



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  
Vanderbilt Child and Family Center

2025-2026

PARENT  
HANDBOOK



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# WELCOME

This handbook is designed to inform families of the policies and procedures of The Acorn School at Vanderbilt University's Child and Family Center (VCFC) that are implemented in support of children's healthy development, to comply with licensure rules for childcare agencies, and to enable a successful home-to-school partnership.



## IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

General inquiries please email: [cfcadmin@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:cfcadmin@vanderbilt.edu)

19<sup>th</sup> Avenue Child Care Center 615-322-1083

18<sup>th</sup> Avenue Child Care Center 615-322-5332

Edgehill Child Care Center 615-322-8076

## STATEMENT OF SERVICE

The Acorn School offers early childhood education and licensed care to Vanderbilt full-time employees who are benefits-eligible, post-doctoral scholars and to full time degree-seeking students, for their children ages 6 weeks through 6 years. Waiting List priority is given to siblings of enrolled children.



## PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The Acorn School provides a Whole Child (mind, body, spirit) approach to Early Childhood Care and Education that is inspired by the Reggio pedagogy. Conceptual understandings emerge through a child's direct engagement with the world. Through primary relationships, shared language and concepts become the tools which children use to absorb social practices and construct their understanding of themselves and their community.

Our programs reflect the research-based understanding that play is essential to children's health and well-being, and foundational to children's learning. The Acorn School supports children to create their own knowledge through hands-on experiences and child-initiated play. Teachers nurture children, providing encouragement, protection, security, stimulation, and supervision, and an Emergent Curriculum.

## CHILDCARE PROGRAM QUALITY

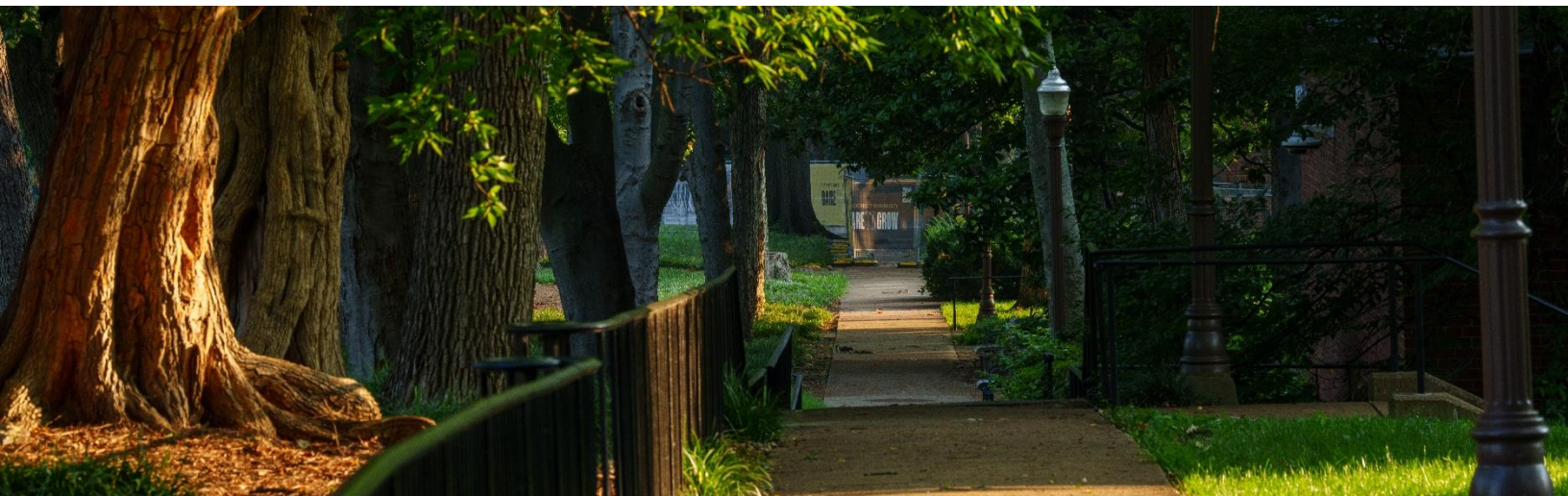
The Acorn School engages in ongoing program quality improvement informed by metrics developed by and for the field of Early Childhood Care and Education.

An example of this is the Pyramid Observation Tool for Preschool Classrooms (TPOT) and the Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) assessment instruments designed to measure the fidelity of implementation of practices associated with the Pyramid Model in infant and toddler care settings and preschool programs.

The Acorn School Emergent Curriculum is featured in the Early Childhood Success video series produced by The Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation.

