medication should be placed in cubbies or on the counter.

## Allergies

All allergies to food, medication, or bee stings, etc. must be listed on the Emergency Information Card. If your child requires medication for such conditions, the medication can be stored and administered when necessary for as long as the child is enrolled. Parent and physician authorization are required to dispense medication.

Due to the possibility of severe allergic reactions to peanuts, our Center does not provide snacks containing peanuts.

We promote a **"peanut free"** environment, and per policy we do not allow products containing peanuts to be brought with lunches or snacks. If we learn that a child has an allergy to other nuts, these nuts will also not be allowed in the child's classroom. Notice of this restriction will be communicated to parents as needed to ensure the safety of the child. If peanut products are sent in your child's lunch, a substitution will be provided and the product will be sent home in their lunch box with a "peanut free" reminder.

## Critical Illness or Injury

In the event of critical illness or injury, 911 will be called. A certified staff member will administer basic first aid or pediatric CPR. Parents will be contacted immediately.

## Bouncing Mat

The Alexa's PLAYC playground is equipped with an in ground bouncing mat. The mat is constructed of reinforced rubber and attached to heavy duty springs which limit the jumping height to 18". The edge of the bouncing mat is built out of recycled rubber thus it absorbs impact like a cushion. Two children are allowed to jump on the mat at one time and no more than 3 children are allowed to wait for their turn. Children are supervised by an adult while on the bouncing mat. Child care licensing requires Alexa's PLAYC to make this information available to parents enrolled in the program.

## Emergency Procedures

All Center staff are trained in emergency procedures. Fire, earthquake and lock down drills are held on a regular basis so children can become familiar with procedures. Should an emergency occur, the director will attempt to notify you as soon as possible. Our primary emergency relocation site is Rady Children's Plaza (3665 Kearny Villa Road). Our secondary relocation site is the Four Points Inn San Diego Central (8110 Aero Drive, 858-277-8888).

## Unusual Incidents

In the rare instance of an unusual incident or disaster which occurs prior to the opening of the Center's day, (i.e. building flood, fires), the following plan would be initiated:

1. All affected families would be contacted using the emergency telephone contact information to inform them of the status of the problem, a proposed timeline for the reopening of the Center, and the process for alternate childcare support.
2. Once the Center has clearance from Community Care Licensing that an alternate site could be designated as a temporary child care site, the following prioritization plan would be utilized:
  - a. Essential hospital employees have the highest priority. Essential hospital employees would be employees who work in direct patient care areas in which their absence would cause immediate hardship for the patients and families being served at Rady Children's Hospital.
  - b. The second highest priority is given to families with sibling groups in which one child continues to receive child care in a non-affected area but the other child or children are displaced due to the nature of the internal emergency. This prioritization plan would be utilized to minimize the impact within the family system.
  - c. The third highest priority is given to all other hospital employees,
  - d. The fourth priority is for all remaining families on a first call, first serve basis.
3. Any families that could not be accommodated using the alternate childcare prioritization plan stated above would receive a credit for the amount of time in which their child or children were displaced from the care at the Center.
4. Families would be advised on the system for receiving updates on the status of the resolution the problem including the plan for re-opening by calling the Center's main number and utilizing the mail box option for emergency updates.

## Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

The State of California requires child care providers to report any suspected incident of possible child abuse (including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse) or neglect. Child abuse includes leaving a child unattended at any time. We are legally obligated to comply with these guidelines by calling Child Protective Services at (858-694-5141). Anyone under stress has the potential to abuse a child. The YMCA Family Stress Counseling Services (619-281-8313) assists families with stressful times and provides suggestions for parenting techniques

## Nutrition

The Center provides a morning and an afternoon snack to enrolled children in attendance. All snacks are well balanced and meet the nutritional requirements of children. The Center provides snacks that include hot and cold foods to allow for variety in daily nutritional intake. If your child does not eat adequately, the staff will notify you. If your child is allergic to any kind of food, arrangements will be made for an appropriate alternative. If your child is on a specialized diet, we ask that you provide alternative snacks that meet your child's needs. Please notify the director of any food allergies or dietary restrictions. Snack menus for the week are posted at the front desk.

