



INDEPENDENCE ACADEMY

PARENT AND STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Purpose of This Handbook

The purpose of the Student/ Parent Handbook is to give Independence Academy (IA) students and their parents an understanding of the general rules and guidelines for attending and receiving an education at IA. Students and their parents are expected to take an active role in our school. It is through participation in activities that individuals gain feelings of satisfaction and ownership. IA expects all families to act in a manner that represents the values outlined in this Student/Parent Handbook.

History of Independence Academy (Formerly Independence Montessori Academy)

Three like-minded families sought a Montessori education for their children in Harnett County, North Carolina. We found a lack of options and opportunity and subsequently, founded Independence Montessori Academy in April of 2015. Our families had experience in Montessori schools, as parents and board members. This provided us with the vision, confidence, and experience needed to create a school that would serve our community. Our mission was to create a legacy of joyful learning, community, and stewardship. Independence Montessori Academy morphed into Independence Academy in June 2020 as the curriculum became more inspired by Reggio Emilia and Montessori. Independence Academy is now a family owned and operated school run under the leadership of Katelyn Gerhardt.

Core Values of Independence Academy

Learn -

Each child enters the environment with an innate curiosity and a vast love of learning. The best way to learn is by experiencing, by “doing”. We harness that natural curiosity by providing a hands-on, challenging, fun, and developmentally appropriate curriculum rich with experiences designed to foster the growth of each child.

IA values ongoing staff development and parent involvement. We model our love of learning by tending to our own continuing development while inspiring our children to view learning as a lifelong endeavor. We encourage active engagement with the community through staff and family participation in community events.

Grow -

In the classroom, through experiential learning, children develop mastery over increasingly complex “work” in all areas of their development – physical, mental, and emotional. As they deepen their understanding and application of these skills, they build confidence in themselves, and their abilities. They gain independence as they become more competent, and also grow to understand the value of their inter-dependence with others.

Give -

As they develop, students learn to mentor their younger classmates, embodying the idea of being a positive, caring role model. They quickly learn that both the mentor and the mentee have much to learn and gain from their relationship.

Our focus on environmental sustainability and stewardship gives our school another avenue to emphasize giving. In the Spring, we cultivate a seasonal organic garden; the garden provides students with lessons across the curriculum, from manual dexterity to math, science, art, and the love of nature to the character building lessons of teamwork and empathy. It also teaches the ability to value, grow, and eat nutritious food. We use environmentally friendly, recycled, and sustainable materials in the classroom as much as possible.

Four Guiding Principles of Independence Academy

IA's Four Guiding Principles are what guide our program in its entirety. Our materials, daily communication, and big picture outcomes are all derived from these four principles.

1. ***Montessori and Reggio Inspired Curriculum: Our approach to learning encompasses both the Montessori philosophy and a Reggio inspired curriculum. Our classrooms will embody a hands-on learning approach with natural and thought provoking materials. The Montessori materials offer a systematic approach to academics as well as a concrete learning of concepts while the Reggio inspired provocations create an open-ended approach to inspire creative thinking.***
2. ***Nature Immersion: Creating play spaces that keep children immersed in nature is a key component to a healthy learning environment. Our playgrounds evolve and change with the seasons. They also are changed as children move objects and decorate the space. Our nature walks provide experiences to discover the beauty of nature. Building a deep connection with nature at a young age will help cultivate a lasting respect for the outdoors.***
3. ***Social and Emotional Growth through Conscious Discipline: Social and emotional growth is at the core of being able to work within a classroom and successfully navigate the world. Our children will learn about emotions and practice strategies for handling their emotions while they are calm, helping them develop a foundation of tools to use when an emotion arises. Children will also learn how to recognize their emotions and communicate their needs.***
4. ***Child Progress Portfolios: Creating a portfolio is a way to document a child's journey and their progress without using worksheets and testing. In the portfolios, connections are made between the child's activities and the learning objectives along with developmentally appropriate guidelines. This portfolio includes pictures of the child, artwork, and other demonstrations of the child's work throughout their time at Independence Academy. This documentation allows us to have effective conferences with parents as well as create a time capsule of your child's journey.***

Key Philosophical Messages That Make Our Montessori and Reggio Inspired curriculum Unique

- Deep respect for children as individuals
- Multi-age classes allow teachers to develop close, long-term relationships with their students, allow them to know each other's learning style well, and encourage older students to become role models, mentors, and leaders to younger students.
- Integrated curriculum is carefully structured and connects subjects within programs (e.g., history and cultural arts to maximize the opportunity for learning and builds from program to program to progress from concrete to abstract learning).
- Independence is nurtured and leads to children becoming purposeful, motivated, and confident in their own abilities.
- Peace and conflict resolution are taught daily and children learn to be a part of a warm, respectful, and supportive community.
- The child creates, in a very real sense, the adult that is to be, through his/her experiences, interactions, and environments. Character development is a central focus of the American Montessori Society curriculum.
- Hands-on learning is central to the curriculum in all programs and leads to children being engaged rather than passive with their work.
- The environments are responsibly and carefully prepared with multisensory, sequential, and self-correcting materials to support self-directed learning.
- Teachers, children and parents work together as a warm and supportive community.
- Self-expression is nurtured in all children. Children experience art, music, poetry, theater, writing, and other forms of creative arts with confidence and passion. The environments are responsibly and carefully prepared with multisensory, sequential, and self-correcting materials to support self-directed learning.

Please see the current tuition rates on the website under “Admissions”

Tuition Discounts

Maximum of 5% Discount on Tuition only

- 5% Military Discount for Active Duty, Military Retirees & First Responders: **ID must be provided for verification before receiving the discount. Discounts are not backdated.**
- 5% Sibling Discount: 2 or more children concurrently enrolled at Independence Academy.

Fees

Registration/Application Fee:

Student Application Fees are due at the time the Admissions Application is submitted for enrollment or waiting pool. The Application/Registration Fee is a non-refundable fee. **For returning students**, the Registration Fee is due by March 23rd of the preceding school year to hold the student's slot.