[Child-Led Inquiry in a Pre-K Classroom](#)

Team members from The Acorn School collaborate on community resources for excellence in early childhood education including the City of Nashville and United Way's [Raising Readers](#) and the [Governor's Early Literacy Foundation](#).





## COMMUNICATION

The Acorn School requires parents to stay informed about their classroom and center to ensure compliance with updated policy and procedures. To support communication for understanding, the following tools and strategies are in place:

### Acorn Parent Handbook

Updated annually, parents and guardians are required to provide signature documentation that they have read the policies and procedures contained therein.

### Electronic Communication

The Brightwheel App provides parents with classroom information. Parent participation is required by administration to support families with classroom notices and program alerts.

### Parent Conferences

Parents meet with their child's teacher for a 30-minute conference two times each year. Parent-teacher communication is the primary co-held responsibility for families and teachers and strengthens their relationship and understanding. Additional conferences may be scheduled.

### Social Media

[@VanderbiltCFC](#) Please follow us on Instagram!

### Verbal Exchange

Parents and teachers exchange greetings during sign in and sign out transitions and convey essential information. Longer conversations need to be scheduled for when the teacher is not directly supervising children.

### Written Communication

Bulletin and Electronic Boards, Classroom Newsletters, Documentation Panels, Incident Reports, Site Director Newsletters, and Welcome Packets

## WINDOWS INTO LEARNING

The Acorn School engages children and parents in ongoing reflection of children's learning, utilizing audio and visual strategies of documentation. These include presentation panels inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, there are several activities embedded in The Acorn School program to support adult awareness of each child's individual development:

- Teachers maintain a portfolio for each child from date of entrance through K-Camp (or leaving date) that follows the child to each classroom and contains anecdotal notes, photographs, and work samples.
- Parents and teachers complete the [ASQ tool](#) twice annually to support teachers to better understand the individual development of their child.
- Parents attend the Fall and Spring Parent Conferences to share observations and discuss the child's strengths and needs. Critical for teachers' understanding of your child, conferences reciprocally provide understanding of the child's development.
- The Acorn School partners with student researchers and trainees, including from the Peabody College of Education and Human Development. Activities in the past have included Speech and Language screenings for children ages two years and older and Math Lab assessments. Parents are informed of activities in advance.
- The Acorn School uses the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tools (TPITOS™ and TPOT™) for classrooms to reinforce high-quality practices that support children's social- emotional development and behavior.

## RESEARCH

VCFC benefits from a relationship with university colleges and departments. This relationship reflects VCFC's contribution as a university team member, and our commitment to Vanderbilt University's mission, goals, and values to be a center for scholarly research, informed and creative teaching, and service to the community and society at large. Parents may be directly contacted by researchers and informed of opportunities to participate in research activities. Research study participation is not required. Invitations to participate will include information about the study and an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent agreement when necessary and appropriate.

Through an established partnership with the Peabody College of Education and Human Development, The Acorn School serves as a site for observation and training by providing access to the classrooms at each site for student and faculty observations. All guests as part of the Peabody partnership are required to conduct themselves at the highest level of professionalism and complete a background check as required by Vanderbilt's compliance and standards.

VCFC partners with Vanderbilt University's [Next Steps](#) program to provide career development training to Next Steps students through an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program that pairs an Acorn Mentor Teacher with a Next Steps student for training to gain competencies that may then result in a professional certificate.



## OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play and explorations are an important foundational learning experience for young children at The Acorn School. “Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development.” (Kellert, 2005) Playing outdoors benefits the child through:

- Communication and collaboration
- Decreased anxiety
- Enriched perceptual ability
- Heightened focus
- Planning and assessing
- Self-esteem and self-image
- Strength, agility, and coordination

Each childcare center has a designated, age-appropriate playground. VCFC appreciates that our childcare centers are located on Vanderbilt’s walkable campus with its unique and distinctive park setting and will take full advantage to engage the children with the public art, arboretum, and green open spaces.

DOE requires that licensed childcare centers ensure that children receive an opportunity for outdoor play every day that the temperature registers between 32 and 95 degrees. Additionally, The Acorn School will take children outside when it is colder and warmer to observe nature. Children are advised to wear non-skid shoes with closed toes and heels with socks to support walking and active play. Please send children in clothing appropriate for the weather, labeled with the child’s first and last name. During a light rain, we may take a walk, so a raincoat is advisable. On snowy days, please send boots, hats, gloves, and layers of warm clothing. During the summer, opportunities increase for water play.

Parents will apply a thick coat of sunscreen to their child every morning before bringing them to childcare. In the summer, teachers will reapply sunscreen throughout the day as necessary. Parents may choose to use insect repellent on the child by applying it at home.



## TRANSITIONS

Childcare “transition” is the morning drop-off routine parents establish with the teacher for their child, especially infants and toddlers, to feel soothed and confident as their care relationship is transferred from the parent to the teacher.