The Center does not provide lunch. If your child is at the Center for lunch we ask that you provide a nutritious lunch for your child. If you need suggestions for healthy choices, please ask a teacher or director. Each classroom has a microwave, so teachers can heat lunches if needed. Please send any food that needs to be microwave in a microwavable container. Refrigerators are not available to hold lunches. Thermoses and ice packs will help keep foods at the correct temperature. The Center provides milk for all children at lunch unless specifically refused by the parent.

Following is a list of foods that are choking hazards for children under the age of three:

**Raw carrots (must be cooked); popcorn; whole grapes or hot dogs (both must be cut in half lengthwise); hard candy, nuts, or dried fruit**

If these foods are sent to school with a child under age three we will not feed them to the child because of the danger they pose for toddlers. We will send any unacceptable foods home in the child's lunchbox. Please understand that this is for the safety of the children in the classroom.

You are encouraged to join your child for lunch. Please inform the teacher when you drop your child off in the morning if you will be joining us for lunch.

## Nap and Rest Time

All children between 18 months and five years sleep or rest after lunch for one to two hours. Children should bring a crib sized sheet and favorite blanket marked with his/her name, and/or a soft animal that will help your child rest comfortably. We encourage you to designate a blanket and soft animal especially for school so that you may leave it in your child's cubby ensuring that it is always available. Blankets will be sent home at the end of the week so you may wash them and bring them back to school the following week. We will provide an individual cot for each child, which will be disinfected regularly.

## Diapering and Toileting

A significant milestone for most two to three year olds is toilet independence. Children develop at individual rates. Therefore, some children will be using the toilet before others, even though they may be the same age. **Don't Panic!** One of the benefits of group care is that children learn from watching and imitating, and there will be plenty of opportunities for your child to practice toileting skills when ready. Typically, we encourage children to use the toilet when they are comfortable, but sometimes a special plan may need to be implemented. We will approach each child individually and toileting issues may be discussed in scheduled parent/teacher conferences.

If your child is in diapers, we require that you bring in all of the diaper supplies that your child needs. The following are items you are responsible for providing.

- **Diapers:** Please bring in enough diapers to last your child through the week. Each package of diapers must be labeled with your child's name to ensure that we are using the correct diaper on each child.
- **Pull-Ups** need to have Velcro tabs.
- **Wipes:** Please bring a plastic container of wipes labeled with your child's name.
- **Diaper Cream:** If your child has a rash and needs diaper cream, you must fill out a medication form

before we can apply the cream. If your child uses cream regularly, you may leave it with us and we will keep the medication form on file.

We will notify you if your child needs more supplies.

### **Confidentiality**

All information provided by parents in the enrollment and scheduling process is considered confidential.

- The information in the children's files is accessible to the appropriate staff only for the purposes of individualization of classroom programming and child safety.
- No information concerning a child's enrollment status may be released over the phone or to any person other than the child's parent or guardian as listed on the application.
- Strict professionalism concerning the discussion of confidential information is required from all staff.
- Discussion of information about individual children is allowed between staff members if such discussion is conducive to meeting the needs and goals of each child.
- Discussion of confidential information with unauthorized persons is not allowed.
- Staff will be happy to discuss your child's progress with you, but are not allowed to disclose information about other children in the program.

### **Program Observation**

Alexa's PLAYC is a teaching program, therefore we ask each parent, upon admission to the program, to sign a waiver to allow observations of children in the program. Observers in the program receive a copy of Observer Guidelines.

- Observers are requested to use only the child's first name to maintain family privacy.
- Observers are asked not to discuss children outside of the observation of the program.
- Parents are asked not to discuss other children in the program with outside observers.

### **Photography/Digital Recordings**

Parents are asked to sign a waiver to allow photography and filming for the purposes of classroom projects, individual goal development, and staff training. These photographs may be posted in classrooms and may be sent home. Recordings will be viewed only by program staff for training.

You may be asked whether photographs/digital recordings of your child can be used for other purposes, such as a research project examining program outcomes, presentations to hospital staff wishing to learn more about the program, presentations at professional conferences, and/or to other organizations wishing to develop inclusion programs. You will be asked at entry to the program, and before your child's image is used, if this information can be shared.