\$75 for all students

Resource Fee:

The Student Resource Fee is due at the time the student is enrolled. For returning and new students, the resource fee is due by July 15, 2025. If the Resource Fee is not paid by July 15, 2025, the student will lose their spot in the classroom. If the student is placed in the waiting pool, the Student Resource Fee is due by the student's first day in attendance. This fee is non-refundable, unless the student is ultimately not placed in a classroom due to circumstances on Independence Academy's behalf. The Resource Fee covers disposable classroom goods, paper goods, school supplies, new classroom materials monthly, extra curriculum materials for specific programs, maintenance of school grounds (13 acres), student spirit shirts, school security measures and technology support. The Resource Fee is prorated to half if enrollment takes place after January 1-March 1 and then prorated by month after March 1.

The Flower Rooms, The Tree Rooms, The Inde Nature School: \$215

Inde Elementary: \$315

Withdrawal Policy:

To initiate withdrawal from IA, the Withdrawal Form must be submitted with a minimum two-week notice (a two-week notice is defined as two weeks from the date of submission). The tuition installment is due in full for the month in which the student withdraws. If your two-week notice runs into the following month, that month's installment of tuition is due. **A withdrawal fee of \$250 is assessed if a child withdraws between August 1, 2025 -April 1, 2026 for Tree Rooms and The Inde Nature School, or June 1, 2025 -April 1, 2026 for Flower Rooms. If withdrawal occurs on or after April 1, 2026- June 11, 2026, for all IA students, a \$250 withdrawal fee is due along with the remaining tuition for the school year.** The ONLY exception to waive the withdrawal fee is official PCS orders (with a report date of no more than 35 days from the last day in attendance as stated on the Withdrawal Form). **WITHOUT MILITARY PCS ORDERS, AS DESCRIBED ABOVE, THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS FOR WAIVING THE WITHDRAWAL FEE.** Student school records are property of IA and will not be released until accounts are current. This Withdrawal Policy applies to the school year only and the Summer Withdrawal Policy is outlined in the Summer Enrollment Forms.

\$250 per student

All belongings, including student records, will be released upon account being paid in full. Any belongings not collected within two weeks of last date of attendance will be donated/discarded.

Tuition Schedule:

Tuition can be paid annually, semi-annually or in equal installments.

Payment Options:

IA offers three tuition payment plans:

1. Pay the full annual tuition in one payment on August 15.
2. Pay semi-annual tuition: The first payment on June 15 (Flower Rooms), August 15 (Tree Rooms and Inde Nature School) and the second payment on January 15.
3. Pay in equal installments (1st installment on the first day of school and all subsequent installments are due on the 1st day of each month).

Installment Tuition Breakdown:

The Flower Rooms: 12 equal installments

The Tree Rooms: 10 equal installments

The Inde Nature School: 10 equal installments

Tuition Policy

Tuition is considered late on the 7th of the month, at which time a late fee of \$50 is assessed at 12:01 a.m. on the 7th of each month.

If a tuition account becomes two months past due, Independence Academy reserves the right to temporarily suspend a student until the tuition account is paid in full. Tuition will not be prorated for time in suspension.

If a student withdraws or dismissed with a remaining balance, and two attempts are made to collect the balance unsuccessfully, the account will be considered overdue and a claim will be made with the small claims of the District Court Division in the county in which the payee lives. The payee will be responsible for paying all court fees and late fees. All student records are property of IA and will be released once the student's account is paid in full. A student is not eligible for re-enrollment if there is a remaining outstanding balance or after a claim has been filed.

Incident weather delays and closures will not be reimbursed or prorated.

If IA must close for communicable disease outbreak, tuition will not be reimbursed or prorated.

Tuition payments are paid through Quickbooks Invoice. Invoices are available 5 days prior to their due date. We accept ACH, Credit Card or Check.

School Hours:

Early Care: 7:00 am – 8:30 am

The Flower Rooms (5 Day): 8:30 am – 3:00 pm (drop-off 8:30-8:45)

The Flower Rooms (2/3 Day): 8:30 am – 12:00 pm (drop-off 8:30-8:45)

The Tree Rooms: 8:30 am – 3:00 pm (drop-off 8:15-8:30)

The Inde Explorers: (2/3/5 Day): 8:30 am - 12:30 pm, 9:30 am - 1:30 pm & 12:45pm - 4:45pm

Inde Elementary: 8:30am - 3:00pm (drop off 8:15-8:45am)

The Inde Hangout: 1:45pm - 4: 45pm

Extended Exploration (After Care): 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Expected Arrival:

Children are expected to arrive during the drop off hours above. If a child must arrive later than the drop off time listed, parents must notify the office. The cut off time to arrive with prior notice is 11:30am. To ensure each classroom is set up for success each day, children must be dropped off by 9:15am (All classrooms that start at 8:30am). Children who arrive after this cut off time, without prior notice, will not be able to attend that day.

As a courtesy to our community of families, we open at 7:00 am daily. Your child is welcome to bring their breakfast to school.

All students must be accompanied to their classrooms by a parent and signed in. Dismissal for 5-day programs is at 2:30- 3:00 pm, 12:30 pm for part day Flower Room programs, 12:30 pm, 1:30pm and 4:45pm for The Inde Nature Explorers, and 4:30pm for the Inde Hangout. We ask that parents not enter the building prior to dismissal as that can distract the children from preparing to go home. If you need to pick-up early, please call ahead and come to the front office for an administrator to retrieve your child from their classroom. **Late pick up fee of \$1 per minute is assessed after a five minute grace period for your child's pick-up time. For children who use Extended Exploration on a drop-in basis, fees apply at \$25/day or \$10 if the child is picked up by 3:30pm.**

The school closes daily at 6:00 pm. Please call the school or message your teacher using Class Dojo if you will be late picking up your child. **An additional fee of \$1.00 per minute will be assessed for late pick up after 6:00 pm.**

Please follow the flow of traffic (counter-clockwise) in the parking lot; it allows parents to anticipate approaching vehicles. The parking lot speed limit is 5mph. Refrain from parking in any spot that is not a marked parking spot or graveled area. Parking lot safety is of the utmost importance.

Please do not park or drive on the grass.