Develop a drop-off ritual to say "good-bye" and reassure your child. Children are capable of developing good management of their emotions given support, encouragement, and the opportunity. If teachers are concerned that your child is unable to be soothed in a reasonable amount of time, the Site Director will contact you for advice.

Transition may also refer to the child engaging with a new classroom and teaching team at The Acorn School. The majority of children transition into a new classroom in August (some newly enrolled children may be accepted throughout the year as space becomes available.) Most children quickly adapt to a new classroom. Children are assigned to specific classrooms based on their age by August 4, 2025 to conform to DOE requirements for group size and adult to child ratio in licensed childcare and expected to stay in that classroom through July 2026. Teacher continuity is a high priority for The Acorn School, recognizing that teachers are also employees with rights and private lives and that sometimes staffing may necessarily adjust to manage teacher periods of absence or attrition.

### Teachers Managing Transitions

The child’s current teachers will collaborate with new teachers to support understanding of how to meet individual care needs. Care Plans and critical health information will be shared (such as management of allergies) before your child transitions.

The new teacher will have your child’s cubby labeled and birthday board ready. The new teacher will provide new parents with a copy of the classroom Daily Schedule, Lesson Plan, and Newsletter in the first week of your child’s attendance.

When the child transitions to a new classroom, the current teacher will transfer your child’s cubby contents, personal possessions, and portfolio. The current teacher will support your child in the weeks ahead by positively discussing “what will be the same, what is different.” As opportunity presents itself, peers transitioning together may visit the new classroom together. *The Acorn School cannot guarantee peers will remain in the same classroom year over year.*





## PERSONAL BELONGINGS

The Acorn School cannot assume responsibility or liability for any items brought from home that become lost or broken.

The Acorn School provides sufficient learning materials and comfort supplies, including sheets and blankets. If your child has a favorite sleep toy or any other security item, please check first with the Site Director to make sure the item is allowed under licensing regulation.

Items from home can support classroom learning. Please check first with your teacher if you would like to share a personal belonging that could enhance children's understanding; this may include an artifact, book, musical instrument, or photograph. The Acorn School asks parents to exercise caution when allowing children to bring personal items to class. Please check first with your child's teacher to see if there is a day designated for sharing such items. Please label all items brought from home to school.

The Acorn School does not allow candy, cosmetics, gum, money, or toy weapons (or real weapons) at school.

Please be mindful of managing personal possessions and exercise care (such as when setting down a purse) to make sure contents are not accessible to children. This includes care taken with knowing what is in the hands and pockets of older siblings to ensure items that are choking hazards are not accidentally left in infant and toddler spaces. *To help manage this risk, parents are asked to drop older children off in their classrooms first.*



## DISCIPLINE

The Acorn School embraces the definition of "discipline" as meaning "to teach." All human beings want to feel respect and self-worth and have a sense of belonging. The Acorn School does not punish children, we educate children. By honoring their interests and needs, adults will enable children to become capable, responsible, successful adults. Staff may never use any form of physical punishment when disciplining a child. Staff will not use language that humiliates and demeans children. The primary focus for teachers is to support young children's self-image as capable of self-control, verbal problem-solving, and responding to others with kindness and empathy.

The Acorn School seeks to honor the Whole Child by endeavoring to understand their beliefs, and to create dynamic spaces for sharing and learning culture, balancing this with the understanding that quality Early Care and Education environments should offer respite to children and their families from the secular marketing frenzy that assaults all our senses during Holiday times. The Acorn School will facilitate activities about only those holiday celebrations *in which children express interest*. Teachers will follow the child's lead and ensure that ideas and themes valued by children are explored in a developmentally appropriate manner that supports established learning goals for the children and that is respectful to all the families and staff in the classroom.



## NUTRITION

Parents provide 100% of nutrition for infants and toddlers under 12 months of age. This is detailed in the class Welcome Packet.

The Acorn School nutrition practice for children 12 months of age and older:

- Children wash hands, sit down, use a sippy cup or a cup, and try new and familiar foods.
- Teachers sit with children to model courtesy and proper use of tools.
- Snack is a small group activity of 2 - 8 children with one teacher. Teachers will encourage every child age 12 months and older to attend snack, but children are not required to do so. The Acorn School provides snacks consisting of at least two food groups.
- All children ages 12 months and older are required to wash their hands and join the lunch table for at least ten minutes. Every child will be encouraged to eat. No child will be forced to eat. Parents provide lunch in an insulated lunch bag using a thermos to maintain the food at hot or cold temperatures. The Acorn School will not microwave or refrigerate school lunches.
- Teachers recognize that meal time is a curricular activity to reinforce children's small motor skills, language development, and pro-social engagement as they identify as part of a community.

