



child care centers

# gretchen's house

## Family Handbook





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## *Introduction*

The first Gretchen's House Child Care Center was opened in September, 1982, in a single-family home on Ann Arbor's west side. Between 1985 and 1991, Gretchen Preston opened four more centers in Ann Arbor—three in homes which have been substantially renovated to create spaces appropriate for children, and one in the Washtenaw Intermediate School District High Point building.

In 1998 and 2003, Gretchen opened two additional centers in Ann Arbor. These centers were designed specifically for children, with classroom spaces around a central shared living area.

In 2021 Gretchen's House partnered with the HighScope Educational Research Foundation to reopen their demonstration preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

In 2021 Gretchen's House also began offering school age care at Northside Church and Zion Church to better meet the needs of working families in those areas.

In 2025, Gretchen's House opened a new center on Manchester Road in Ann Arbor. This newly renovated space is adjacent to the County Farm Park, which is a perfect tie-in for our focus on the outdoor learning environment.

Gretchen's House also manages one center outside of the Ann Arbor Area: Little Huskies at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan (since 2007).

Since 1987, Gretchen's House Child Care Centers have been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This accreditation is renewed every five years and is a significant indicator of high quality.

# *Our Goals and Philosophy*

## **Our Goals**

Gretchen's House strives to provide a high-quality Early Childhood Program by creating a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children and responds to the needs of families. Our families and staff are partners, working together to meet the needs of the children and their families. As partners, we will communicate regularly and thoughtfully with each other to build a relationship of trust and respect.

## **Our Philosophy**

Young children learn by doing! They acquire knowledge of their world through playful interaction with objects and people. Children are motivated to learn by their own desire to make sense of their world.

In 2007, Gretchen's House formed a partnership with the HighScope Educational Research Foundation and adopted the HighScope curriculum approach. The HighScope approach is consistent with the Gretchen's House philosophy, emphasizing active learning, adult support, and a consistent daily routine.

Gretchen's House believes deeply in supporting children's connection to the natural world. Children at Gretchen's House spend as much time outdoors as weather permits. Our outdoor classrooms were designed to support engagement with natural materials and a sense of wonder and curiosity for the great outdoors.

Gretchen's House is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in our educational practices. We strive to model and foster the four goals of anti-bias education:

- Identity. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social/group identities.
- Diversity. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity, accurate language for human differences, and deep, caring human connections.
- Justice. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Activism. Each child will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2010)

We work each day to create an environment that is welcoming to all children, staff and families.



## *Our Centers*

Gretchen's House Child Care Centers are located within residential neighborhoods, in renovated homes or new buildings specifically designed to meet the needs of early childhood programs. The neighborhood setting enhances the experience for children and families, many of whom live nearby. Our centers have keypad access. Families are given the code when they enroll. Children are cared for in mixed-age groups. This creates a family atmosphere and provides an opportunity for long-term friendships and continuity of care. The age of children cared for varies from center to center.

### **The Infant and Toddler Spaces**

Our infants and toddlers (ages 3 to 36 months) are cared for in small groups of 6-12 children. A separate space within this area is set aside for infant care. This accommodates the particular needs of very young babies who spend much of their time eating and sleeping before they become mobile.

Once a child is creeping or walking, there are large spaces for active exploration, areas for messy activities, and small, soft places for quiet reading, singing, pretend play, or one-on-one play with a teacher or friend.

### **The Preschool Spaces**

In our preschool rooms the teachers care for 16-24 children ages 2½ to 5 years. These rooms are arranged into several interest areas that allow each child to freely choose a variety of challenging and creative activities. There are large spaces for group activities and smaller areas for individual children or small groups.

### **The Older Preschool Spaces**

Our Older Preschool programs include older 4-year-olds or younger 5s, whose birthdays are very close to the public school cut off for kindergarten. In addition, kindergartners may join the older preschoolers at the end of their school day. Like our other preschool rooms, these classrooms are arranged into several interest centers that allow each child to freely choose a variety of challenging and creative activities. There are large group spaces and smaller areas for individual or small group activities.

## **The School-age Spaces**

School age children attend Gretchen's House before and after public school, during school vacations, and in the summer. We provide equipment and supplies purchased specifically for school age children's development and interests. Because they do not require a full-time space of their own, school age groups often share space with another program. This sharing of space encourages a family atmosphere and creates many opportunities for shared learning.

## **General information**

Each space has its own toileting area (and diaper changing, if appropriate). Most centers have a fully equipped kitchen, where a cook prepares two meals and snacks every day, and a complete laundry area.

*At GH-WISD, families may pack a lunch for their child or order lunch from the Highpoint school lunch program.*

All of the centers have large wooded and fenced outdoor play areas with age appropriate play structures and a variety of loose equipment for extended outdoor play.

Each center has an administration area with offices, teacher workrooms and meeting areas.

## *Our Program*

Our centers use the HighScope© curriculum approach, which emphasizes active learning and a consistent routine that provides many opportunities for children to make choices throughout the day.