Before and Aftercare & Drop- in Care

IA offers early care and after care. Many students are enrolled in this program and pay a monthly fee. Once enrolled in early and/or aftercare you are committed for the month. We require a minimum of a two week notice in order to withdraw from before or aftercare. If your child is not enrolled in this program, but you would like to utilize this service from time to time, please call or email to see if there is availability, and if so, make a reservation. We require at least 24 hours notice. The fee is \$25/day or \$10 if the child is picked up by 3:30pm. Please do not leave your child in early care or after care if you have not received a confirmation from administration; this will help us maintain proper student to teacher ratios.

Pick-Up Permission

If someone other than a previously designated person (in your child's file) is to pick up your child, please update your authorized pick-up list by emailing admissions@independenceacademync.com or update your emergency contacts in your account through KangarooTime. Please remind the pick-up person that they must provide photo ID at pick-up.

Lunch and Snack

IA does not provide food. Students need to bring a lunch, water bottle (**containing water only**), and snack in the appropriate container(s). Each classroom has a refrigerator. Meals will be eaten in the classroom or outside, weather permitting. Please strive to pack healthy, unprocessed and filling meals. High sugar, caffeinated, and highly processed foods do not give children the energy they need to learn and function well in a classroom. We know that fueling the body with nutritious foods helps aid in keeping the immune system strong while promoting healthy habits as they grow. Also, it's important to us to keep our environment in mind by packing meals in reusable and/or recyclable containers to help eliminate excessive waste. In the event that a student forgets a lunch, parents must bring lunch to the school office. Please refrain from bringing fast food lunches. If you are unable to provide your child with a lunch, please notify the school to coordinate a plan for your child's lunch. IA cannot warm up food; if you would like to send a warm meal, please pack it in a thermal container. All classroom healthy treats (fruit, muffins etc.) need to be store bought and approved before they are brought in. High sugar treats, if approved, such as cupcakes, need to be in small bite sized portions.

Ground Rules for Exploration Periods

The following are guidelines established to enable the partnership of parents and teachers

The Teacher/Collaborator/Guide

The teacher's prime responsibilities are:

To help each child help himself or herself experience success.

To protect the child's right to engage in appropriate activities of his/ her choice.

To act as a collaborator and provide provocations to create a well-rounded education through child-led activities.

To model appropriate emotional responses in line with the Conscious Discipline method.

The Child

1. Children may work alone or in spontaneous groups. No one may touch another's work without being invited; therefore, there is no forced sharing.

2. Everyone walks around the work rugs.

3. Calm bodies are encouraged for group stories or lessons to include sitting quietly with arms and legs folded.

4. Each child hangs their own coat, buttons or zips it, and when leaving they are responsible for dressing themselves and gathering their belongings.

5. Athletic shoes with ties or classroom slippers help us walk quietly and make us sure-footed.

6. Children are in charge of cleaning the environment.

7. Children are directors of work and teachers are collaborators to help serve their needs.

They push us; we don't push them. Expectations are developmentally appropriate.

8. Children talk quietly and ask for help on a one-to-one basis, not by yelling across the room. They wait quietly in close proximity to the teacher or with a soft hand on the teacher's arm before asking for help or direction.

Parents

1. Please leave toys at home. If a toy is brought in, the child will be asked to put it in their backpack until the end of the day.
2. Please try to bring happy, relaxed children to school by allowing adequate time and a very slow pace in preparing for school.
3. Talk about ground rules with children in a "positive" manner, and practice talking quietly at home.
4. Encourage the ability to distinguish between appropriate indoor behavior and outdoor behavior.
5. Parent conferences are scheduled twice each year. A parent or teacher may schedule an additional conference if needed.
6. Please avoid tangible rewards for accomplishments children naturally receive pleasure from.
7. Order is very important to children to give them a sense of security and peace.
8. **Return folders and please respond to teacher/administration communications promptly.**
9. Notify the lead teacher if you have a question or concern. You can email the teacher, send a private message through Class Dojo or leave a message with the office.
10. Parents are the child's primary teacher. The faculty and staff at Independence Academy can love, support, and encourage parents best by setting excellent examples. We must address parents' needs as well as the needs of our children. We must also trust one another and share the goal of providing the best environment for children to develop.

Observations in the Classroom

Parents who wish to observe in the classroom may do so. Appointments must be arranged through the office and communicated with the lead teacher. We ask that parents do not visit the classroom before mid-October. This will give students and teachers an opportunity to acclimate before visitors are present. Observations are limited to one hour. A parent must not interact with any of the students in order to aid in maintaining the classroom environment as though there were not an extra person in the classroom. Observations in the classroom may not be available when state guidelines limit access to the building.

Toddlers – The Flower Rooms

Drop-off time for The Flower Rooms is between 8:30 – 8:45 AM each morning. As your child arrives, please have them wash their hands upon entering the classroom. Jackets and shoes are to be stored in the assigned cubbie bins. Children may wear house shoes (comfy shoes: Crocs, moccasins, or soft soled shoes) in the classroom. Socks are a slip/fall hazard.

The exploration cycle is between 8:45 – 12:00 PM, daily. A portion of the exploration cycle may include outdoor time in the playground, garden area or on a nature walk.

Weather permitting, lunches may be held outdoors at their picnic area. Otherwise, lunches will be held in the classrooms. All children will have nap/quiet time after lunch. Children will be given a nap gear bag at the beginning of enrollment. All nap gear (blanket, sheet, etc.) must fit into this bag.

The Tree Rooms

Drop-off time for The Tree Rooms is between 8:15 – 8:30 AM each morning. As your child arrives, please have them wash their hands upon entering the classroom. Jackets and shoes are to be stored on or under their assigned hook in the hallway. Children may wear house shoes (comfy shoes: Crocs, moccasins, or soft soled shoes) in the classroom. Socks are a slip/fall hazard.

The exploration cycle is between 8:45 – 12:00 PM, daily. A portion of the exploration cycle may include outdoor time in the playground, garden area or on a nature walk.

