



HopeMark Preschool

Parent Handbook

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History & Philosophy

HopeMark Preschool was established in 1971 as a community outreach project between Hope United Church of Christ and St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Since then, HopeMark has established itself as a recognized presence in the community and has readied thousands of children for Kindergarten.

At HopeMark, we believe that children learn through play. Play enables children to better understand their world. Children enrich their social skills interacting with other children. Manipulative play allows children to problem solve and develop fine and gross motor skills in a safe and supportive environment. Sensory exploration offers children the opportunity to self discover math and science concepts. Through art, children learn creativity and decision making. Dramatic play enhances social, emotional and language skills.

We also focus strongly on the academic skills children need for Kindergarten. From alphabet, number, color and shape recognition to concepts such as sequencing and opposites to writing and pre-reading skills, we prepare your child for success in Kindergarten.

We also recognize the value of unstructured gross motor play. Recent studies are proving that reduced recess time at preschools and elementary schools is resulting in behavior problems and lower test scores. During unstructured outdoor play, children refine and strengthen large muscles while also developing social skills. Children are able to release energy and regulate emotions, and are more able to pay attention in class when they have been given the opportunity to exercise. And with childhood obesity rate continuing to climb, outdoor play provides countless health benefits.

It is our goal that children will emerge from their time at HopeMark with the emotional intelligence skills (Self confidence, awareness and control, the ability to listen, wait ones turn, cooperate, share, and work with others) and the academic foundation that will enrich their experience in Kindergarten and beyond.

Staff

There are two teachers in each classroom, resulting in a maximum student teacher ratio of 10:1. All hold college degrees with an emphasis on or certification to teach early childhood education.

In addition, each teacher is required to participate in early childhood education classes and seminars throughout the school year.

Communication Policy

At HopeMark, we strive to provide families with consistent communication with regard to events at school. A calendar with daily activities as well as a newsletter detailing important notices is emailed home monthly. We post important notices and reminders outside classroom doors and in the school office.

We also have a website that parents may access to look up the current calendar, newsletter, and any other information needed. The address is www.hopemark.org. You may also call or email the director, Jeanne Ryan at the office with any questions or concerns. Jeanne's email is hopemark@att.net.

Teachers work to partner with parents to meet each child's individual needs. Parent / Teacher Conferences are held twice a year, in November and March. The teachers also welcome conversations before or after class, and are happy to meet with parents by appointment.

We have an open door policy for parents to visit our school in session anytime.

Programs

2-Day Program Tues/Thurs 9 – 11:30 AM

This class is typically a child's first school experience, and is geared toward children three-years-old. The 2-day program focuses on developing social skills, adapting to the school environment, and an introduction to academic concepts, primarily through games and hands on play.

3-Day Program Mon/Wed/Fri 9 – 11:30 AM

Children in these classes continue to develop socially, and participate in a more focused Kindergarten readiness program. These children complete an alphabet book, learn number concepts, begin printing using correct grip and formation, and are introduced to academic concepts such as opposites, rhyming, patterning, etc. through games and play. Children in this program are typically four years old, and will either enter Kindergarten, or continue onto one of our Pre-K classes.

Jr. Pre-K Program Mon – Thurs 12:15 -2:45 PM

This program is designed for children with late winter, early spring and summer birthdates who will be attending Kindergarten the following school year. This class allows for intensive Kindergarten readiness preparation as well as time devoted to free play and social interaction.

Sr. Pre-K Program Mon – Thurs 12:15 -2:45 PM

This program is designed for children with late summer and fall birthdates who turn 5 years old by December 31st, and have missed the July 31 Missouri Kindergarten cutoff date. Parents also often choose to enroll their child who is eligible to attend Kindergarten, but would benefit socially, physically or academically from another year of preschool. This class allows for intensive Kindergarten readiness preparation as well as time devoted to free play and social interaction.

Music Program

Children learn the fundamentals of music through song and movement, with our music teacher, who provides weekly music activities. The children also perform Halloween, Christmas and Spring musical programs.

Registration Fee

HopeMark charges a \$75 registration fee for new families. Returning families who register for the following school year in January pay a reduced fee of \$50. This fee is **nonrefundable**.

Tuition

Tuition is due from September through May. Tuition is not prorated for children who miss school due to vacation, illness, etc. Please make checks payable to HopeMark Preschool. You may also pay electronically through your bank's online billing service. Please instruct payment to be made to HopeMark Preschool, 6273 Eichelberger Street, St. Louis, MO 63109.