### Food Allergies

If a child is allergic to any food (or develops an allergy after enrollment) parents are required to immediately inform the Site Director by email (you will be provided with any necessary forms required by licensing regulation) AND notify classroom teachers verbally and in writing.

### Food Related Conditions

Parents must meet with their Site Director and provide supporting medical verification (a signed and dated note from your child's pediatrician) identifying the condition (e.g., food allergy, Celiac Disease, Diabetes) and listing specific foods your child is not allowed to eat. Without documentation, teachers will not withhold any item.

### Sharing Food from Home

Due to complex food allergy management, parents may not bring in or order food for their child's classroom to be shared with peers.

The Acorn School will not distribute food in classrooms brought in by parents, including to celebrate children's birthdays.

It is possible that a classroom may engage in a cooking project. Teachers will design these learning activities to ensure that every child in the classroom can be included and notify parents in advance by posting a lesson plan. Parents may be invited to supply an ingredient.

Periodically the childcare center will host a Family Potluck wherein parents provide a dish from home. Children will participate in this event only with their parent/guardian's supervision to select and enjoy foods appropriate for them. VCFC assumes no responsibility or liability for foods provided by families.



## WELL CHILD

VCFC is licensed as a Well Child program. Children must be able to engage in the daily rhythm of The Acorn School program to attend. Parent partnership is necessary to comply with the Well Child Policies. The goal is to keep children healthy in school and parents at work. VCFC must prioritize the health of all children over the inconvenience to one family asked to care for their ill child at home.

*Parents will report contagious illness to their Site Director as soon as possible and within the day of diagnosis so that the classroom can be informed and the illness posted in accordance with licensing policy (the child's identity will be kept confidential.)*

### Hand Washing

Hand washing is the #1 practice in place to prevent the spread of illness. By teaching children healthy hygiene practices, adults minimize the spread of illness. Parents will facilitate children's handwashing upon entering the classroom. Teachers will ensure every child washes their hands before and after eating and after toileting, including diaper changes.

### Partnership

We ask that parents assess their child's health and wellness based on the child's behavior at home as a first indicator of ill health before arriving at the childcare center. If upon arrival teachers identify that the child is not well enough to attend The Acorn School, the child will be sent home with the parent. If the child becomes ill while at school, they will be isolated from the rest of the children as able. Parents will be notified and asked to come and pick up the child as soon as possible and within one hour. Children may return to The Acorn School after they have been *symptom free* 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication. VCFC defines these policies in an effort to protect the health and safety of all children enrolled in the program. These policies align with the Metro Nashville Public Schools' policies.

Parents may not bring a child to VCFC if they exhibit any of the following symptoms and until the child is symptom free for 24 hours:

- *Fever*: A fever of 100 degrees or higher. Fevers are generally an indication that the body is attempting to fight off infection.
- *Nasal Discharge*: A clogged or runny nose with green or yellow mucus. The only exception is if the child was seen by a pediatrician and has a pediatric release note.
- *Conjunctivitis*: Commonly termed Pink Eye, this condition is highly contagious. Symptoms include itchy, watery eyes or discharge. The child may not be at VCFC until symptom free or if the parent provides a pediatric release note.
- *Lice*: The child must be louse and nit free to be readmitted to childcare. A child diagnosed with scabies or lice shall have written documentation proof of treatment signed and dated prior to readmission, per licensing regulation.

- *Diarrhea*: This is especially of concern for infants and toddlers because of the risk of dehydration. The child may not return to The Acorn School until symptom free. Teachers recognize the difference between loose stool related to breast feeding and teething, and diarrhea; parents cannot negotiate on this symptom.
- *Vomiting*: This is especially of concern for infants and toddlers because of the risk of dehydration. The child may not return to The Acorn School until symptom free. Teachers recognize the difference between spit-up and vomiting; parents cannot negotiate on this symptom.
- *Unexplained Skin Conditions/Rash*: Children will be excluded from The Acorn School for any patterns of small bumps, blisters and blotches (including: Chicken Pox, Fifth's Disease, Hand- Foot-Mouth Disease, Impetigo, Measles, Rubella, Scarlet Fever.)

The child may not be at school until symptom free for 24 hours or if the parent provides a pediatric release note meeting all the following components:

- ✓ The note dated within 48 hours of the day provided to The Acorn School (presented on the day the parent seeks to readmit child)
- ✓ Stamped by a medical office
- ✓ Expressly stating that the child was examined by a physician
- ✓ Expressly stating that the child is well enough to attend licensed childcare
- ✓ Expressly stating that the child poses no risk of contagion to the other children and adults in the childcare

Template for Readmission to School Note:

*Stamp or Letterhead of Medical Office*

*(Child's First and Last Name) was seen by (physician's name) on (date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_) for (precise reason including symptoms). They pose no risk of contagion to other children and may return to school on (date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_).*

The Acorn School will not administer medication to children.