Weather permitting, lunches may be held outdoors at their picnic area. Otherwise, lunches will be held in the classrooms. After lunch, the children will have an outdoor recess and then come in to prepare for nap. All children four-years-old and younger are required to take a nap or have a quiet period. Children will be given a nap gear bag at the beginning of enrollment. All nap gear (blanket, sheet, etc.) must fit into this bag.

Children enrolled in The Tree Rooms must be completely toilet-trained. Teachers in this program are not required to assist in toileting or cleaning after use.

The Inde Explorers

Drop-off time for The Inde Nature School is between 8:15 – 8:45 AM each morning for our Sparrow Class and 9:15 - 9:45am for our Starlings Class and 12:35-12:45pm for our Falcon Class. Please have your children dress in weather appropriate gear and bring plenty of extra changes of clothes each day. Please review The Inde Nature School Gear Guide. Children will spend the majority of their day outside, exploring and creating. If the weather does not permit safe outdoor exploration, the classroom will move indoors with engaging activities.

The Inde Nature School is a family environment where older children gain leadership skills by assisting younger students and younger students develop strong peer relationships by bonding with older students who can aid them in tasks. Children may be grouped together by ability for specific projects throughout the day. Many of the group activities and open play will be done as a large group.

The exploration cycle is from 8:30am-12:00pm (Sparrows) and 9:30am-12pm and 12:30-1:30pm (Starlings). At 12:00pm daily children will have lunch until pick up at 12:30pm for our Sparrow Class. The Starling Class will continue their exploration cycle after lunch until pick-up at 1:30pm. The exploration cycle is between 12:45-4:45pm for our Falcon class. Please make sure your child eats lunch prior to arrival if they are in the Falcon Class. They must have bring a robust snack and a water bottle containing water only.

Inde Elementary:

Inde Elementary is a 5-day program. Drop-off time is between 8:15 – 8:45 AM each morning. Pick-up is between 2:45-3:00pm. Children will need to be registered as a home-school student through the state of North Carolina. All students will utilize the Oak Meadow curriculum, a nature based home-school guide. Montessori works and materials are used as well for core subjects such as Math and Language. This curriculum will guide daily academics and will be used in conjunction with encouraged to acquire a copy of the curriculum or supplemental materials for following along at home, however it is not required. While in the program, both the family and the teachers work together to keep the child engaged in the curriculum and meeting desired outcomes. This program is open to children K-3rd grade.

After School Specials

We offer After School Specials each semester. Some of the specials we may offer are:

Art
Yoga
Music
Spanish
German
American Sign Language
Soccer
STEM

Please see “After School Specials” under the “Programs” tab on the website to see current after school specials. After School Specials are enrolled on a semester basis (Fall and Spring). **Once enrolled for the semester you are committed to enrollment for that semester and may not withdrawal.**

Parent Volunteers

There are many opportunities for parents to volunteer for their child’s classroom and for IA. Parents can present an extracurricular lesson (music, dance, art, language, yoga), help arrange classroom socials, and/or read in the classroom.

Field Trips

Students and parents are notified in advance regarding the specifics of field trips along with a permission slip, which must be signed and returned. If the field trip requires admission, payment is due with submission of the permission slip prior to the field trip date. It is the parent’s responsibility to pay admission in order for the child to attend the field trip. IA pays in one lump sum for admission on field trips. Each family must provide a chaperone for their child(ren) for field trips. This could be a parent, grandparent, or babysitter. Permission slips will indicate if siblings are able to attend the field trip.

Parent Chaperone responsibilities:

- Chaperones must be in charge of and aware of their child(ren) at all times on the trip.
- Chaperones must follow the plan and guidelines established by the teachers prior to the trip.
- Chaperones are responsible for signing children in and out with the classroom teacher.

Babysitting and Outside Care Conflict of Interest

It is inappropriate for parents to employ Independence Academy faculty and staff for in-home childcare/babysitting. This policy is furnished in order to maintain the professional integrity of our school program.

Employees of IA may not provide babysitting or child care for IA students at any time. Employees of IA must refrain from discussing IA’s students or issues when they are in the company of IA parents before or after school hours, e.g., birthday parties, sports events, public encounters.

Mini-conferences must not occur away from school.

Parents may request to schedule a meeting with teachers with questions or concerns.

Approach to Discipline

We believe that the people who work with young children on a regular basis must be sensitive, warm, caring, knowledgeable, and interested professionals. They must be able to identify individual qualities, to design and implement a program and an environment that will be conducive to positive growth in all areas of development. Teachers must offer authentic role models for interactions with others and display a sincere enthusiasm for active learning.

The educational philosophy of Independence Academy is that real, effective discipline is one that comes from within oneself and is worked on throughout a person's life. Developing this inner discipline is one of the objectives of IA. It is our belief that inner discipline develops in a child through active involvement in self-chosen tasks and the development of emotional self-regulation. The development of inner discipline in a child is the goal of IA. The clear organization of the physical environment; the structure, consistency, and predictability of daily school life; the indirect manner of teaching interpersonal skills through the lessons of "grace and courtesy"; and the direct methods of teaching social-emotional skills and self-regulation, through Conscious Discipline, help to limit difficulties.

Children are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions in a non-judgmental atmosphere, and adults use empathetic listening and understanding to help interpret a situation with those involved. The teacher sets the tone for bringing the child into harmony by avoiding harsh words, bribes, and generalizations. As children feel accepted for who they are and what they feel, they develop positive self-esteem. The happier children are with themselves, the more likely they are to reach out and interact cooperatively with others.

Children typically integrate into the classroom within the first six weeks of consistent attendance. Children develop a classroom routine and an understanding of general boundaries during this period of time. Occasionally, some children take longer to integrate into routine, and when this happens we work with the family to aid in this process being successful. This may look like a consistent drop-off and pick-up routine, routine charts, or possibly modified hours in the classroom to start. If the six week integration period extends and a child is exhibiting challenging behaviors as listed in the following page, a meeting may be requested with the IA team of administration and teachers and the parents or guardians to come up with a plan to help the child be successful.

