



Preschool Family Handbook



Holy Cross Stars Academy

Where Every Child Shines

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Information contained in this Preschool Family Handbook may be updated throughout the year. Families will be notified of any changes. This Handbook is not an all-inclusive list of school policies and procedures. We follow all state licensing regulations and guidelines.

I. Our Philosophy

Mission & Goals

Holy Cross Stars Academy offers the perfect balance of learning and play in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment for children. Our caring teachers are dedicated to creating lifelong learners. Through the implementation of our curriculum, evidence of learning is found throughout our school. We develop productive Family-teacher partnerships, keeping families involved and connected to what their children are learning and discovering.

Our school and staff members hold themselves to high standards of ethical behavior, based on the shared belief that childhood is a unique and valuable stage of life and that each child, family member, and colleague should be respected for their unique qualities. We base our work on knowledge of how children learn and develop, and we recognize that children are best understood and supported in a context of family, culture, community and society.

We have an obligation to provide care and education in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Furthermore, we are responsible for communicating, collaborating and cooperating with each family to bring home and school together to foster each child's development.

Our school is guided by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH)-Bureau of Childcare. By specifying standards of excellence for instruction and for the arranged learning environment, the curriculum helps children develop confidence in their ability to learn. They begin to develop self-understanding, self-worth and self-discipline. They also begin to gain an understanding and appreciation of the world around them.

Our goal is to provide a loving, safe environment and an exceptional educational program to help children develop:

- A healthy self-concept
- Social and emotional awareness
- Cognitive, physical and language skills
- Independence
- Sense of responsibility to self and others
- Security
- Feeling of accomplishment
- Trust in peers and adults
- Enjoyment of the learning experience

We also strive to help Families by communicating:

- Realistic, age-appropriate expectations for their children
- Methods of child guidance and clarifying values
- Sensitivity to cultural differences
- Ways we can partner with each family for the benefit of their child

Non-Discrimination

Our school does not discriminate in employment or the provision of educational services on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, national origin or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law.

Ethical Standards

Our school and employees strive to create a school culture based on the ethical standards of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Guide to Terms

We strive to use language that embodies our Culture of Care which emphasizes relationships in schools and workplaces, and for that reason we use language that supports diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Throughout this handbook, we use “us” and “we” to refer to us, Holy Cross Stars Academy. Where a “School Leader” is referenced, this could be a Director, Assistant Director or another similar title at the School. “Family” or “You” refers to you as the parents, legal guardians, and other trusted adults that care for your children. We use “Child” to refer to our students, your children.

II. Forms & Authorization to Pick Up

Enrollment Forms

Families must complete and submit all required documentation, including but not limited to the application form, tuition agreement, emergency contact form, immunization record and physician's form for their Child. These forms must be kept current throughout your Child's enrollment. Registration paperwork and fees must be submitted annually before the start of the upcoming school year.

Authorized Pick-Up/Drop Off

It is very important that your Child's emergency contacts are always kept current. If you have moved or have changed your home, work or cellular telephone number, please notify the School office immediately. It is our responsibility to ensure we release a Child only to those adults who have prior authorization. Please also review the list of emergency contacts for your Child and update in writing as needed.

You must sign each of your Children in and out daily when arriving and departing from School at the designated entrance. Additional persons authorized to pick up your Child must also sign them in and out using the same system. All Children arriving after 8:45am or leaving prior to dismissal must use the main entrance of the building.

If someone other than the previously authorized individuals will be picking up your Child, we must have verifiable written permission from the Family. Photo identification is mandatory for anyone unknown to the staff. A Child will NOT be released without confirming the identity and authorization of the person picking up.

If there is a court order or signed Family agreement in place regarding who has responsibility for a Child on certain dates and times, the Family needs to provide it to the School so we can follow that schedule.

Late Pick-Up

If a Child has not been picked up within 15 minutes of closing time and the Child's Family has not contacted the School, the School Leader will attempt to contact all family members or emergency contact persons listed for the Child. If the Child remains at the center after 15 minutes, fees will be charged for late pick-ups as described in the tuition agreement and fee schedule.

III. Consistency of Care

When children are grouped in similar age levels, the maximum child group sizes and ratios of staff persons align with state licensing requirements.

Lead and assistant teachers have primary responsibility for a single group of children. During opening and closing times, some age ranges may be combined, with the teacher in that classroom assuming the responsibility of care until the Family arrives for pick up.

Attendance

Social, physical, cognitive and language development is greatly enhanced when children attend school with regular attendance.

Parents have the right to have their children out of school for any reason they deem important. In exercising that right, they acknowledge their children may miss the instruction and activities planned for that day.