#### DIAPERING AND TOILET LEARNING

Please refer to your classroom's welcome packet for the practice specific to your child's age group.





## BIRTHDAYS

Children's birthdays are a special time and Acorn kids will be recognized in the classroom with a cheer and their favorite song. Please do not bring food or gift bags to school. These will not be distributed. Many of our children have varying nutritional needs and therefore snacks including sweet treats are not allowed.

## TEACHER APPRECIATION

Parents coordinate teacher appreciation activities as a learning community. These delightful events happen throughout the year, with particular festivities in December for holidays and May for Teacher Appreciation Day.

There is an active parent group called CONNECT comprised of two volunteer coordinators from each childcare center. CONNECT meets quarterly to support planning and coordination of teacher appreciation activities and parent engagement across all three childcare centers. If you are inspired to volunteer and support an activity at your child's school, please contact your Site Director who will introduce you to your CONNECT representatives.

## POLICIES

### Attendance

The Acorn School is open twelve months a year, Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Children are required to be signed in at school by 10:00 AM every day to support their social and emotional development with a consistent routine (an exception will be made for pediatric appointments, with a note.)

Please inform the program before 10:00 AM if your child will not be attending due to illness or unforeseen absence. Please communicate planned absences to your Site Director via email or by Brightwheel and verbally to your classroom teachers.

The Acorn School is closed on the following holidays observed by Vanderbilt:

- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving
- day after Thanksgiving
- Vanderbilt University Winter Break
- New Year's Day
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth

Date	Additional Important Days
Friday, June 13, 2025	Enrollment Packet for 2025-26 due
July 28 - Aug 1, 2025	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Days
Friday, August 1, 2025	Classroom Open for Teacher Meet & Greet from 3:00 PM-4:00 PM
Monday, August 4, 2025	2025-2026 School Year Begins
Friday, October 17, 2025	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day
Friday, January 2, 2026	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day
Friday, March 13, 2026	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day

Additionally, The Acorn School may be closed on designated chancellor days, including due to inclement weather and on days as identified by public health agencies. The Acorn School is mindful of the impact of unanticipated school closure on working families and seeks to minimize these events. *There is no tuition proration for dates of facility closure or child absences.*

### Access Code

Every family is provided with the access code, which is changed quarterly or more frequently. Parents who cannot recall the access code must knock or ring the doorbell to gain entrance. Do not share access codes with others.

### Supervise Your Child at All Times

Please make sure your child is supervised by you at all times until signed into the program and placed with the teacher in the classroom. Please encourage walking feet. Please make sure you close doors and gates securely behind you. Do not allow your child to input the code, open doors, climb on furniture and equipment, or touch the adult tools on the reception counter. Encourage your child to notice the electronic bulletin board (they might see their picture or a friend's!) Your partnership to establish safe and respectful boundaries for your child is appreciated.

### Sign In and Sign Out

In compliance with licensing regulation and to ensure the safety and supervision of your child, sign your child in and out each day with your full legal signature or electronic code – parents that fail to complete this step will be called and required to return to the childcare center and do so. After signing-in, take your child to the designated classroom or area. Please help your child through the morning steps (toileting and hand washing). Parents must connect visually and verbally with a member of the teaching staff in that classroom before leaving your child.

## **Children may not be left in any space unattended at any time.**

The adult responsible for taking the child from The Acorn School must be on the child's Emergency Information and Authorization form. A government issued photo ID is required of anyone picking up the child – please have it ready to show to the staff on duty as requested. The authorized person must visually and verbally connect with the staff member on duty and sign the child out with the accurate time and date they are being picked up.

The Acorn School has the responsibility to refuse to release a child to any person:

who appears to be incapacitated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance that may impair their judgement to safely care for a child, OR

whose behavior may, as deemed by a reasonable person, place the child in imminent risk. In the event of such an occurrence, teachers will suggest that another authorized individual (listed on the child's Emergency Information form) be contacted to come and pick the child up.

If the authorized adult picking up does not cooperate and insists on removing their child from care, and/or if the staff member reasonably believes that refusal to release the child could place staff or other children in imminent risk, staff are directed to release the child to the guardian, but immediately call VUPD 911 (or non-emergency 322-2745) to report the potential risk of a possibly impaired driver.

## Tuition

Childcare tuition is payable in advance and due in full at the first of each month. Statements are sent via email from Brightwheel five days prior to due date.

Parents will be notified when payments are past due. If an account is two months past due, parents will be asked to disenroll their child.