Conscious Discipline is a researched based model that focuses on tapping the adult's power for self-control first. Misbehaviors are viewed as opportunities to teach values through the use of discipline skills. Conscious Discipline is a practice and as a community we study and practice these skills. Below is an outline of each power, corresponding discipline skill and value taught. Opportunities for parents to learn and practice these skills are provided throughout the school year. We recommend you begin with the book "Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline", by Becky Bailey PhD.

Powers of Self-Control	Discipline Skills	Values for Living
Power of Perception	Composure	Integrity
Power of Attention	Assertiveness	Respect
Power of Free Will	Choices	Commitment
Power of Unity	Encouragement	Interdependence
Power of Love	Positive Intent	Cooperation
Power of Acceptance	Empathy	Compassion
Power of Intention	Consequences	Responsibility

We have identified a series of escalating challenging behaviors: Disruption, Destruction, and Safety Concerns. The following is our approach when students display these behaviors:

1. Limits are set, stated with an assertive voice and without emotion.
2. Children are given the opportunity to correct choices.
3. If the child is not ready, the child is removed from the situation until they are ready to safely try again.
4. When the child re-engages, the teacher uses encouragement to reinforce positive behavior.

If negative behaviors escalate through the day, pose a safety risk, or detract from the teachers' ability to support the rest of the class, the student will take a break from the classroom with an administrator. If the student requires multiple breaks from the classroom, parents will be contacted, and the student will need to go home.

*If materials are broken by a student during a behavioral outburst the parents will be asked to replace the material. IA will send an invoice which must be paid within 30 days of receipt, along with the web link to the replacement material ordered.

Under no circumstances shall any child be subjected to corporal punishment in any manner upon the body or to verbal abuse.

Policy for Professional Evaluation of a Child

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that children who frequently exhibit behaviors that interfere with their ability to appropriately participate in classroom activities are identified and considered for possible professional evaluation, program modification, and for continued enrollment at Independence Academy. It is our belief that external help is sometimes required to ensure the best possibility of success for children.

If a teacher notes a behavior or behaviors that indicate developmental, cognitive, or psychological challenges, or observes behaviors that significantly disturb classroom functioning and peer interaction, she will report these to the administrative team.

A member of the administrative team will observe in the classroom and in other situations of concern. Both the teacher and administrator will document examples of the behaviors they observe that are concerning. A time frame will be set for observation and documentation, to determine if the behaviors are situational (parent recently deployed, new sibling born, etc.)

After the observation period is complete, a request with an outside professional may be requested to observe and report on classroom interactions and to recommend a course of action to ameliorate a perceived classroom problem. Parent consent is not required for classroom observations, provided the consultant does not directly interact with the child.

IA will contact the parents and together will set goals and strategies for change within the student's classroom experience. Support for these strategies from parents at home will also be discussed.

- a. If the child's behavior endangers the welfare of a child or children in their class, or staff members, a referral to an appropriate professional may be requested in a conference with the parents.
- b. An acceptable time table will be set for regular review of the child's progress toward the outlined goals and of the implementation of agreed upon strategies at school and at home.
- c. Parents should be assured that we wish to keep all children enrolled at Independence Academy, if possible. We are committed to working with parents and outside professional support to facilitate the child's progress.

Teachers need to be aware of a child's participation in treatment with an outside professional. Teachers may wish to contact the professional treating a child for information regarding management of specific problems in the classroom. Release forms must be signed by a parent before any such exchange of information can take place. Working together and creating consistency between home, school, and professional treatment supports the best outcome for children.

Independence Academy reserves the right to request a child's withdrawal from school if his/her problem behaviors adversely affect classmates and/or staff, and/or if the parents refuse to work in cooperation with the Academy regarding recommendations and goals for the child.

Bringing any weapon or dangerous materials to school, or threatening to harm faculty, staff, or classmates is strictly prohibited. Violations of these prohibitions will result in immediate suspension and a meeting between Administrators, Teacher, Parents and Child, with possible termination of the Child's enrollment by the school.

With Toddlers

Living peacefully with others is an overwhelming challenge for toddlers when their strongest and most impulsive language is through their bodies and not their words. Cognitively, motor messages override verbal messages at this developmental age. Even when words do come, sometimes they do not accurately or effectively express what the child is trying to say.

Toddlers expend enormous amounts of energy getting their bodies to do what they want them to do and to go where they want them to go. Frustration can result in tears or whining and sometimes even biting, pushing, or pinching. Though not acceptable behaviors, these responses are effective toddler ways of communicating frustration. Thankfully, most toddlers do usually develop acceptable ways of expressing these feelings as they become more comfortable in the environment.

For minor, nonchalant misbehaviors, gentle redirection toward work, which will re-engage the interest of the student, is often all that is necessary.

For recurring, minor misbehaviors, a teacher may temporarily limit the child's choice of workspace and/or quietly state the impact of such behavior on class materials or on other children's feelings. We help the child use language to describe what she/he needs or wants.

When a toddler persists in aggressive behavior, the adult stays by the child's side until the child has calmed and can refocus his/her attention positively. During periods of unacceptable behavior, teachers continue to interact with the child, using gentle, positive support and clear, simple language. 1. Teachers may meet with parents to share concerns and discuss ways to replace the aggression with positive coping mechanisms. 2. Teachers must also inform the administration of concerns and decide together an appropriate course of action, if follow-up is needed.

Biting Incident Policy

Toddlers and Primary Students

Biting often results from frustrated, inadequate communication and/or lack of impulse control—two developmental tasks that toddlers, and even some older children, are intensely engaged in. Toddlers are in the process of mastering language and often lack the words to fully express their needs, feelings, and thoughts. In the absence of words, toddlers employ their bodies; they push, grab, scratch, and sometimes bite. A bite by an older child is more unusual, but usually still stems from the inability of a child to be successful when using words to resolve a conflict.

Because impulse control is still being developed in young children, there can be a lag between what a young child wants immediately and learning to be calm and wait for something. Often giving words to children who have bitten once or teaching them to take turns will help with the behavior and typically there will not be another bite. However, it is not unusual for a toddler to bite once or twice.