At times, Rady Children's Hospital media or outside media may visit our program to promote our services, or when doing a story about our program or about ASD in general. You will be notified if media of any kind is coming to our program.

You will have the opportunity to let us know upon entry into the program, and again each time the media comes to the program, whether you agree for your child to be involved in any filming or photography.

### **Training and Research**

The Center is a program designed to integrate early education for typically developing children and children at-risk or diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. All classrooms are staffed with highly qualified teachers and autism education specialists. In order to ensure the highest quality programming, supervision and training are provided by the Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and director, both with expertise in autism spectrum disorders. Residents, fellows, students, and graduate students of other professional

educational institutions may participate through supervised observation of intervention and classroom procedures as a part of the health and developmental programs at Rady Children's Hospital.

The Center is continually working to provide the highest quality of programming possible for all children enrolled. As part of this process, we measure outcomes for children in the program in a systematic way. At different points during your child's time at Alexa's PLAYC, we may ask you or your child to complete assessment measures to evaluate your child's progress. We use this information to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of our programs overall.

The Center actively collaborates with local researchers. Our involvement in research promotes staff awareness of current findings in our understanding and treatment of autism spectrum disorder, and also facilitates our use of research-informed practices every day. Because of our partnership with many researchers in the community, our program and staff are provided with opportunities to learn about cutting edge research or to receive training in evidence-based practices by experts in the field. You may receive information about specific research projects that may be appropriate for your child or family. You can choose to learn more about any project or decide not to participate in any project. All children will receive quality programming whether or not they participate in any research project, and all research projects are reviewed by an Institutional Review Board to determine the safety of the project.

In addition, there may be times when a student, trainee, interviewee, or researcher may interact with some children in the program. The purpose of this activity may be to learn a new assessment, observe how children play or to try a specific assessment or intervention technique. Any time interaction occurs children are supervised by Center staff. If this occurs, children's participation is strictly voluntary, and if a child chooses not to participate or gets fussy he/she will not have to complete the activities. These appointments are scheduled with your child's teacher at a time that will be best suited for both the child and his/her teacher. If you do not wish for your child to participate, please notify the director.

### **Parent Involvement**

Parents are welcome to visit and observe their children anytime. We have an observation room for viewing into the classrooms if parents want to observe their child, unseen.

There are several ways for parents to find out information about the program and special events happening at the Center or in the community. A newsletter will be provided to each family, and parents will receive letters or flyers about special events in their child's cubby.

Parents are encouraged to:

- Share special talents such as reading, singing, playing an instrument, story-telling, carpentry, and cultural activities.
- Help with parties, special activities, and holidays
- Donate new toys and equipment
- Organize special functions for staff

If you are interested in becoming involved or know someone who would like to be, please contact the director or site manager.

### **Conferences**

Observation and assessment is an integral part of the program. Children will be observed on a daily basis by our teachers and child development professionals, and any concerns will be brought up with parents. Typically developing children will be assessed upon entry into the program and development will be formally screened twice per year, or as needed. Children with ASD or risk for ASD will have specific

curriculum goals, and progress will be evaluated every five weeks or as needed. Information will be shared with parents about the child's assessment in scheduled conferences between parents and teachers and/or clinical supervisors twice per year. Children enrolled in the toddler classrooms will have an additional parent meeting before their child turns 30 months of age. Appropriateness of continued enrollment in the toddler classroom will be discussed during this meeting. If parents choose to have their child continue in the toddler room, written acknowledgement must be obtained (per community care licensing) for their child's file.

If you wish to have a conference, inform the director or one of your child's teachers. We encourage open communication between parents and staff. If you need to have a lengthy discussion with your child's teacher we ask that you schedule a time with the teacher outside of the classroom since during classroom time, the teachers must focus their attention on the children.

### **Home Visits/Parent Training- Toddler Program**

Toddler-aged children with ASD or at-risk for ASD enrolled in Alexa's PLAYC will also participate in our home visiting program. This program will assist parents in using techniques similar to those used in our program in the home and community, to help children use their developing skills in other environments. Additionally, home visits will be designed to assist parents in working on self-help skills and decreasing difficult behaviors, which may be unique to the home environment and to help parents with transitioning to school district services at age 3. Home visits typically take place on a bi-weekly schedule and last approximately 2 hours.