Our **daily routine for full day children** includes:

- A gathering time each morning with the children and their teachers for announcements and information about the day.
- A small group time with their family group, when the primary caregiver (teacher) plans an activity that is geared toward the interest and development of the children in the group.
- Work time (choice time), during which children can choose activities from any area of the room. Teachers support children by observing and joining their play.
- Large Group time, when teachers and children participate in music and movement activities, planned by the teachers but directed by children's interests and choices.
- Outdoor play at least twice each day, but often much more. (unless the wind chill or temperature is below 0°F or the heat index is at or above 100°F).
- Regular meal and rest times.

### **Family Groups**

Family Groups are small groups of children and one teacher who spend at least one hour together every day. Each child in our infant, toddler and preschool rooms is assigned to a Family Group upon enrollment. Whenever possible,

a child stays with the same Family Group the entire time that they are in that room at a minimum for one year.

*The purpose of a Family Group is to:*

- provide one primary adult with whom the child is able to form a trust relationship and build emotional security,
- ensure that every child spends as much time as possible in small groups, and
- provide continuity of care and ensure that any changes in a child's health, behavior, or development will be noted regularly, and that any concerns will be shared with families.

## Consultants

During the school year, several consultants visit Gretchen's House and enrich our program. These consultants may include a creative movement specialist, children's musician, or occasional visits from community members with special skills or interests. The children and staff always look forward to these visits.

We also have a Teacher Support Coordinator and a Director of Curriculum on our administrative team. Our staff meets with these professionals regularly to discuss any concerns about individual children or behavior and health *in general*. If families have a special concern about their child, these professionals will visit the center to help in evaluating any problems. They are also available to meet with families who wish a consultation. We have found their services to be most valuable.

## Field Trips

Families sign a permission slip at enrollment that authorizes us to take their child on our regular and special field trips. Most of our trips are within walking distance or on the city bus routes. Center vans and busses, public school busses and family vehicles may be used for special trips. Our Little Huskies center does not have a van or bus at this time.

*Regular field trips might include:*

- Public Library
- Nearby Parks
- City pool in summer for school age children

*Special field trips might include:*

- Apple Orchard
- Pumpkin Patch
- Pet Store
- Local museums
- Fire Station
- Ann Arbor Airport

## Birthdays and Celebrations

Gretchen's House celebrates each child's birthday, generally on the closest weekday to their actual birthday. *We ask that families not bring food or gifts to the center to celebrate their child's birthday.* Our Birthdays Purple Page publication provides guidelines for our celebration policies.

Each Gretchen's House center has its own birthday traditions to mark children's birthdays. These may include a special activity, songs, or projects. Families are encouraged to participate by visiting the center for an activity. Please speak to your child's teacher to determine the best way for you to join in the celebration.

Families may use our center spaces after hours or on the weekend, free of charge, to host private birthday parties for their children. Invitations should be mailed rather than handed out at the center, so that children who are not invited do not feel left out.

Please speak to your Director if you would like to use the center after hours.

We look to the children and their interests to help us plan for most of our special celebrations. For that reason, we typically don't plan parties around specific holidays, as would be seen or remembered from elementary school days. We take cues from children and provide materials to support their intentions. For example, around Valentine's Day, we will stock the writing and art center with extra materials for making fancy cards, such as lace, ribbon, and shiny paper. Holidays aren't "banned" from our program, but we follow the traditions and ideas brought from the children and their families.

We plan fall and spring potluck dinners and other family gatherings throughout the year. Families are encouraged to visit the classroom any time to share traditions that are important to their family.

## Diapers

Infant/Toddler Program      Diapers are provided; the cost is included in your monthly fee.

Preschool Program      Disposable diapers must be provided by families until their children are fully toilet trained

**\* Exceptions:**      **At our WISD and Little Huskies locations, families supply diapers for infants, toddlers and or preschool aged children.**

## Food

The cost of food and preparation of breakfast, lunch, and snacks is included in the fee for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Families of infants must provide prepared baby bottles with milk or formula every day. We do provide whole milk once children are off formula, even if they take it in a bottle. We prepare a hot lunch every day and serve nutritionally balanced meals and snacks as outlined by the Children's Nutrition Council. Menus for each week are posted on your child's bulletin board and in the kitchen as well as available on our website: [www.gretchenshouse.com](http://www.gretchenshouse.com). Our menu is reviewed by a nutritionist and follows all safe food handling practices, including that all whole fruits and vegetables are washed thoroughly. All Kitchen Managers have Serve Safe certifications.

Families who wish to bring food for their child because of allergies, dietary consideration, or religious preference must provide the center with a written statement to that effect. In these cases, families are encouraged to provide a small stock of appropriate foods to be stored in the classroom. All food brought from home must be nut free and clearly marked with the child's name. Staff will not prepare special food, but they will serve the ready-to-eat foods families provide for children with special needs.

Kindergarten, school-age children and summer campers bring a bag lunch. The center will provide breakfast, noon-time milk, and two snacks each day.

\* ***Exception for Gretchen's House at WISD:*** Families bring their child's lunch or may purchase one from the Highpoint School cafeteria. Refrigerator space is not available for lunches brought in, and lunch foods cannot be heated for individual children, so families are encouraged to use thermal containers and/or insulated lunch bags.