We also offer debit and credit card payment – There will a \$5 service charge if a credit or debit card is used.

Supply Fee

HopeMark assesses supply fees rather than provide supply lists to each child. This is a bi-annual fee. The supply fee is due October 1 and February 1. A reminder will be sent home in the September and January newsletters.

We also request donations of everyday items (eg. Paper towels, tissues, etc.) throughout the year in order to reserve supply funds for art and craft supplies. These requests are completely voluntary and will be in the monthly newsletter.

Late Payment Policy

Tuition is due on the first of the month. Payment is considered delinquent after the 10th. An invoice reflecting an outstanding balance will be sent home on the 15th of each month, including a \$25 late fee. A child whose tuition remains unpaid at the end of the month will not be admitted to school until the past due amount is paid. If a family is experiencing an unexpected financial hardship or needs to establish an alternate due date, please see Mrs. Ryan to discuss.

Withdrawal Policy

Should a child be withdrawn from school, HopeMark requires a month's advance notice of withdrawal, or one month's tuition.

Arrival / Dismissal

Children are to be accompanied by their parent or caregiver upstairs. You may wait for class to begin in the office or in the hallway outside the classroom. Please do not send your child upstairs unaccompanied, as this poses a safety concern to your child. If you are unable to climb the stairs, please ask another parent to escort your child up/down the steps each day.

At 9:00 AM for the morning classes or 12:15 PM for the afternoon classes, a bell will ring to signify the beginning of the school day. Please do not enter the classroom until the bell rings. At 11:30 AM for the morning classes or 2:45 PM for the afternoon classes teachers will open the classroom doors and dismiss each student as their parent or caregiver arrives. Again, you may wait in the office or hallway until dismissal. Please ensure that you list all persons who will be picking your child up from school on your emergency contact form. If someone other than the listed caregivers will be picking up your child, please advise the child's teacher or call the office.

Late Policy

We encourage you to make every effort to bring your child to school on time. Late arrivals disrupt the class and the late child may miss out on having a job or other planned activities.

Parents or caregivers are expected to **pick up their child on time** at the end of the school day. Teachers use the time between the morning and afternoon classes to prepare for the afternoon and eat lunch. After the PM classes, teachers must leave to pick up their own children from school, or to attend to other matters.

If you find that you will be unavoidably late to pick up your child from school, please call the school office. Morning class dismissal is at 11:30 AM. If a child is not picked by 11:40 AM will be sent to the lunch bunch room and will be charged \$8.00 for that day's lunch bunch.

Afternoon class dismissal is at 2:45 PM sharp. Parents should aim to arrive at school at 2:40 PM to ensure a timely pickup. Any pickup later than 2:55 PM for the afternoon classes is unacceptable. Consistent offenders will be given a reminder of our late policy, and then will be charged a fee of \$1.00 per minute that they are late.

Weather / School Closings

If inclement weather forces a school closure, HopeMark Preschool will be listed on FOX (ch.2), KMOV (ch.4), and KSDK (ch.5) television stations. I will send out an email as well.

Should the school need to close for any other reasons, such as a power outage, water main break, etc.; you will receive an email and / or a phone call.

Parking

A parking lot is located behind the school and accessible through the alley at Tamm and at Clifton. Please follow the entrance and exit arrows on the lot. The back parking lot can become congested – please try to fill up the front spaces nearest the fence first before parking in the spaces next to the alley. There is **no parking on the driveways next to the lot** – they belong to the neighboring apartments. Please also refrain from parking in the handicap spaces in the alley, on the grass lot next to the parking lot, or in the alley itself. You may also park on Eichelberger or Tamm Avenues. Entrances to the school are through the red doors on Eichelberger, or the red door through the gate of the back parking lot.

At all times, please drive slowly and be aware of small children when entering and exiting the parking lot.

Safe Building Policy

HopeMark employs a remote lock / unlock system. Doors will be unlocked for arrivals and dismissals, and then locked at all times while school is in session. If you are late or need to pick up your child early from school, please ring HopeMark’s doorbell at the back parking lot or Eichelberger entrance. The director or one of the teachers will speak with you, confirm your identity, and then unlock the door. All doors are equipped with emergency exit bars should the building need to be evacuated quickly.