When a child bites another child at Independence Academy, our policy is that both sets of parents are called and informed of the incident if the skin has been broken. Children involved in the incident will never be named to keep both children's anonymity. The parents of the child who has bitten are given some advice by the classroom teaching team that speaks to the developmental tasks discussed above.

Right after the biting incident, the child who has bitten is told that biting hurts, and that biting is not allowed. The child is asked to use her/his words to resolve conflict and express feelings, not her/his teeth. The child is then encouraged to participate in repairing the bite. This means attending to the hurt child by giving the hurt child an ice pack after the wound is washed with soap and water.

The hurt child is usually calmed by one of the other teachers who administers first aid and attends to the child until she/he feels okay. The hurt child is also told that the teachers will be very careful so that the child will not get hurt again. The biting child is then "shadowed" in the classroom by a teacher, given a lot of guidance and language and is watched for other biting attempts or impulsive behavior. After both children are calm and feel more comfortable an incident report is written by the teachers and placed in both children's cubbies to be signed by parents and filed.

If the biting behavior continues, **and this means after two bites within a week**, a meeting is then set up between the Director and the parents of the child who is biting. **If a child bites twice in one day, the parents are called by the administration to pick up their child. The Director may suggest that the parents consider having their child evaluated for oral/motor sensory therapy and/or play therapy.**

If the above procedures are not successful, the Director will schedule a meeting with parents to discuss other alternatives.

Child Care Procedures

Student Recordkeeping

All confidential student records, including incident and behavioral reports and notes to and from the teachers, are kept in the front office. Your child's safety and welfare is of the utmost importance. Please do not send confidential information: notes regarding family health issues, financial information, etc. to school in a backpack or diaper bag. Please submit hand written correspondence directly to the Administration or Lead teacher.

Birthdays at School

The school keeps a record of each child's birthday and celebrates each in a special manner. Pictures of students from birth to present are an excellent lesson in history that is personal and fun. Your child may share these at circle time. Please consult with the student's teachers for planning and suggestions.

Store bought treats are allowed if there are no allergies in the classroom. Acceptable treats would include fruit or muffins, Sugary treats are to be limited. Please consult with your child's teacher to assure that treats brought for sharing are appropriate for all classmates. Balloons, party favors, candy, etc. are not permitted.

Cultural Celebrations

Independence Academy is a non-parochial school. We are proud of the fact that people of different cultures and religions place their children within our school. This requires our sensitivity to deep religious feelings especially in late December and in the spring. Religious holidays are presented as cultural celebrations that enrich all of our lives.

Keeping in mind these ideals, our guidelines for holiday celebrations:

1. Present religious events and celebrations from a historical and cultural perspective.
2. If several celebrations occur near each other in time or season it is appropriate to deal with all. The themes should be cultural and historical and not religious.
3. Not to include any type of prayer or any words that can be interpreted as a prayer.
4. The religious holidays in late December are referred to as "Winter Holidays" and the spring as "Spring Break"

Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma Policy

Belief statement

We, Independence Academy, believe that preventing, recognizing, responding to, and reporting shaken baby syndrome and abusive head trauma (SBS/AHT) is an important function of keeping children safe, protecting their healthy development, providing quality child care, and educating families.

Background

SBS/AHT is the name given to a form of physical child abuse that occurs when an infant or small child is violently shaken and/or there is trauma to the head. Shaking may last only a few seconds but can result in severe injury or even death. According to North Carolina Child Care Rule (child care centers, 10A NCAC 09 .0608, family child care homes, 10A NCAC 09 .1726), each child care facility licensed to care for children up to five years of age shall develop and adopt a policy to prevent SBS/AHT. care centers, 10A NCAC 09 .0608, family child care homes, 10A NCAC 09 .1726), each child care facility licensed to care for children up to five years of age shall develop and adopt a policy to prevent SBS/AHT.

Procedure/Practice

Recognizing:

- Children are observed for signs of abusive head trauma including irritability and/or high pitched crying, difficulty staying awake/lethargy or loss of consciousness, difficulty breathing, inability to lift the head, seizures, lack of appetite, vomiting, bruises, poor feeding/sucking, no smiling or vocalization, inability of the eyes to track and/or decreased muscle tone. Bruises may be found on the upper arms, rib cage, or head resulting from gripping or from hitting the head.

Responding to:

- If SBS/ABT is suspected, staff will:
 - Call 911 immediately upon suspecting SBS/AHT and inform the director and call the parents/guardians.
 - If the child has stopped breathing, trained staff will begin pediatric CPR.

Reporting:

- Instances of suspected child maltreatment in child care are reported to the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) by calling 1-800-859-0829 or by emailing webmasterdcd@dhhs.nc.gov.
- Instances of suspected child maltreatment in the home are reported to the Harnett County Department of Social Services. Phone number:910-893-7500

Prevention strategies to assist staff* in coping with a crying, fussing, or distraught child

Staff first determine if the child has any physical needs such as being hungry, tired, sick, or in need of a diaper change. If no physical need is identified, staff will attempt one or more of the following strategies:

- Rock the child, hold the child close, or walk with the child.
- Stand up, hold the child close, and repeatedly bend knees.
- Sing or talk to the child in a soothing voice.
- Gently rub or stroke the child's back, chest, or tummy.
- Offer a pacifier or try to distract the child with a rattle or toy.
- Take the child for a ride in a stroller.
- Turn on music or white noise.

In addition, the facility:

- Provides support when parents/guardians are trying to calm a crying child and encourage parents to take a calming break if needed.