## **Infant Bottle Feeding**

Families supply bottles that are labeled with your child's full name, contents and date. We cannot store bottles from day to day. Any day-old bottles will be discarded. We discard leftover milk and formula after feedings, so if your infant takes smaller portions, please prepare smaller bottles. We are required by licensing to discard contents of any bottles if they have been unrefrigerated for one hour or more. If infants prefer warmed bottles, we use a bottle warmer.

For breastmilk, fresh bottles must be labeled with child's full name, the time & date they were expressed. This allows us to offer the oldest milk first. Frozen bottles or bags of milk should also be labeled with the date they were prepared. Please leave "extra" breast milk at the center while we figure out your infant's feeding patterns. Formula bottles must be prepared by families. Please let us know if you use soy formula so we can make sure your infant doesn't get dairy products when s/he starts eating table foods at the center.

## **Food Allergies/Special Accommodations**

Gretchen's House makes every effort to provide a safe and healthy environment for all children. We are an Allergy Aware program, which means that we have established policies and procedures to meet the needs of children with food allergies.

We have a firm policy that families may not bring food from home to share with other children. In addition, we ask that families be aware of the foods they send in children's lunches (kindergarten and school age.) We do not allow peanut butter, nuts, or food containing these ingredients in our programs.

Families of children with diagnosed food allergies or other food related health concerns need to meet with the center Director and family group teacher to communicate their child's specific needs and establish an action plan based on recommendations from their child's physician. A plan for sharing information with you about your child's food consumption and how special dietary needs are met will be a part of the action plan.

## **Special Needs and Accommodations**

Gretchen's House meets all standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act. We provide reasonable accommodations for children, families and staff with special needs and disabilities.

## **Special Medical Procedures**

If a physician has ordered a special medical or dental management procedure for a child, an adult trained in the procedure must be on site whenever the child is present.

## **Giving Thanks at Meals**

We often take a moment to give thanks for the food we eat before meals. These sayings are non-denominational and meant to help develop a spirit of thankfulness. They also support the creation of rituals and traditions that help build a sense of community in the classroom. We encourage families to share their traditions with us as we work to help all families feel a valued part of the Gretchen's House community.

## **Rest Time**

A daily quiet time is part of our routine. The length of this time depends upon the age of the child and individual needs, but all full day children will have the opportunity for rest. This is a licensing requirement, and research and our experience tell us that children's brain development and physical well-being require regular rest periods during the day. If you have questions about your child's particular schedule, please speak with your child's teacher.

## **Television**

Broadcast television is not available to children at any time in our centers. A video or DVD may be played occasionally as a special activity or as part of an exploration of a particular topic, but TV is not part of our regular curriculum. All videos or DVDs will be previewed by the staff, and only "G" rated movies will be viewed. PG movies may be viewed by older school age children, with prior family notification.

## **Toys from Home**

Children may bring a comfort item for use at nap time or to ease the transition from home to school. These should be labeled with the child's name and must fit into their cubby. Please check with your child's teacher before bringing other toys from home. We have carefully selected the toys and equipment at the center, and toys from home may not be conducive to social play. Teachers cannot be responsible for toys brought from home. Expensive games or toys with weapons should not be brought to the center.

## **Drop-Off and Pick-Up Procedure**

We have found that children have a better start to the day when families create a consistent drop-off routine. A staff member will greet your child in the morning and help him/her to enter the program smoothly. Please help your child remove coat, boots, etc. and help place them in their cubby or on their hook. Please talk to your child's teacher for suggestions and help if the drop-off or pick-up time is especially difficult for you and/or your child.

We do not allow off-site drop-off or pick-up during field trips or neighborhood walks.

Families must drop their child off and pick them up at the center.

Even during busy times of the day, families need to make contact with a teacher, even if it's just a wave across the playground. Gretchen's House assumes responsibility for enrolled children from the time between sign-in and sign-out by families. Families are responsible for the safety of their children at all other times.

## **Procedures for Releasing Children**

Families are asked to sign their name both when they drop off and pick up their child. This procedure is in place for all children at all centers at all times. A clipboard with daily sign-in/sign-out sheets is provided in each classroom.

*The following procedures are used for releasing children:*

- Only regular staff may release children; substitutes may never release a child.
- A child will only be released to another adult when written or verbal consent is given by family, and the person picking up the child must be listed by the family on the emergency card.
- If someone comes to pick up a child without a family's permission and their name is on the emergency card, we will call the family before releasing the child to make sure this is what they want.
- If a person is unknown to staff, we will ask for picture identification. We will compare the picture with the person and make sure the name is listed on the emergency card. This applies to families who are unknown to the staff present at pick-up time.
- The approved pick-up person must use the sign-out sheet.
- Families or other adults who are picking up a child at the center must make contact with a teacher to acknowledge their release of the child.
- If the family or adult forgets to sign out, the center may need to follow up with a phone call.
- We will not release a child to anyone who we feel is under the influence of drugs, including alcohol.
- When in doubt, we will not release a child.