If a child is absent, parents need to notify the administration prior to 8:00am to adhere to Department of Health guidelines. A phone call may be made to the main office (718-747-3803), or an email or Class Dojo message may be sent to the administration. Contact must be made each day a child is absent, unless parents can accurately report the number of days of absence at the first call.

A student who is absent from school is not permitted to participate in any special events on the same day as the absence.

IV. Curriculum

Curriculum

Our school employs a researched-based curriculum (“Curriculum”). Our Curriculum is an integrated series of programs for children ages two to five years that engages the young learners’ senses, mind and body and values the individual child. Each program takes advantage of a child’s readiness to learn with activities that are fun, challenging, easily understood and meaningful.

Our Curriculum is built upon Developmentally Appropriate Practices which provide teachers the flexibility to differentiate instruction based on developmental stage.

The Curriculum spirals to review and build upon prior skills before advancing to higher-level content and includes opportunities for students to be curious and ask questions. It is built around the following principles:

- Well-rounded content Page 8
- Literacy focus
- Center-based learning
- Goals & assessments
- Personalized learning
- Social-emotional focus
- Family communication
- Effective instructional practices

The Curriculum, when implemented with fidelity, is customized to support and enrich each child’s unique learning needs. The program places emphasis on small groups and individualized instruction. This is how teachers ensure all children succeed in attaining developmental milestones and academic, social and emotional development.

Religion Curriculum

Our pastor, Rev. Presbyter Nicolaos Paros, enhances the intellectual growth of the students with the development of positive moral and ethical values through religious instruction and church services.

Parents, children, and their families are always encouraged to attend Sunday services and other major holidays of the Greek Orthodox faith. Participation in religious activities will help reinforce and foster the mission and goals of our School, which aim to make students positive and caring members of the community.

Prayer in the morning and before lunch is part of the daily routine. Children will be attending Liturgy services monthly when scheduled during the school day. Please inform the school if your child is allowed to receive Holy Communion by completing the Communion Form.

Greek Curriculum

The Greek language is a routine part of our classroom activities, through songs, nursery rhymes, music and cultural activities throughout the year. In addition, a formal Greek lesson is conducted in our Little Stars and Rising Stars classes. The use of the on-line learning platform "Ellinopoula" is used to supplement instruction in class. Each child has access to the platform at home to reinforce their learning through activities and learning games. Occasionally, they may be assigned a short activity by their teacher to complete at home.

Assessments

Assessment is the process of gathering information about children's developmental strengths and progress to inform learning goals. Our Curriculum promotes a systematic assessment protocol to gather information about each child's progress over time.

Assessment tools may include notes of observations and maintenance of a portfolio for each student.

Developmental Progress

Teachers plan lessons to meet an individual Child's cognitive, physical and emotional needs. They provide materials and activities that encourage children to explore their environment and develop social skills, problem-solving skills and new ways of thinking.

Every staff member strives to routinely assess the developmental needs of the Children. If concerns are noted, they are brought to Families' attention.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Our program staff receive ongoing training and agree to follow the ethical responsibilities for maintaining confidentiality when collecting information on Children. All information contained in your Child's records is confidential, and anyone not directly involved with the care of your Child or affiliated with state licensing, protective services or other government agencies will not have access to your Child's records without your prior written consent. Families have the right to add information, comments, data or other relevant material to your Child's records as appropriate. We are happy to provide you reasonable access to your Child's on-site records.

We ask that you not post any recordings you take at School or at School-related events as they may include other Children or School staff who have not given their permission or consent. Posting recordings, on the internet or in any other public forum requires written permission from the School Leader.

V. Communications

We take Family communication very seriously. When families and teachers work together as partners in a child's education, the learning experience is richer and more meaningful.

Electronic & Mobile Communications

Our School uses a web-based application ("Class Dojo") that helps us meet a Family's increasing expectations for electronic & mobile communications, and that helps make a teacher's daily communication easier. Additionally, each staff member has a email account to facilitate communication with families. Staff guidelines prohibit communication via personal devices.

During the week, Families typically receive communication about their Child engaged in learning. Families receive information about the Child's daily routine as well as a photo and brief description of a learning highlight from that specific Child's day. Families also may send morning notes to the teacher through Class Dojo or email.

School Events & Activities

We strive to keep Families informed of upcoming events, activities and key dates. The overall school holiday calendar is on the school website, as well as the monthly calendar with all special events. We also issue a monthly school newsletter with calendar reminders.