Should an unwelcome intruder enter the church building, HopeMark will go into “lockdown mode” in which the teachers will lock the classroom doors and remove students to a safe area within the classroom, away from doors and windows. There is a telephone in each classroom should a teacher need to call for help.

Emergencies

The children practice monthly fire drills and quarterly tornado and earthquake drills to prepare for the unlikely event of a true emergency.

Should the school need to be evacuated, children will be removed to a safe location outside the school. Should it not be safe to be outside, HopeMark has partnered with St. Gabriel the Archangel School, located at Tamm and Nottingham, to provide shelter to the children.

All emergency contact information is brought outside, along with cell phones to contact parents or caregivers to pick up their child.

Parent Volunteers

We welcome parents to volunteer in our classrooms at any time. There are also occasions when the teachers will request parents to assist in the classroom for special projects, class parties, etc. If you would like to be contacted if the teachers request help in the classroom, please notify Mrs. Ryan.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent / Teacher conferences are held twice a year, in November and March. **There is no school for the children on these days.** Appointment sign-up sheets will be available prior to the conferences.

Toys / Personal Items

Please discourage your child to bring his/her toys, blanket, etc. to school. If a personal item is brought to school, our policy is to have the child leave the item in the hallway on the shelf above his or her name.

Clothing / Footwear

Please dress children in comfortable play clothes. Dresses should be worn with shorts or leggings underneath. Always send appropriate outerwear, (coats, hats, mittens, etc.) as we go outside most days. All outerwear should be labeled with the child's name.

Also, please send your child to school in athletic or athletic soled shoes. Sandals, Crocs, Flip Flops, etc. pose an injury risk when climbing on the play equipment.

Tote Bags

A canvas tote bag is given to each child at the beginning of the school year, and is used for sending art and notes home from school. Therefore, it is very important that parents or caregivers inspect their child's tote bag after each school day. Children bring their tote bag to school each day and take it into the classroom. At the end of the school day, children will place their art projects in the bag. Notes to parents will be placed inside this bag as well. Parents may place a note to the teachers inside their child's tote as well.

When you receive the bag, you will need to put your child's name on the **front of the bag** above the HopeMark logo. The tote bags are navy blue with the HopeMark logo in white on the front. You may write your child's name on the bag using fabric paint or you may have your child's name embroidered on the bag.

A local seamstress, Sarah McCarthy has agreed to embroider tote bags starting at \$7 per bag. Sarah's contact information will be in each child's bag.

Replacement bags will be available at a cost of \$10.

Illness

In a preschool classroom, germs are spread easily. Our illness policy is an effort to reduce the amount of germs in the classroom in order to keep the spread of infection to a minimum. If your child is exhibiting any signs of illness (fever, coughing, runny nose, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.), please keep them home from school until symptoms have subsided. A child with a fever must be fever free for 24 hours, without medication, until he or she may return to school. Parents will be called to pick up children who are exhibiting acute symptoms. Also, teach proper hand washing and nose blowing at home, to reinforce the methods your child is taught at school. Please notify the school office if your child will not be at school due to illness.

Immunizations

Missouri law requires that all children attending public, private, and parochial day care centers, preschools, and nursery schools be current on all vaccinations upon the beginning of school. Should a family choose not to vaccinate their child, we must have a medical or religious immunization exemption on file in the school office. Parents of non-immunized children understand that their child may be withheld from school if there is a local outbreak of an illness for which there is a vaccine. This protects children whose immunizations are in progress as well as infant siblings. The law also states that parents have the right to ask the director if there are any unimmunized children currently attending the facility.

Head Lice Policy

Preschool is often a child's first time participating in a group setting, and in all group environment there exists the risk of contracting head lice. HopeMark has adopted a "No Nit Policy," as recommended by the National Pediculosis Association. Our staff has been trained to identify head lice and nits and will occasionally screen the children for lice, which is a common practice in all school settings. Parents are strongly urged to make lice inspection part of a child's personal hygiene care. If a case of head lice is detected while at school, the parent will be notified to come pick up the child. The parent will be provided with safe and effective lice removal procedures, and notified that the child may return to school as soon as he or she is free of lice and nits. All parents will receive a note that lice have been detected at our school, encouraging them to screen their child for lice carefully over the following weeks. It is important to note that head lice DO NOT reflect poor hygiene or social status.