## *Our Staff*

Quality, continuity, and longevity of staff are priorities in a high-quality child-care program. Our salary schedule and employee benefits are given a priority in the budget to ensure that we have the best staff available to care for your children.

The following teacher/child ratios for each age group help to ensure a quality program:

Infants and Toddlers	2 weeks to 2.9 years	1:4
Preschoolers	2.9 to 4 years	1:8
Young 5s and Kindergartners	5 to 6 years	1:8-10
School-agers	6 to 11 years	1:8-12

Lead teachers generally have a four-year degree in early childhood education (or a related field) and experience working with young children.

Other full-time teaching staff generally have or are earning a four- or two-year degree in early childhood education (or a related field) and practical experience working with young children.

**All staff receive an initial Administrative Orientation and Health and Safety Training. These orientations are provided by the Administrative Staff. These sessions are completed before the first day of work whenever possible.**

**All staff complete a 32-hour Starting Points Training Series. This includes training in administering the HighScope COR Advantage child assessment tool.**

Gretchen's House has developed training curricula for all age groups. All teachers attend this training series, with scheduling priority given to full-time, family group teachers. Starting Points is typically scheduled during the workday. The content of the training includes the HighScope curriculum content for both infants and toddlers and preschool age children. Training content includes information on Active Learning, the Classroom Environment, the Daily Routine, Supportive Adult Child Interactions, Family Partnerships and the Child Observation Record, our assessment tool.

**Lead Teachers complete a 21-hour leadership training series.**

Gretchen's House has also developed training curricula for staff who will be in a leadership role in the classroom. These sessions help new Lead teachers/administrators become familiar with the basic principles of leadership and strategies for supervising in the early childhood setting.

All staff members receive ongoing training and attend regular center planning meetings. All full-time staff must be certified in Basic First Aid and C.P.R.

### **Jr. Counselor Program**

Gretchen's House has a special program for children 12-15 years of age. These children may volunteer in classrooms during their school holidays or summer vacation. The guidelines for this program are available from your Center Director.



# *Guidance and Discipline*

## **Overall Guidance and Discipline Information**

At Gretchen’s House we approach guidance and discipline by supporting children at their developmental level as they learn about expectations, routines and social interactions. We begin practicing the use of the HighScope 6 steps to conflict resolution with children as toddlers and continue this support as they grow.

At Gretchen’s House, we adhere at all times to the law as described in Michigan’s Revised School Code Section 380.1307b. Staff are informed of the limitations that the state sets for guidance and discipline and trained on supportive alternatives. As outlined by the State of Michigan, we ensure that staff understand that no corporal punishment or restraining (other than for their own safety) of children is ever allowed.

## **Guidance for Infants**

Infants learn through their own experience, trial and error, repetition, imitation, and identification. To encourage this learning, their environment must be safe, healthy, and emotionally supportive.

We use language, gestures, eye contact, and touching to help infants when frustrations arise. “I know you want Tony’s truck. He has it now—here is another one for you.”

## **Guidance for Toddlers**

Our teachers encourage cooperation, independence, and respect of self and others at this age, but realize the children’s developmental limitations in expressing these ideals. Discipline at this age generally involves redirection and separation as we encourage curiosity and exploration of their new world and playmates. Consistency in scheduling and planning appropriate and adequate activities helps to reduce many toddlers’ frustrations. We also begin to introduce the High Scope 6 Steps to Conflict Resolution with our older toddlers. We acknowledge strong feelings and encourage children to work out solutions together that will work for both of them.

## **Guidance for Preschoolers and Older Children**

At Gretchen’s House we use the HighScope 6 steps to conflict resolution with children who may be having a problem. This process encourages cooperation, independence, and respect for self and others. We expect children to have occasional difficulties with self-control, as well as with conflict resolution. Teachers view these as opportunities for children to practice their developing social skills. When children are verbally, emotionally or physically hurtful, we take the following steps until the problem is resolved:

- **Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.** Teacher place themselves between the children, on their level; they use a calm voice and gentle touch; they remain neutral rather than take sides.
- **Acknowledge children’s feelings.** Teachers say something simple such as “You look really upset; or You seem frustrated.” If the conflict is over a toy, the teacher will hold the toy until a resolution is agreed upon by the children.
- **Gather information.** The adult will ask “What’s the problem?”
- **Restate the problem:** “So the problem is…” Teachers use and extend the children’s vocabulary, substituting neutral words for hurtful or judgmental ones.
- **Ask for solutions and choose one together.** The teacher will ask “What can we do to solve this problem?” They encourage children to think of a solution and ask each child if the suggested ideas work for them.
- **Be prepared to give follow-up support.** Teachers acknowledge children’s accomplishments, e.g., “You solved the problem!” They stay nearby in case anyone is not happy with the solution and the process needs repeating.
- **Adults respect children’s ideas for solving problems,** even if the options they offer don’t seem fair to adults. What’s important is that children agree on the solution and see themselves as competent problem-solvers.