There is no pro-ration of tuition for child absences, including for illness, holiday or vacation, or site closure.

Families will provide one month's (thirty days) written notice of intention to disenroll or the financial equivalency of one month's tuition fee.

There are 3 methods of payment.

- The preferred method is automatic payment from your bank account (ACH) there are no fees to families and the monthly payment will be automatically processed on the first day of the month (you will receive a statement of your account 5 days prior to payment processing).
- You may also choose to set up automatic payment by credit card, however a 2.7% credit card processing fee applies (This is collected by the credit card processing company, not VCFC).
- Families that need the accommodation may pay tuition by check payable to Vanderbilt Child and Family Center and drop it off at your center. **Any checks received after the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month will be charged a \$25 late fee.** There is a \$25.00 returned checkfee.

## Fees for Late Pick Ups

In the event parents are unable to pick up their child **and** depart by 5:30 PM, the child's account will be charged a late fee of \$10 for every five minutes (or portion thereof) that the family remains on site, that is due and payable within 24 hours. Parents arrive on site no later than 5:25 PM to manage their child's transition. Please understand the impact caused by parents that are late picking up their children: this negatively affects the child's sense of security and impacts the personal and professional lives of the teachers.

## Enrollment

All full-time, benefits-eligible Vanderbilt University employees, post-doctoral scholars, and full-time, degree-seeking students may submit a waitlist application. Applications will be accepted throughout the year. Community members may also apply to be considered for any vacancies not utilized by University affiliated families, but Community rates will apply.

The Acorn School actively manages a Wait List to accomplish full program enrollment organized by child's date of birth and date of application. A separate Sibling Wait List is maintained; siblings are prioritized as a space appropriate to their age becomes available. To enroll, families will be contacted and offered placement and have two business days to secure the spot after completing the orientation or the family will be placed back on the Wait List and the next family contacted. A family may choose to "pass" on offered enrollment placement without compromising their spot on the Wait List; the family that chooses to pass will be placed in an inactive status until they re-engage with VCFC in writing to be considered active (no further fee is collected.)

### Disenrollment

Parents are required to provide a minimum 30 days written notice or the financial equivalency of one month's tuition payment.

Children who are eligible for Kindergarten (turning age five years on or before August 15, 2026) will have their last day at The Acorn School on July 31, 2026 unless 30 days written notice is provided determining an earlier leave date. Parents of Kindergarten-eligible children may choose to enroll in the independent or public school kindergarten of their choice or by December 2025 enroll in the Owls Developmental Kindergarten program for 2026-27.

### Non-Discrimination Policy

In compliance with federal law, Vanderbilt University does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, covered veterans' status, or genetic information in its administration of educational policies, programs, activities; or other University-administered programs.

### Pyramid Social-Emotional Tools

The Acorn School uses the Pyramid Model to address the social and emotional development of young children and to address challenging behavior. The Pyramid Model is about promoting positive social and emotional development and preventing challenging behavior.



There are four levels in the Pyramid Model: Nurturing and Responsive Relationships, High Quality and Supportive Environments, Targeted Social and Emotional Strategies, and Individualized Intensive Interventions.

Each of these levels includes a set of practices designed to teach children specific skills to help children participate in the learning environment and learn to navigate social situations in positive ways.



Using the Pyramid Model creates a school environment where children are highly engaged in learning activities and able to participate in quality learning across all areas of development. When children understand how to behave and interact with others, teachers are able to spend less time managing behavior and more time engaging with children in play-based learning. More information about the Pyramid Model and family resources to support social and emotional development in young children can be found at [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel) or <https://challengingbehavior.org/>

### *Special Needs*

The early years are often the time when children's special needs are identified. There are several activities embedded in The Acorn School program to support adult awareness of each child's learning strengths and needs:

- Parents complete the [ASQ tool](#) twice annually to support teachers to better understand the individual development of the child.
- Parent attendance at the Fall and Spring Parent Conferences is critical to observing, documenting, and discussing the child.
- The Acorn School partners with the Peabody College of Education and Human Development in training students to assess children's (ages two years and older) speech and language at the beginning of the Fall semester.

### *Reasonable Accommodations*

Vanderbilt is committed to the principles of equal opportunity. The University provides reasonable accommodations made on a case-by-case basis for qualified persons with disabilities. Please tell us if your child requires a reasonable accommodation to apply for the Program or to perform the Program tasks. Reasonable accommodations are often possible for children with disabilities who wish to participate, so long as the accommodations do not fundamentally alter the nature of the Program, cause undue hardship or otherwise cause a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

The Acorn School recognizes that appropriate supports well address a child's development and learning and will work diligently to meet the individual needs of every child, within the established framework of the licensed childcare ratios, group size, and program design. In the event that a child's needs determine that an alternative learning environment would better support the family, the school will compassionately partner with the parents to ensure this successful transition.