Birthdays and Other Celebrations

All children's birthdays are celebrated at school. We do not make food the focus of any birthday, instead choosing to promote special activities such as games or singing. We want to ensure that we adhere to our healthy food guidelines. As such, parents may not bring food items, but may choose to send in goodie bags for distribution at the end of the day. Recognition of the child's special day varies by classroom, but usually includes a birthday crown and the singing of "Happy Birthday". If you wish to send in a favorite book to the class, please let your teacher know and the book will be read during class time on your child's birthday.

Teachers will make sure your child feels special and celebrated on their birthday. If you are having an outside party, to prevent hurt feelings, please do not send party invitations to school unless you are inviting the entire class. To invite only a few children, please mail the invitation directly to their home or send direct emails to parents.

Greek Independence Day Parade

All families are encouraged to participate in the Greek Independence Day Parade on 5th Avenue in Manhattan, which usually falls at or around the 25th of March. This day is considered a regular school day and attendance will be taken. As such, the school will be closed on the day following the parade. The children are encouraged to wear traditional Greek costumes or white tops and blue pants or skirts.

Transportation to the parade is coordinated by the church office and all families are responsible to reserve their seating if needed.

Family Reports

Teachers issue Family reports entitled "Developmental Checklists" three times per year, in November, March and June along with an opportunity for a Family-teacher conference. The Family reports show how a child is doing relative to the skills and objectives of the program and provide a snapshot of the child's learning profile. The information reflects assessments that have already been completed by the teacher in the classroom on a weekly basis. Teachers do not "test" the children in order to complete the Family report. Skills are rated on the following scale:

- Introduced: Skill has been introduced, demonstrates skill less than 20% of the time.
- Beginning: Demonstrates skill between 20% and 50% of the time.
- Developing: Demonstrates skill between 50% and 80% of the time.
- Mastered: Demonstrates skill at least 80% of the time.

Teacher comments are based on objective observations, not opinions. Comments describe how the Child is progressing, observations of skill mastery, what is being done to help the Child develop skills, and a description of activities that support the rating.

VI. Guidance and Discipline

Behavior Guidance

Our behavioral guidance is constructive, age- and stage-appropriate and redirects Children to appropriate behavior and conflict resolution. We approach discipline with a positive attitude, based on the premise that children respect and care for themselves and others. Our goal is to solve behavioral concerns by using modeling, redirection of behavior, and positive reinforcement through attention and praise. Positive classroom rules, structure and reinforcement help children understand expectations of behavior. Circle time and other group meetings incorporate time for children to give and receive praise for positive actions, to plan activities together, and to discuss class concerns and goals for desired behavior.

When necessary, staff work with family members and other support professionals to create a plan for resolution. The plan includes positive behavior support, and Families are kept informed of progress.

Discipline Policy

All classroom expectations will be clearly taught and reinforced in a positive manner. At Holy Cross Stars Academy, we SHINE! This is our acronym for Show respect, Honor, Interest in learning, Nice and Empathy towards others. Students will receive verbal praise when observed meeting expectations. Students struggling with expectations will be verbally reminded of what it looks like to follow the expectations.

SHOW RESPECT	HONOR	INTEREST IN LEARNING	NICE	EMPATHY TOWARDS OTHERS
Identify emotions through pictures and words	Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself	Stay in your assigned area	Use appropriate voice level	Help others.
Use polite words	Follow directions and listen to others	Work with quality and care	Use materials appropriately	Include and encourage others in your play
Clean up after eating or playing	Move safely throughout the room and on the playground	Participate by asking questions and communicating respectfully	Be a full-body listener.	Be a problem solver.

To ensure the safety of all participants and staff, the Holy Cross Stars Academy staff will implement a positive discipline program. The following are guidelines used when disciplinary action becomes necessary due to unacceptable behavior. Severe behavior will be addressed by the Preschool Director/Principal.

1. Positive redirection and reteach of expectations. Page 13
2. Verbal warning for specific unacceptable behavior.
3. Separation from the group with a warning of future consequences for repeated behavior.
4. Separation from the group with a warning and write-up for repeated behavior.
5. Separation from group with a call to parent or guardian and write-up.
6. Parent/Guardian conference to discuss corrective action and consequences for future incidents.
7. Suspension - 1 to 2 days from the program and/or remainder of the day.
8. Repeated aggressive/inappropriate behavior may result in removal from the program with approval from the Preschool Lead Instructor and Preschool Director/ Principal.

Holy Cross Stars Academy Preschool reserves the right to withdraw a participant from the program if all discipline options have been exhausted and/or demonstration of extreme behavior that may put participants and staff in danger.