## If Your Child Struggles in Group Care

When a child in our care struggles in a group environment, there are many steps we take to support that child’s needs. Struggles may include physical aggression, relational regression and difficulty following the daily routine. We know that children come to us with different life experiences and skill levels. It is always our goal to meet the child where they are developmentally. Here are some of the steps we take when this situation arises:

- We will communicate and partner with the family regarding the struggles we are observing.
- Teachers create a behavior log that will assist us in assessing the behaviors function.
- Gretchen’s House may temporarily provide an extra staff to provide direct support to the child to guide in new skill development.
- The Curriculum Director may visit the center to see if there are any environmental changes to the room or our daily routine that might help the program.
- The Teacher Support Coordinator will visit the center to observe the child and meet with the team to offer direct support strategies for positive behavior management. These may include modifying the classroom environment, creating visual schedules, social stories, etc.
- It may be determined that community resources or services may be useful for the child or family. Gretchen’s House will assist in helping families connect to these resources.
- Create an individualized plan and monitor the child’s progress.

## Exclusion Policy

The goal of our policy is to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, and other exclusionary measures. For children with persistent or serious challenging behaviors, individualized plans designed to support inclusion and success are developed jointly with families and with our Teacher Support Coordinator. Gretchen's House makes every effort to ensure that our program is the best fit for a child's needs, and that children can participate fully and comfortably with us. If it is determined that a child's safety requires additional staffing beyond our typical adult to child ratios, exclusionary measures may be considered.

Exclusionary measures are not considered until all other possible interventions have been exhausted, and unless there is agreement that another placement is in the best interest of the child. If exclusionary measures must be taken, we will assist families in accessing services and identifying an alternative placement. This policy complies with Federal and State civil rights laws.

## Toilet Learning

Teachers and families need to communicate openly to promote a consistent approach to toilet learning for the child. A child may be ready for toilet learning when s/he:

- Can retain bowel movements for short periods of time.
- Shows some interest.
- Is willing to sit on the toilet.
- Understands what is expected.

## Toilet Learning Procedure

When a child is **ready and showing interest** in learning to use the bathroom independently:

- Teachers will encourage the child to sit on the toilet at routine times, with cues taken from the child's and/or classroom schedule.
- Teacher will not use external rewards such as stickers or candy for successful use of the toilet. Intrinsic motivation has been shown to be much more successful in this transition. Teachers may make encouraging comments, such as "You went potty in the toilet!" or "You stayed dry all morning."
- Teachers will be consistent but present a relaxed attitude. Learning to use the toilet is the child's job, not the adults. Children should assume responsibility for using the toilet. S/he is, after all, the only one who can control her/his own body.
- If the child is showing signs of resistance, teachers will talk with families and suggest taking a break for a few days and trying again later.

We view toilet learning as a developmental process and take its successes and failures in stride. Successful toilet learning is not a prerequisite for a child to move into the preschool group, although it is taken into consideration as a developmental milestone.

# *Health and Safety*

## **Active Supervision**

Our staff supervise play at all times. Children are never be left unattended: Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers are supervised by sight and sound at all times. Kindergartners are supervised by sound only for brief periods of time (such as independent toileting or during nap time). School-age children may be allowed to leave the teacher’s sight and sound for brief periods, such as taking a message to the office or going inside from the playground to use the restroom. When older children are out of sight, staff check on them frequently.

## **Immunization and Health Records**

Gretchen’s House maintains updated immunization records for each child and reports this information to the Washtenaw County Health Department as required by the State of Michigan’s Care Improvement Registry (MICR).

If your child is not fully immunized, we require a waiver from your physician or the Washtenaw County Health Department. Your child may be excluded from care if they have been exposed, if they show signs or symptoms of a vaccine preventable disease, or if there is an outbreak of an illness for which the child is not immunized..

A yearly physical signed by the child’s pediatrician is required. We require that the hearing and vision section of the form be completed by your physician. This updated health record will be maintained for each child as required by the State of Michigan.

## **Illness Policy**

To protect your child, the staff, and the other children, we request that your child not be brought to the center when your child shows any one of the following symptoms:

- sluggishness or unusual drowsiness without explanation
- extreme irritability or cries and cannot be consoled
- difficulty breathing
- diarrhea in the past 24 hours
- blood or mucus in stool
- vomiting in the past 24 hours
- mouth sores or drooling
- an unexplained rash
- Has an oral temperature of 101°F or higher
- Cannot participate comfortably in routine activities.
- Needs more care than the staff can give while they care for the other children.

Teachers will send a “Sick Child Observation” form via Kaymbu anytime they believe a child may not be feeling well. We provide this information so you can obtain appropriate treatment and/or plan for the possibility of your child needing to stay home.

If we send a child home sick (i.e., with any of the above symptoms), the observation form will indicate that the child should not return to the center until he or she is well or being treated by a physician and meets our other criteria for particular illnesses.

We post notices on Kaymbu and on the family information boards when children have been exposed to any communicable disease. We will care for a child that has symptoms of a communicable disease until a family or authorized adult arrives.