### *Families in Crisis*

The Acorn School makes a strong effort to work with families in crisis, to find real and reasonable solutions that will support children and parents. It is a licensing requirement to state that VCFC reserves the right to terminate enrollment without notice for the following reasons:

- Non-compliance with policies and procedures, including late drop-off and pick-up.
- Failure to submit required documentation, including updated immunizations (*the child will be suspended from care until documents are received.*)

- Failure to cooperate with the Well Child policy.
- Adults choosing to exhibit behavior that threatens the physical or emotional safety of the children and teachers on site.

Parent wellbeing supports children. Vanderbilt University has an employee assistance program and free wellbeing services. If you have questions, please email [Wellbeing@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Wellbeing@vanderbilt.edu)

VCFC's early childhood care and education program has the objective to support children's healthy growth and development. We recognize that many families are in transition and may experience issues that impact temporary or permanent child guardianship.

Parents experiencing family transitions (e.g., adult illness including drug rehabilitation, child custody, marital separation or divorce) may make an appointment to meet privately with their Site Director or the VCFC Executive Director to discuss any matters of importance in relation to issues affecting the well-being of the child as it pertains to their enrollment in the licensed childcare program. Site Directors will confidentially manage this information, sharing with teachers only necessary information regarding these changes in the home to support teachers to understand how to best care for the child, especially as these may result in children's behavior changes in the classroom.

#### Parent/Guardian Custody Management

It is imperative that The Acorn School staff maintain good relationships with all the significant adults in each child's life. In order to provide the best possible care for your child, VCFC asks that parent/guardians strive to implement civil and respectful communication in their partnership with one another.

Parents/Guardians will initiate communication with one another to ensure compliance and understanding with the VCFC policies and procedures, and including by sharing calendar, conference dates, forms, and paperwork. This includes strategies for sharing newsletters, Brightwheel updates, surveys, and other information. Site Directors and teachers will not be utilized as go-betweens. To minimize uncomfortable situations, disputes and problems, VCFC will not tolerate a parent/guardian speaking negatively about the other parent/guardian in front of any child or teachers. Adult confrontation with another on site is unacceptable, will not be tolerated, and subjects the family to immediate disenrollment.

#### Legal Documentation

VCFC complies with the documentation requirements of the TN Department of Education for licensed childcare center regulations. Parents/Guardians must provide written clarity regarding any change in custody arrangements and specifically list on the enrollment form which adult to contact first and listing only persons authorized to pick up the child. ***VCFC will share this data with VUPD as appropriate and necessary to support program compliance and to ensure the safety and well-being of all the children, parents, and staff on site. VCFC will comply with any precise and specific directives of a court order to deny an identified parent/guardian access to the child during program hours or when releasing the child at pick-up time, but this paperwork must be provided in advance of the date of implementation for The Acorn School to honor and implement it.***

## MANDATED REPORTER CHILD ABUSE

Maltreatment and abuse of a child is prohibited by Vanderbilt policy and the law. Staff are held to a high standard to assure children under their care are safe and supervised. All staff are Mandated Reporters, required to report concerns of maltreatment by others. This includes internal reporting and possible reporting to the State of Tennessee (in compliance with the law) if child abuse is suspected. Training is provided to all VCFC staff about identifying and reporting child abuse. Vanderbilt University personnel (including VCFC staff) adhere to Tennessee state law on mandatory child abuse reporting. If you have any concerns about maltreatment, please report those immediately to VCFC or the Vanderbilt Protection of Minors Director ([protectionofminors@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:protectionofminors@vanderbilt.edu)).

## RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Behavioral Health Services	(615) 340-2172
Metro Public Health Department	(615) 340-5616
MNPS	(615) 259-INFO
<a href="#">Tennessee Early Intervention Services</a>	(800) 852-7157/(615) 532-7237
Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line	(877) ASD-VUMC (273-8862)

TRIAD Family Services offer experienced professionals knowledgeable about autism resources.

Email: [autismresources@vumc.org](mailto:autismresources@vumc.org)

Pyramid Tools for Families (e.g., articles, social stories, etc.) can be found at

<https://challengingbehavior.org/implementation/family-engagement/>

## SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION

Licensing regulation requires schools and childcare centers to develop a written plan to address *suspension* and *expulsion*.

The Acorn School understands that children, especially pre-verbal children, use physical expression to share their feelings and needs. An undesirable behavior indicates an opportunity for the child to develop an important skill; it is not a “morals” issue.