Behaviors that are prohibited include (but are not limited to):

- shaking or jerking a child
- tossing a child into the air or into a crib, chair, or car seat
- pushing a child into walls, doors, or furniture

Strategies to ensure staff members understand the brain development of children up to five years of age

All staff take training on SBS/AHT within the first two weeks of employment. Training includes recognizing, responding to, and reporting child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment as well as the brain development of children up to five years of age. Staff review and discuss:

- Brain Development from Birth video, the National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, www.zerotothree.org/resources/156-brain-wonders-nurturing-healthy-brain-development-from-birth
- The Science of Early Childhood Development, Center on the Developing Child, developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-eed/Resources

Resources

Parent web resources

- The American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Abusive-Head-Trauma-Shaken-Baby-Syndrome.aspx
- The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome: <http://dontshake.org/family-resources>
- The Period of Purple Crying: <http://purplecrying.info/>

Facility web resources

- Caring for Our Children, Standard 3.4.4.3 Preventing and Identifying Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma, <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView.cfm?StdNum=3.4.4.3&=+>
- Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/trprev/Preventing_SBS_508-a.pdf
- Early Development & Well-Being, Zero to Three, www.zerotothree.org/early-development

References

Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma Policy

1. The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome, www.dontshake.org
 2. NC DCDEE, ncchildcare.dhhs.state.nc.us/general/mb_ccrulespublic.asp
 3. Shaken baby syndrome, the Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/shaken-baby-syndrome/basics/symptoms/con-20034461
 4. Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED, American Red Cross, www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4240175_Pediatric_ready_reference.pdf
 5. Calming Techniques for a Crying Baby, Children's Hospital Colorado, www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/calm-a-crying-baby/calming-techniques
 6. Caring for Our Children, Standard 1.7.0.5: Stress <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/1.7.0.5>
- Application This policy applies to children up to five years of age and their families, operators, early educators, substitute providers, and uncompensated providers. Communication Staff*

Children's Safety Policies

Custody Agreements

If a custody agreement is in effect for a child, it MUST be provided via email to the admissions office upon acceptance of enrollment. A child may not attend until the custody agreement is on file.

Emergency Contact Protocol

In the event of illness or incident involving a student, where the parent must be contacted but cannot be reached, we will give three phone calls in a period of 30 minutes, then move on to the emergency contacts. If it is a medical emergency, all points of contact will be attempted immediately.

Arrival/Dismissal Policies as They Relate to Parents

Our concerns for the children's safety, both physical and emotional, require that once the child has been released to the parent's care, the child is still not permitted to run in the hallways or roam the building and grounds unattended.

Parents who spend a little time in their child's classroom need also to remember that while their child is in her/his classroom, class rules that encourage appropriate behavior still apply for both adults and children. We gently remind adults:

- To use quiet voices
- To walk easily and quietly in the class
- Not to enter a room with sleeping children
- To respect a child's concentration on an activity and not distract him/her at work
- To hold conversation to a minimum and not engage in a spontaneous parent conference at the door during arrival/dismissal

Parents visiting in classes may have an anxious effect on other children settling in for the morning or writing for their parents at day's end, so please give a gentle cue if it is time for visiting parents to leave. Decorum in voice and demeanor is necessary at all times.

Safety at the Garden, Nature Walk, or Playground

Children need physical activity, either inside or outside. Physical activity is considered part of the curriculum. Classrooms will be outside for a minimum of one hour every day. This requires the support of families sending warm layers for cool weather and rain gear for wet weather. Time spent outside can be calming and inspire inquiry into the natural surroundings. Our outdoor spaces are set up for children to test their physical abilities, practice balancing, and learn how to assess risks. We talk with students about safety on the playground and encourage children to practice these skills. By enrolling your child at Independence Academy you are acknowledging that your child will participate in Risky Play and will be monitored by teachers/administration to assess their abilities.

No throwing of equipment is to be permitted, unless it is a safely played game of ball.

The level of child voices needs to be consistent with where they are (classroom/quiet, gym/louder, park/loudest). Screaming is not permitted. Staff should walk over to children to speak with them and avoid raising their voices in the playground or garden.

Children should wear sneakers or rubber-soled shoes, not jellies, flip-flops or sandals, for these are dangerous in the garden and outdoor situations.

If your child has an allergy to plants, insects, animals, or food, make a note of it in their admissions packet and make sure their teachers and administrators are aware of the severity of the allergy and the required treatment for exposures. Children will be allowed on supervised outings into our gardens where they may come into contact with insects and plants. Make sure children are aware of their own allergies.

Health Policies

Teachers are responsible for seeing that obviously ill children are not admitted to school for that day. If your child is not well enough to participate in everything on the daily schedule, including recess, please keep them home.

Each classroom is responsible for awareness of any drug, food, or insect allergies of children under their care. Parents are responsible for updating children's health records to that effect.

Smoking is prohibited on any and all school locations, inside and outside.

All medicines must be kept in the classroom in a locked backpack accompanied by an emergency action plan, administration log or waiver. Please come to the office with any new medication. Any time medication is administered it must be documented in the child's file. We may not dispense non-prescription medicines to any children that do not include written instructions from a doctor.

Head Lice

Students with lice and/or nits will be sent home and may not return to school without a doctor's note and are nit free. Head lice can be a nuisance but they have not been shown to spread disease. Personal hygiene or cleanliness in the home or school has nothing to do with getting head lice.

Medical Accident Procedures

For Children's Care

In case of child injury, basic first aid will be applied. In the event of a serious injury, a parent will be notified. If the parents are not available, the emergency numbers will be called. If these person(s) cannot be reached, the Advice nurse may be called for medical direction and/or the child taken to the hospital/ER.

For minor scrapes/bruises ("boo-boos"): We will wash off the area with soap and water, put on a Band-Aid if appropriate, and fill out an incident report stating what happened so that parent(s) can receive it at pick-up time.

For bites: check to see whether skin was broken. Quickly wash off the area with soap and water if unbroken skin; fill out an incident report stating what happened so that parent(s) can receive it at pick-up time. Call parents to notify if the skin has been broken.

For sick children (fever (100.1 or above), two diarrheas, one incident of vomiting, unexplained rash, or child complains of illness): We will call the parent(s) immediately, explain the problem, and tell them to come and pick up their child. Until a parent arrives, the sick child shall be placed in the front office until picked up. We consider calling 911 if the temperature is over 104 and is accompanied by additional symptoms (trembling limbs, eyes glazed, etc). Students may not be readmitted to school until 24 hours free of medication, fever, vomiting, diarrhea or rash. In some instances, a doctor's note may be required for admittance. Please note that these guidelines may change based on updated information from NC Health and Human Services.