Family Conflict Resolution Procedure

We encourage open communications between Families and staff, so they may work together for the benefit of the children. Families can interact with their Child's teacher and other staff members daily during our school's normal hours of operation, subject to any applicable security of classroom management procedures. Families may also interact with the School Leaders informally and/or by appointment. In most cases, Families and school staff can resolve any concern or conflict that arises.

In the rare instance that Families are not satisfied with the outcome of discussions with the teachers and School Leader, they are welcome to communicate by phone, email or in person with Fr. Nicolaos Paros, to whom the school reports.

We understand that sometimes emotions regarding a child or a situation at a school can run high. However, we expect that Families will treat all teachers and staff respectfully and professionally.

VII. Health

Our Commitment to Health and Safety

Providing a healthy and safe learning environment for our students is our highest priority. To ensure that all children receive the best possible education, children need to be healthy and feel good when coming to school. As each child arrives for the day, the teacher will conduct an informal health check. Children may not be accepted if they have a fever or otherwise demonstrate that they are too ill to participate in the program that day.

Medical and Immunization Records

Prior to enrollment, all students must have an updated medical form on file, including a current list of vaccinations and the date of their last vision and hearing screening. All required immunizations must be completed, as per New York State and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene guidelines.

If the student's physical expires during the school year, a School Leader will notify you. It is your responsibility to ensure a yearly physical is scheduled and the school is provided with a copy of the updated medical form. Please note that the Department of Health requires a yearly influenza vaccine for all students under age 5 prior to December 31st each year.

Dental health is just as important as overall physical health. All three and four year old students are required to submit documentation of an annual dental exam.

Only those directly involved with the care of your Child or affiliated with state licensing, protective services or other government agencies will have access to your Child's records. Others may access these records only with your written consent.

Cleaning, Disinfecting and Sanitizing

We recognize the importance of clean and sanitary conditions for children's health and safety. Toys that have been in a Child's mouth or otherwise contaminated are removed immediately, cleaned with soap and water and disinfected. This also applies to other surfaces in the classroom. We do not use toys that cannot be cleaned and sanitized.

Any spills are immediately and thoroughly cleaned up adhering to Department of Health guidelines.

All cleaners and other toxic substances are kept out of the reach of Children.

Diapering

Teachers check diapers every 2-3 hours, when a Child wakes from a nap, and upon being soiled. The changing table is sanitized after each changing, even if paper covers are used.

Parents are responsible to supply diapers and/or pull-ups for their child. Staff will notify families when an additional supply is needed.

Food and Nutrition

Parents will provide a healthy snack and lunch for their children. Glass containers are prohibited from being used in the building. Parents will be contacted if a child forgot their snack/lunch.

Our School is a nut-free facility. To ensure the safety of all of our students, foods with nuts will be discarded immediately. Parents will be notified if there are additional allergies in the classroom.

Illness

Families assist us in maintaining a safe and healthy environment for all our Children by keeping sick Children at home. The purpose of our sick child policy is to:

- Reduce the spread of illness from a sick Child to other Children.
- Promote complete recuperation of the sick Child.
- Prevent the constant spread of cold, flu and diarrhea and other communicable diseases that are common among small children.

We reserve the right to refuse admittance to any student who shows a sign of illness. Children who become ill at school will be made comfortable and Families will be notified to pick them up within a **reasonable amount of time**. Families must keep sick Children at home until they have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours if they display any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees or more. Children must be free of fever for at least 24 hours, unassisted by fever-reducing medication before returning to school.
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Heavy nasal discharge requiring frequent wiping every 3-5 minutes
- Persistent, non-productive or “barking” cough
- Sore throat
- Fussy, cranky behavior unlike the Child’s normal demeanor
- Skin rash, including diaper rash
- Head lice
- Symptoms of a communicable disease such as pink eye, measles, chicken pox, mumps, or strep throat

A doctor's note is required to return to school if the child had a communicable disease or was otherwise under a physician's care.

Medication Administration

With the exception of Epi-pens and Narcan, our facility is not authorized to dispense medication.

Clothing & Personal Belongings

Children must wear comfortable, washable, seasonally appropriate clothing. Closed-toe shoes are preferred. For the safety of the children, flip-flops are prohibited.

Families must provide a labeled bag with a change of clothing (including socks and undergarments) for their Child to be kept at school for emergencies. All items must be labeled with the Child's name.

All full day children will be provided a cot to rest on. Parents are to supply a toddler-size fitted bed sheet and blanket. Bedding will be sent home at end of the week for laundering and should be returned with the child on Monday. These items will be stored in your Child's cubby.

Candy, gum, toy weapons, jewelry and money are not permitted at school. Toys should only be sent on designated days.

Sunscreen

Families must provide written permission for school staff to apply sunscreen on their Child.