## **Isolation Procedures**

Gretchen's House understands our critical role in helping communities limit the spread of the virus. People who become ill while in care will be isolated.

- If a child becomes ill, the child will be isolated in a designated location until the child can be picked up.
- Proper health and safety precautions will be taken while the child is waiting to be picked up. This includes staff wearing masks, gloves and disinfecting the space once the child has been picked up.

## **When to Return to Group Care**

If a child is sent home due to illness, they should stay home *the next day*, **and** they must be fever- and symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to the Center. It is important that your child not be contagious and be well enough to participate in regular center activities. Often children appear to be well in the home setting, but they struggle in the center environment, due to the higher levels of noise and activity.

If an antibiotic is prescribed for a contagious illness, your child may return after staying home and taking the medication for 24 hours, if they are feeling better. If the antibiotic is prescribed for a non-contagious illness, your child may return when they are able to comfortably participate in the daily routine. We understand this may be an inconvenience, but we also know that efforts such as these to contain illnesses benefit all families. All families should have emergency plans established to care for ill children.

## **Medication**

Medication will be given only after a medication permission slip has been filled out and the medication is labeled with your child's name. Special note: When filling a prescription for your child, ask the pharmacist to divide the medicine into two containers—one for use at home and the other to be kept at the center. Medication is stored out of reach of children in a locked, but accessible cabinet or in the refrigerator. Please talk with a staff member directly when completing a medication form and dropping off a medication.

## **Sick Days**

Families must pay for all contracted care. The same monthly rate will be paid each month, regardless of absence for illness or other reasons.

## When Your Child Is Absent

If your child will not attend as scheduled, please call the center in the morning to report their absence. Our staff need this information to plan their day, and to talk with the other children about their playmate's absence.

When your **school age** child will not attend the center as scheduled, please contact the center at least one hour before the end of school to report the absence. Please check with your center director for details on the notification policy for school age care. Safety is our top priority, so communication regarding attendance is especially important. A fee may be charged for failure to notify the center in advance when your school age child is absent.

## Pest Management

Per Section R400.8390 (9) of the State of Michigan licensing rules for child care centers it is our policy that:

- An annual notification shall be provided to families or guardians informing them that they will receive advance notice of pesticide applications. We will provide this notice in September.
- The annual notification to families or guardians will specify two methods by which the advance notice of pesticide application will be given.
- Advance notices will contain information about the pesticide, including the target pest or purpose, approximate location, date of the application, contact information at the center, and a toll-free number (800-222-1222) for a national pesticide information center recognized by the Michigan Department of Agriculture.
- We generally do not use liquid spray or aerosol insecticide applications in any of our buildings. In the rare case that this would be necessary, advance notice would be given and said treatment would be performed at least four hours prior to the treated room being occupied by children.
- No insecticides are applied by staff. If a problem with stinging insects develops we call a licensed pest control company to find the source and remove or spray them after the center is closed.
- Herbicides are not used within the fenced playgrounds. A pre-emergent herbicide is typically applied to lawns in the spring. We recently decided to stop using herbicides in the decorative flower and shrub planting areas, even though they are outside the playground areas. These areas will be mulched and weeding will be done by hand.
- Before a pesticide is applied we will post notices at least 48 hours in advance at the entrance of the center and on family bulletin boards. You are entitled under this regulation to receive a notice by first class United States mail postmarked at least 3 days before the application. (If you would like this type of notice please mail your request to Gretchen's House, 4531 Concourse Drive, Ann Arbor MI 48108).
- For programs in public school buildings (WISD), the school will notify families of any treatments.

## **Child Restraint in Vehicles**

Automobile safety restraints will be used at all times for children riding in center, staff, or family vehicles while in care at Gretchen's House. Families will be asked to provide a car seat for their child if they are less than 4 years of age, unless the children will be riding in the center busses which have built-in restraints for younger children. Older children will use seatbelts in center vans and busses.

## **Duty to Report**

Children's safety is our first priority. Michigan law states that child care center staff are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. Gretchen's House staff receive information on maintaining safe environments and their duty to report suspected abuse or neglect during new staff orientation and through ongoing training.

Our Staff Handbook states:

Gretchen's House learning environments are intentionally designed to provide clear visibility into classrooms, for ease of observation and communication. Our teaching team approach provides back-up for adults working with children and decreases opportunities for anyone to question a teacher's interactions with a child.

In the event that a staff member is accused of abuse or neglect, the following actions will be taken:

- The staff member will put on a paid leave of absence until the matter is resolved.
- Administration and staff will treat the matter with the utmost confidentiality.
- Licensing and NAEYC will be notified that an investigation is underway.
- Gretchen's House will follow all licensing rules and regulations and state law regarding matters of suspected abuse and neglect.

# *Emergency Procedures*

## **Injuries**

Families will be contacted immediately if their child is hurt and requires medical treatment. If we cannot reach you, we will contact the individuals listed on your emergency card.

Appropriate First Aid will be given while we wait for a family to arrive. If emergency care is required, we will call 911, and a staff member will accompany your child to the nearest appropriate medical facility as indicated on your emergency card.