Serious wounds (severe bump on the head, loosening of teeth): We will apply ice to the area, call the parent(s) immediately and explain what happened. Describe the nature of the wound and tell them to come pick up their child immediately.

On the day of the incident, teachers must fill out an incident form for all accidents/illnesses. All signed and completed incident reports must be kept on file.

Abuse & Neglect

As childcare providers, we are legally bound to report any suspected abuse or neglect. Before reporting any suspected inappropriate activity, we will gather all necessary information and assess the situation. We will then act accordingly in the best interest of the child

EMERGENCY PLAN

Emergency Phone Numbers

If an emergency requires calling for an ambulance, Police, and/or Fire Department, the following procedures should be followed:

- **Ambulance services: 911**
- **Police: 911**
- **Fire: 911**
- **Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222,**
- **For all area-wide emergencies, listen to the radio for instructions from emergency personnel.**

NEAREST HOSPITAL: *Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg
Central Carolina Hospital, Sanford, NC
Central Carolina Hospital, Sanford, NC*

Annual Inspections

Inspections occur annually. We are licensed by the State of North Carolina and subject to Fire and Safety, Sanitation by the Department of Public Health and the Department of Child Development and Early Education.

Training and Drills

We all hope to avoid any emergency situations throughout the school year, however, in the event that an emergency situation arises we will be prepared to keep our children safe. In accordance with State law, fire drills are conducted monthly and lockdown drills are conducted at least quarterly. All students and staff are required to participate in these mandated drills. The Office Staff will maintain a record of these drills.

Security:

Independence Academy's doors are locked at all times. Parents and guardians must use their K2 app in order to unlock the front door for drop off and pick up. If your app is not working, please ring the black doorbell, if no answer, please ring the white doorbell. Our security cameras around the perimeter of our building are always streaming live, and record when there is movement. Fire drills are conducted monthly, and Lock Down drills are conducted quarterly. Children are taught what to do during drills that keeps them engaged and safe but not threatened or alarmed.

RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

(In all situations, listen to the radio for instructions from emergency personnel.)

Fire

Evacuate to meeting place at *PARKING LOT*.

- Evacuate building and take roll communicated via wireless radio
- Close all doors and windows to rooms when evacuating.
- If smoke deepens, stay low to the ground.
- When approaching a closed door, feel with the back of hand before opening; feel temperature along the crack between door and floor or frame.
- Shut down HVAC system (air conditioners and fans).
- Approval must be received from fire officials before reentering the building.

Fire Safety Tips

- ◆ Each teacher should know at every moment where each child in his/her group is.
- ◆ Safe, orderly leaving is to be observed; there is much danger in running.
- ◆ Keep calm. Never try to hide. If the room is smoky, crawl along the floor.
- ◆ Feel the doors. If they are warm, do not open them.
- ◆ If your clothes catch on fire, **stop, drop** to the ground, **and roll** around to smother the flames.
- ◆ Follow the procedures posted in each room.
- ◆ Never block doors or exits with furniture, strollers, or toys.

Armed Intruder/Threatening Individual Lock Down, Shelter in Place

- Summon students and employees into lockable classrooms and offices.
- Take care not to lock out students or employees still in hallways or bathrooms.
- Lock doors to classrooms and offices.
- Cover glass on interior classroom or office doors.
- Turn off lights.
- Sit on the floor away from windows and remain quiet.
- Deactivate bell and fire alarm systems (if possible).
- Keep other students and employees away from building.
- Lock exterior doors.
- Do not leave a secured classroom, office, or building without approval from the police or Executive Director.
- Do not attempt to confront or subdue intruders.

SHELTERING IN PLACE: Should we need to 'shelter in place' or 'lock down,' no parents will be allowed in or out of the building until we receive advice from the Emergency Services/Harnett County Sheriff's Department. **SHELTERING IN PLACE:** Should we need to 'shelter in place' or 'lock down,' no parents will be allowed in or out of the building until we receive advice from the Emergency Services/Harnett County Sheriff's Department.

PARENT NOTIFICATION: If possible, parents will be notified by e-mail or other method of communication. Teachers will use their classroom lists to make calls by cellular phone should there not be enough time to notify parents by e-mail or change the message on the answering machine. If cellular phones are inoperable, the children will remain with their teachers until a parent or approved adult arrives to retrieve them.

NOTE: We will ONLY release children to those whose names are on the approved pick-up lists provided by the parents in the admission packet.

Independence Academy will keep the building secured. All points of access will be locked during the day except for during high traffic times.

School-to-Home Communications

Monthly Classroom Updates

Classroom teachers will provide a monthly newsletter to parents by e-mail or by letter hanging on your students hook. These indicate the group activities that occurred in previous weeks. It is a summary of the group's activities for the month.

School-Wide Newsletter:

The Directress and Administrators produce a whole-school newsletter. School wide newsletters will be sent out within the first week of every month and any updated/new information will be sent out as needed.

PARENT CONFERENCES

Teachers hold two required Parent/Teacher conferences per school year in November and May. Parents are free to schedule a meeting with teachers any time that they want to discuss their child or the classroom.

E-mails

Each Lead Teacher has a school email address. Parents are encouraged to send emails concerning classroom questions; these will be responded to within 24 hours. E-mails are not confidential or necessarily confidential. E-mails do not take the place of face-to-face communications. Teachers plan a time to check their emails once per day. All parent emails must be in the classroom's address book on the Independence Academy Mail System prior to the start of school.

Telephone Calls to Parents

Teachers may call parents whenever they have information (concern or celebration) about a child. Parents can call the school office to request a call back from a teacher. Teachers will return the telephone call within the same day if it is received by 2:30 PM.

Grievances

Parent Grievances

The procedure for consideration and adjustment of grievances of any parent shall be as follows. **The parent will consult with the child's Teacher first.** Failing to reach settlement in conference with the Teacher, the parent will consult with the Director of the School. The Director will consult with the Administrative team as necessary, and help mediate a meeting between the Parent and Teacher.

All IA Parents and Guardians are expected to behave respectfully towards staff, other adults and children in accordance with our behavioral policies outlined in this handbook.

IA reserves the right to withdrawal a student and family for failure to follow policy outlined in this handbook.