All bottles must be in the original container, labeled with the Child's name.

Allergies

Families are expected to inform the school about their Child's allergies. Each child should have a Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan ("FARE Plan") listing their allergies, recommended treatment in case of an allergic reaction, prepared by Families and the Child's physician. Children's allergies are posted in the classroom. Some Children may need immediate intervention for an allergic reaction which may include administration of medication or an injection device, such as an Epi-pen. Families and School leaders will work together to ensure understanding about the allergies and FARE Plan.

Abuse and Neglect Reporting

All staff members are mandated by law to comply with the child abuse and neglect reporting requirement. The law requires any person working in a school or child care setting who has knowledge of or observes a child whom she knows, or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect whether within the school or outside of school, to immediately report it to the applicable state child protective agency.

Teachers and staff are responsible for monitoring their own behavior and the behavior of other staff members and must immediately report to the principal any observations of an employee violating either licensing regulations or company policies. In addition, upon starting employment every staff member is required to participate in training on sexual abuse and molestation prevention. Those who in good faith report neglect or abuse by a family member or co-worker are immune from discharge, retaliation or other disciplinary actions for having made the report.

We take allegations of neglect or abuse very seriously. Once the allegation is reported, we will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or regulatory agencies. To the fullest extent possible, but consistent with our legal obligation to report suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, we will endeavor to keep confidential the identities of the alleged victims and investigation subject.

VIII. Security & Safety

Building Access

Access to our building is limited to enrolled families, staff and registered visitors.

Visitors other than enrolled Families cannot enter our school unless escorted by a staff member. All visitors, including vendors, applicants and family members are required to wait outside until met by a staff member.

Accidents & Injuries

The health and safety of both Children and staff in our school are of paramount importance. All employees are responsible to assist in the prevention and control of injuries, illnesses and hazards and to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Staff members inspect their classrooms and outdoor play areas daily for potential hazards.

No matter how minor the incident, if a Child experiences an accident, injury or possible injury, staff will report it to school administration and a written incident report will be provided to Families. Families will also be immediately contacted if the injury needs medical attention. For any serious accident or incident, we will attempt to notify Families by a telephone call as soon as possible.

There is a staff member trained in first aid and CPR on premises at all times. If a Child requires medical attention, a report is filed and sent home to Families. In the event of a serious emergency, the school will secure immediate medical attention as described in the “authorization for medical treatment” section of the enrollment forms filed in the school office. Every effort will be made to contact parents, guardians, or authorized family members or friends during such emergencies.

Fire and Other Safety Drills

As required by law, our school holds regular fire and safety drills. It is expected that all Children on the campus at the time of such drills participate fully. If a drill must take place in inclement weather, all attempts will be made to ensure that Children are properly attired. Should you find yourself at the school while a drill is taking place, please participate with your Child, and take the time to review and discuss the importance of such drills with your Child.

If an emergency requires lockdown, we will notify Families as soon as possible. All entrances to the school will be secured. No one, including Families, will be allowed to enter or exit the building. The lockdown will be lifted when we receive notification from law enforcement officials.

Weather Emergencies

In case of severe or hazardous weather, we may have to close or delay school opening hours. We will announce closings and delays on the Class Dojo.

In the event of severe weather or other emergencies during the school day, it may be necessary to close school early. We will notify Families by Class Dojo announcement. Families should acknowledge the receipt of the message by "commenting" on the post. Follow up phone calls may be made to families who do not respond.

In an emergency, immediate decisions may be made. We will make every attempt to contact you, authorized family members, or specified friends. If you are going to be out of town, please notify your emergency contacts and let us know whom to contact in an emergency.

IX. School Contacts

Families may contact the school and staff via Class Dojo messages, email or by calling the main office. Please note that while teachers are with students, they are actively engaged in instruction and supervision of children and are unable to respond to messages. Staff will make every effort to respond within a reasonable amount of time.

In case of emergency, please contact the main office directly.

School Phone Number: 718-747-3803

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Family Handbook Acknowledgement Form

Child's Name (please print) _____

Address _____

Phone # _____

This Family Handbook was created to promote an understanding of the school's policies and procedures.

The information in this handbook applies to all activities occurring on school grounds and during any school-related activity. It is important that Families and Children are familiar with these expectations.

This signed page will be added to your Child's permanent file. Your signature means that you have received this Family Handbook and understand the policies and procedures of our school.

I have read and understand the policies and procedures in the Family Handbook. I agree to abide by them as will my Child(ren).

Full Name

Relationship to Child

Family Signature

Date

Full Name

Relationship to Child

Family Signature

Date