Families will also be notified for injuries that are not of an emergency nature (pinched fingers, bumps on head...) that might require a physician's consultation but are not serious. We believe that these decisions should be made by each family individually.

## **Fire**

In the event of a fire, the children will be evacuated from the center using the nearest exit and be moved to a safe place away from the building. All exits are clearly marked and each center practices regular fire drills.

Our centers are equipped with smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and alarm pull stations that are inspected regularly.

## **Tornado**

During a tornado warning, the children will move to a safe area (e.g. the lower level of the interior of buildings, near a staircase, away from doors and windows). Children and staff will remain there until an all clear has been sounded by the city sirens or over the radio. All centers practice tornado drills regularly during the tornado season.

## **Other Emergency Response Plans**

We have procedures and policies in place for managing serious emergency incidents at our centers in addition to the ones listed above, including environmental accidents, building issues and acts of domestic terrorism, among others. Our staff have been trained in critical incident response and receive regular renewal training on this topic. We are in communication with the emergency preparedness systems for our communities.

# *Operational Information*

## **Public School Vacations, Report Days**

Any school-age child enrolled for regular care at Gretchen’s House is eligible to attend the center on days there is no public school and the Center is open. Families must register for these extra days in advance on the posted sign-up sheets, and enrollment is based on available space. Fees for extra days will be charged either to that month’s or the next month’s bill. Care will not be guaranteed for children whose families do not sign up. Fees will be charged when families sign up but children do not attend, unless a cancellation is made one week prior to care.

## **Snow Days/Inclement Weather/Building Emergencies**

Gretchen’s House may close centers or have different opening or closing times when necessary due to weather, power outage, interruption in water or sewer service, or other events beyond our control.

- All staff and family phone numbers and emails are automatically entered in our **Kaymbu App**, which we use to send notices of unexpected closings for any reason. We strongly recommend that families sign up for text messages, as well as email.
- We post a notice on our **Facebook** page when unexpected closings occur.

In the event of inclement weather, we will do one of three things:

1. Stay open with our regular hours, 7:45 - 5:15.
2. Open late or close early, with notice given as soon as possible to families;
3. Close for the day.

Please know that our goal is to be open with our regular schedule. If the weather is severe, we will make the best decision we can with the information available. In addition to monitoring public school decisions, we consult with our snow plow services and stay abreast of the local weather reports. Our priority is the health and safety of children, families and staff as they travel. We also need to consider our ability to maintain licensing requirements for staffing when weather conditions prohibit many of our teachers from getting to the center.

**A suggestion:** In the case of bad weather, if you hear the **Ann Arbor or Ypsilanti Public Schools will be closed**, you should check one of the resources listed above to find out what we will be doing—opening on time, opening late, or remaining closed.

Staff members may not care for children during days when the center closes for weather conditions. We suggest that families trade care with other families on snow days if your work does not permit you to stay home.

## **Building Safety**

Gretchen's House has great concern for the safety of families, staff and children in and around our buildings. Teachers routinely practice critical incident situations throughout the year. Buildings owned by Gretchen's House have keypads for more secure entry and other sites follow their buildings safety procedures. Staff are expected to have a heightened awareness of any unknown people in or around their classroom.

## **Parking Lot Safety**

It is important that drivers drive slowly and cautiously in our parking lot for the safety of children and families. Some centers have signs indicating the direction you need to drive to enter and exit the parking area. Please adhere to these instructions and park in a designated space to keep traffic flowing smoothly. It is recommended that you hold your child's hand or carry a young child as you walk to and from your car. Vehicles should not idle in the parking areas at any time, including during drop-off and pick-up. Please turn your vehicle off when entering our facility and remove your keys.

Please do not use your cell phone in the parking lot or upon entering the center. Refraining from using your cell phone keeps our parking lot safe and provides an opportunity for our teachers to communicate with you about your child.

## **Payment Schedule**

Payments are due on the first of each month, as per your contract, regardless of a child's absence for any reason. These include a child's illness, family illness, vacations, doctor appointments, family's days off work, etc. A contract change fee may be imposed each time a change is made to the original contract.

## **Late Payment Fee**

There is a late payment charge for any payments received by Gretchen's House after the 10th of the month in which they are due. Special payment arrangements may be made, in advance, with the Director, if this causes a hardship to any family. A fee will also be assessed for checks returned to us for any reason.

## **Photographs**

We occasionally use photographs of children and teachers at our centers on job fair posters, in brochures, on our web site, etc. No names or other information are provided in these instances. Photos of children engaged in center activities may be viewed by families via the center Kaymbu (or similar) account. Families may get information regarding this app from their child's teacher.

## **Admission Policy**

Children are enrolled at Gretchen's House throughout the year. The admission procedure, as space allows, is as follows:

The family visits the center to meet with the Director, discuss center operation and philosophy and observe the classroom.

The following forms are completed and returned before the child's first day:

- Child information card
- Green health form (signed by a physician)
- Contract (with first month's tuition)
- Family profile
- Field trip permission form
- Participation release
- First Aid permission slip
- Date for enrollment is set (with visit planned prior to the child's first day to ease the transition).
- An orientation visit is arranged for families/guardians to go over specific center policies, etc. with the Director or other administrator.