Early childhood educators design the learning environment to support children with opportunities to grow these skills, intentionally addressing predictable early childhood “undesirable behaviors” through developmentally appropriate activities, class discussion, and individual coaching.

Discipline is an ongoing process embedded in the child’s experience and relationships. It is possible that some children may exhibit consistent behaviors that are detrimental to the ongoing safety and security of the other children in the classroom. This may include aggression toward peers, such as biting, hitting, and kicking. The Acorn School will handle these situations discreetly, with compassion and in partnership with the family.

In the event that a child's ongoing behavior at school poses a risk to themselves or to the other children in the program, the following steps will be taken:

- The Site Director will meet in person with the parents within 72 hours of the school's documented concerns being communicated to them.
- A written behavior plan signed by the parents and the Site Director will be put into place the day of the meeting. This must include:
  - *Identify the specific behavior being addressed (e.g., biting peers)*
  - *Identify supports in place (e.g., redirecting the child to a specific peer cohort, shadowing, providing a squeeze toy to bite)*
  - *Identify needed supports (e.g., a pediatric developmental evaluation)*
  - *Identify a precise timeline for the behavior plan (e.g., two weeks)*
  - *Identify precise metrics of behavior improvement (e.g., "The child's attempts to bite are reduced to two incidents or less per week.")*
  - *Identify peer respite strategy (e.g., "If the child bites, the parent will take him home for the rest of the day.")*
- The parents will meet with the Site Director to assess the efficacy of the written behavior plan, validate progress, and modify strategies.

In the unlikely event that the child does not respond to the efforts of teachers and parents to correct the undesirable behavior, The Acorn School will provide the family with *30 days' notice* to determine a more appropriate placement.

## AGREEMENTS

I have read The Acorn School Family Handbook and agree to comply with the policies and procedures contained therein.

(Please initial)

\_\_\_\_\_ I have been provided a copy of and thoroughly read the Family Handbook. I understand that a copy is also available on the VCFC website.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read and understand and agree to comply with the policies and procedures set forth in the Handbook.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand and agree that neither Vanderbilt Child and Family Center, Vanderbilt University, nor any of their officers, agents, or employees are liable for bodily injuries or illnesses suffered by my child(ren) or for damages to personal belongings.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand if my child should suffer an injury or illness while participating in the program or any other activity, I authorize the employees of VU or other persons acting on behalf of VU to use their discretion to have my child treated for basic health services, including assessment and treatment of illness or injury, or transported to the nearest medical facility for assessment and treatment of illness or injury.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that Vanderbilt cannot promise or guarantee that my child will not be exposed to an infectious disease. I understand that if my child is immunocompromised my child could be at greater risk of infection and complications. I knowingly accept these risks. I understand that the illness and exposure procedures contained in the FAQ section of the program application are fluid and that procedures may change depending on Vanderbilt policies as well as DOE, Metro Nashville, and the CDC guidelines and recommendations. I understand that failure to comply with procedures may result in disenrollment of my child.

\_\_\_\_\_ Weapons Prohibition: Vanderbilt University is a private institution. All childcare sites (VCFC/Acorn Schools and Susan Gray School) are a part of the university campus. Consistent with university policy and childcare licensing regulations, Vanderbilt University strictly prohibit weapons, including firearms, concealed or otherwise, on the premises of the childcare centers excepting only on-duty law enforcement officers. **Persons with handgun carry permits are not exempt from this prohibition.** The weapons prohibition includes knives and explosives. I understand that persons in violation of this policy will not be admitted to the facility/will be removed from the facility, and may be subject to disenrollment from childcare programs for violating this policy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that VCFC discourages employees from working privately for The Acorn School families (e.g., babysitting) and assumes no responsibility or liability for employees after their scheduled work hours.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that VCFC reserves the right to update this Handbook at any time, to ensure compliance with Vanderbilt University and State of Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) policies and practices and for the continued safety of children and staff.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for staff to include my child on walking/stroller field trips. I understand children will be accompanied by staff and stay within 1.5 miles of the classroom.



\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my student's image to be used in photographs and or any media within The Acorn School program's creative space (e.g., bulletin boards, crafts, booklets.)

\_\_\_\_\_ (optional) I give permission for my student's image to be used on the VCFC website and social media, and VU website and publications.

\_\_\_\_\_ (optional) I give permission for staff to apply sunscreen to my child as needed. I understand that I am responsible for supplying the sunscreen and that the sunscreen I supply must be in the original container, labeled with my child's first and last name.

\_\_\_\_\_ (optional) I give permission for staff to apply insect repellent to my child as needed. I understand that I am responsible for supplying insect repellent and that the insect repellent I supply must be in the original container, labeled with my child's first and last name.

Name of Child to be Enrolled Date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

*A copy of this form will be maintained in your child's file.*