Potty Training

We encourage all children to be fully potty trained prior to entering preschool. That said, no child is turned away if he or she is not fully potty trained. If your child is not yet completely potty trained, he or she may wear a pull-up diaper to school. All children are encouraged to use the restroom frequently.

Because HopeMark is not licensed to change diapers, should your child have a bowel movement while wearing the pull-up, the parent or caregiver will be called to come to school and change the child. We also keep a supply of extra clothes should a child have an accident. The soiled clothes will be sent home in a plastic bag. We ask that you wash the loaner clothing and return it on the next school day.

Snacks / Birthday Treats

Children in the morning classes receive a snack and drink each day. Children in the afternoon classes do not receive a daily snack, but occasionally will have a birthday treat or special snack that correlates with the day's skill or project. Parents are expected to sign up to bring a snack for their child's class on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

A calendar is posted in the hallway outside of each classroom. Please sign up on the calendar for the day of your choice. (Please refer to the school roster or the snack calendar for the number of children in your child's class.) A list of healthy snack ideas is posted in the hallway outside each classroom.

Our goal is to teach your child to make healthy choices at snack time, so we ask that you purchase healthy, minimally processed snacks. A snack suggestion list will be provided. Water will be served at snack time, but you are welcome to bring milk or sugar free juice if you prefer. We are discouraging juice boxes.

If it is your child's birthday, please designate that he/she is bringing a birthday treat. The teachers will make your child a birthday crown, a special puppet comes out to say hello, and the entire class sings "Happy Birthday" to him or her. Cupcakes are a popular birthday treat, but we have found that many children cannot finish an entire cupcake, and there is a great deal of waste. In keeping with our healthy choices, please consider the mini cupcakes, or similar sweet treat accompanied by a fruit. Other suggestions for a birthday treat are frozen yogurt, or frozen fruit popsicles. **Birthday treats may not be homemade**, but pre-packaged or ingredient labeled, as per our allergy guidelines.

Food Allergy Policy

Due to the increasing number of children with peanut allergies, we are a peanut and tree nut free facility. That means that all **snacks must be pre-packaged and the ingredient list checked for traces of peanut or tree nuts in the product.** Unfortunately, we cannot allow homemade treats because of the risk of cross contamination. If you purchase a snack from a bakery, it must contain ingredient labeling.

It is surprising how many foods contain nut traces! It is very important that you double check the ingredient list of all snacks you send to school. Also, please send snacks in the original packaging. While it is a nice gesture to make individual snack bags, the food must be in its original packaging with ingredients labeled, to prevent cross contamination.

The teachers will also double check the snack before serving it to the children. **If a snack is homemade or found to have peanut traces, it will not be served, and returned to the parent.**

HopeMark has adopted a zero tolerance policy with regard to homemade treats and items containing traces of nuts. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation as we strive to keep our children with allergies safe.

Occasionally parents will send treat bags to school to celebrate a special event, such as holidays and birthdays. While treat bags are optional, if you choose to do so, please make every effort to send nut free treats. The teachers will not allow children to open the bag until their parent or caregiver has inspected it.

If your child has a peanut or tree nut allergy, please let Mrs. Ryan know the severity of the allergy.

Many children also have allergies to other foods such as dairy, gluten, food dye, etc. If your child cannot eat a certain food or drink, please note the information on your child's medical form, and let the teachers know. You are always welcome to provide a daily snack just for your child that meets his or her dietary needs.

If your child requires an epi-pen or inhaler, please provide one to the school office, clearly labeled with your child's name and class time.

That said, if your child is challenged by food and/or environmental allergies, we will do everything humanly possible to see that he or she is safe while at HopeMark.

We cannot, however, *guarantee* an allergy – free environment. We are unable to remove all chances of contact with food allergens such as peanut butter any more than we can remove bees from our playground! Children often eat peanut butter at home before coming to school. If the child has wiped his or her fingers on their clothing while eating at home, we'll have peanut butter in the environment. That said, we do strongly encourage parents to have their child wash his or her hands after breakfast!

Please be aware of the possible life threatening consequences of nut and other allergies, and strive to prevent potential contaminants from entering our school.