### **Effects of Integrated Education for Typically Developing Children**

A primary goal of inclusive preschool programming is to promote the social integration of children with disabilities into peer groups with their more socially competent, typically developing peers (Guralnick, 2001; Odom, 2000). The following research findings have led to the design of classroom procedures to support social integration, promote interactions, and increase social competence among all children.

### **Research Findings**

- Typically developing children have demonstrated the following benefits from inclusive settings:
  - Increased self-esteem (Devin-Sheehan, Feldman & Allen, 1976)
  - Advanced skills for getting along with others (Daly, 1991)
  - Significant developmental gains, similar to or greater than children in other types of preschool settings (Hoyson, Jamison & Strain, 1984; Stahmer & Carter, 2005)
  - Better social skills and fewer disruptive behaviors (Strain, 1994)
  - More positive attitudes toward children with disabilities (Peck et al., 1992)
- Children with and without disabilities learn from each other in inclusive settings (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).
- Typically developing children develop a greater understanding of disabilities and an increased sensitivity to individual differences (Odom et al., 2004; Stahmer, Carter & Baker, 2005).
- Inclusive preschool programs and child care settings receive comparable or higher ratings when evaluated on environmental ratings scales than regular education (Gamel-McCormick, 2004; La Paro, et al., 1998).
- The social interactions of typically developing children are not disrupted by participation in groups in inclusive settings with children with disabilities (Guralnick and Hammond, 1999).

### **Perspectives of Families**

- Families express positive views of the benefits of inclusion, including promoting acceptance of their children in community settings (Guralnick, 2002). Two benefits reported by families include increased social contact between children with and without disabilities, and an increased sensitivity and acceptance of differences by the typically developing children toward peers with disabilities.

- Parents report the benefit of being accepted by other parents and feeling less alone themselves. Birthday parties and walks for the cause of autism, which are held in the community, consistently include all children.

### Alexa's PLAYC Research Informs the Center

Research looking at parent attitudes and child development in our own inclusion programs has found:

- High parent satisfaction with special benefits related to:
  - Low student to teacher ratio leading to greater individual attention to their children
  - Excellent curriculum
  - High level of support from the staff, including increased opportunities for parental education
  - Greater acceptance and understanding for children with disabilities; increased sharing and interaction.
  - One parent from Alexa's PLAYC shared that the "inclusion program was wonderful in teaching my child compassion and understanding of children with special needs."
- Standardized assessments show that typically developing children in our programs:
  - Show typical or advanced increases in cognitive, social and language skills.
  - Display no increases in difficult behaviors such as biting and aggression or stereotyped behaviors.
  - Demonstrate more altruistic behaviors than children in typical preschools without inclusion.

We have published articles on the following topics from our San Diego based inclusion program, Alexa's PLAYC:

- Inclusive Programming for Toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Outcomes for Children's Toddler School (now Alexa's PLAYC)
- Stress Levels and Adaptability in Parents of Toddlers with and without ASD
- Differential treatment outcomes for children with ASD based on level of peer social avoidance

For more information about outcomes for children enrolled in Alexa's PLAYC, please visit [www.rchsd.org/autism](http://www.rchsd.org/autism) and click on the *publications* link. You can also ask for copies of the articles at the front desk.



## PARENT HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alexa's PLAYC accepts all children ages 18 months through five years, regardless of race, color, sex, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, handicap or medical condition, provided that the established program meets the needs of the individual child's reasonable accommodations.

Alexa's PLAYC has attempted through these pages to outline its duties, responsibilities, and expectations to you, the parents. These conditions have been carefully planned in order to insure the comfort and protection of your child. As a parent, you can expect that we will adhere to all state and community licensing rules regarding fire and safety precautions as well as health, sanitation and adult staffing requirements. We will do our best to provide your child with a program of education to suit his/her needs in a physical environment, one in which they can feel secure and free to grow. As we strive to achieve these ends, we encourage and welcome your comments and suggestions. We give sincere thanks for your cooperation in these efforts.

I have read the Alexa's PLAYC agreement entitled "Parent Handbook" and accept the conditions stated therein.

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(Print name)

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Parent's Signature

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Date