Lunch Bunch

For children who may need to remain at school or arrive early for an extended period of time due to schedules, appointments, etc., we offer our "Lunch Bunch" program. Children bring a sack lunch to school to eat after the morning class dismissal or prior to the beginning of the afternoon classes, and engage in a variety of activities such as group games, art projects, science activities, and more. We do not require lunches to be peanut free, but if a child with a peanut allergy is staying for lunch bunch, caution will be

taken to ensure that the child does not come in contact with any other child's lunch.

Parents may sign up for this program on a regular or as needed basis. Children in the two and three day morning classes bring their lunch and stay until 1:00 PM. Children in the afternoon classes arrive at 10:45 AM, eat lunch, and go to class at 12:15 PM, If your child will be staying for lunch bunch on a regular basis, a 25% discount will be offered to the per day cost. "Regular basis" is defined as coming to lunch bunch at least 50% of the week, ie. 2-day program: 1 day/week, 3-day and Pre-K programs, 2-days /week. The sign up calendar for this program is located in the school office. The maximum number of children who may be in lunch bunch each day is 15. Therefore, you must check the calendar and sign up for each day your child is staying.

If your child will be staying for lunch every school day, let Mrs. Ryan know, and she will add your child's name each month.

Lunch bunch will be held in the church nursery room, located in the basement of the building. Children attending an afternoon class will come to this room to start their day, and come upstairs for class at 12:15pm. Children attending a morning class will be escorted downstairs by a teacher following 11:30 dismissal. Parents and caregivers will then pickup their children from this location at 1:00 PM.

A note regarding lunch boxes and drink containers – children are required to carry their own lunch box downstairs. Our lunch bunch coordinator carries coats, tote bags and any miscellaneous items. Children also must have one hand free to hold the handrail while going to and from lunch bunch. If you choose to send a drink container along with your child's lunch it must be inside or attached to the lunch box. Please ensure that any drink containers or thermoses are leak proof as well. If your child does not have a drink and is thirsty during lunch bunch, there is a drinking fountain available for their use.

Playground Rules

When the children are using our outdoor playground, we employ some basic safety rules. We encourage you to use the playground and picnic area before and after school and at times when the school is not in session. **Parents are expected to adhere to and enforce the same playground rules that the children learn at school.** This reinforces the rules the teachers use as well as provides the child the security of consistence.

1. **No climbing or walking on, or jumping off the playground wall.** This is a safety hazard for your child, as well as an insurance liability for our school.
2. **Do not walk up the slides,** and only slide down on your bottom, feet first.
3. **Keep the sand in the sandbox.** If the sandbox is covered, please refrain from using it.
4. Please **remain on the walkway** in the garden. Children are encouraged to explore nature, but also to respect the foliage by not walking, running or picking live plants or flowers. We want to instill the value of enjoying and appreciating nature so that everyone may benefit.
5. If **older siblings** are playing on the playground after school, please remind them of the rules and to **be mindful of smaller children.**
6. You are welcome to raise the umbrellas at the picnic tables. **Please lower the umbrellas when you leave.** Also, please do not allow your children to sit or stand on the table and spin the umbrella.

Disciplinary Policy

HopeMark's disciplinary policy strives to encourage positive behavior rather than focus on undesirable behaviors. We strive to empower children to solve conflicts verbally and stand up for their rights. Our goal is to teach children about choices and consequences, and how to self-regulate behavior. These are crucial skills needed for Kindergarten. We also consider age appropriate behavior and discipline accordingly.

However, should a child engage in an unsafe or inappropriate behavior, we employ the following disciplinary action:

The child is given one warning, in which the teacher will explain the reason the child's behavior is unsafe or inappropriate. Teacher and child will discuss alternative ways to handle the problem (ask for a turn, come get the teacher, etc.) The child will be told in clear terms if the behavior is repeated, there will be an (age) appropriate consequence.

If the behavior is repeated, no warning is given and the child receives the consequence stated.

If the above methods are not working or do not produce positive results, the teachers will set up a time to meet with the parents or caregiver to discuss strategies for improving the child's behavior.

*HopeMark is a non-profit incorporation,
open to all races and creeds. We are
governed by a Board of Directors. We
strictly adhere to all safety mandates
required by the State of Missouri
Department of Health, Child Care
Regulation.*

"I'm a HopeMark Kid!"

Look at me, Look at me,

I'm a HopeMark Kid!

Look at me, Can't you see,

I'm a HopeMark Kid!

And everywhere I go,

I want the world to know,

I'm a HopeMark Kid!