## **Waiting List Priorities**

Children are given priority for enrollment in our program in this order:

- Currently enrolled children who wish to change schedules or location
- Siblings of currently enrolled children.

Within these categories, the waiting list is based on the first date that contact was made with the center.

**Exceptions: Our Little Huskies location has a different enrollment priority system due to their affiliation with the university.**

## **Withdrawal Policy**

A 30 or 60-day written notice is required if a child is to be withdrawn from the center before his/her contract expires. Please refer to your contract for details on this policy.

## **Late Pick-Up Fee**

Families will be charged \$1 /min. late fee for pick up after our stated closing time. A phone call to the center if an emergency arises is appreciated and will be considered in assessing fee.

## **No Call/No Show Fee for School Age Care**

Families will be charged a fee for failure to notify the center at least one hour before the end of the school day of a child's absence from care. When a child is unexpectedly absent, staff must spend time looking for the child at the pickup location and contacting the school office

and family. It's important that you notify the center when your child will not be attending care.

## **Gretchen's House Statement of Confidentiality for Families and Staff**

Confidential information families provide to Gretchen's House staff will be kept in their child's file and will not be shared without family consent. A child's file is immediately available to their family upon request. Regulatory authorities may also need to review the file (for example, State licensing visits). This information could include documentation of eligibility, requests for community service referrals, or other sensitive information.

Gretchen's House staff perform observation-based, developmentally appropriate written assessments of children enrolled in our programs at any of several points:

- During annual assessments in preparation for family-teacher conferences
- When behavioral concerns arise
- To assist teachers in planning program activities
- To assist the program in making improvements

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is the tool we use at Gretchen's House. Families asked to complete the ASQ when their child enrolls in our program and if/when they transition to another Gretchen's House classroom. This information is used to inform our practices and help scaffold learning.

These screenings and assessments will be shared with custodial families, the center program director and director, and with outside professional consultants as needed following discussion with the child's families. Gretchen's House will not share this information with staff who do not directly care for the child or with families of other children in the program. The information is stored in locking file cabinets.

Families participating in the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) share personal and financial information. Gretchen's House maintains confidentiality by keeping the information in a locking file cabinet and shared only with the relevant WISD staff who oversee the program. The procedures in the referral process allow for all families to be treated equally and no one family will be singled out.

Staff will not discuss individual children's physical and emotional needs and issues with the families of other children. This includes topics such as, but not limited to: illnesses, special needs, physical altercations between children, and enrollment status.

Staff may discuss general behavioral concerns with outside consultants without informing families. If staff and consultants believe a formal professional evaluation is prudent, families will be informed prior to any observations. In these cases, Gretchen's House and/or our

consultant will assist families with obtaining further assistance, as needed.

When families wish to provide our staff with access to their own hired consultants and specialists to help us meet their child's individual needs, families must grant this permission to share information in writing to both parties.

### Licensing Information

All our centers are licensed by the state of Michigan. The center keeps a licensing notebook containing a summary sheet, all licensing inspections, special investigation reports, and related corrective action plans for the last 5 years. The licensing notebook is available to parents/guardian(s) during regular business hours. Reports from at least the past three years are available at [www.michigan.gov/michildcare](http://www.michigan.gov/michildcare)





We encourage you to speak to your Assistant Director or Director with any concerns that arise. The process of solving problems with your child's caregivers is an important part of building trusting relationships. However, if you have conferred with your teachers and the administration in your program and you still feel dissatisfied, it may be time to speak with the Executive Director. Your concerns are important to us and we want to support you and the team in resolving any issues you may have. You can reach the Executive Director at our administrative offices: 734-761-2576.

### **Kaymbu and Bulletin Boards**

Two-way communication between the center and families is very important to us. There is a bulletin board inside each child's entry door where important messages and notices are posted. Please read them and let us know if you have any questions. The Kaymbu announcements will also have the timeliest information.

### **Family Mail Slots**

Each family is provided with a mailbox, cubby, or assigned hook (for a Gretchen's House canvas bag, when provided) in their child's classroom. Please check these daily.

### **Daily/Weekly Children's Reports Through Kaymbu**

Informal daily communication is part of our drop off and pick up routine with all families at Gretchen's House. Formal written communication varies by age group.

Families of infants and toddlers receive a daily note through the Kaymbu Family App. This note has information for nap times, food intake (including type and quantity), diaper changes, daily activities, social emotional health and well-being and developmental milestones. Families of all children with special feeding needs will receive information on food quantity and type of food consumed daily.

Families of preschoolers receive a weekly note similar note to the infant and toddler note. Notes are taken daily and share information on children's current interests, activities, developmental notes and social emotional well-being. Please inform your child's teacher if you wish them to focus on specific information about your child. Families also receive what we call 'moments' through the Kaymbu App. These moments are shared a few times per week so that you can get a view into the day-to-day activities in the classroom. We hope that this type of communication helps you to feel more a part of your child's time with us. You can also reply and comment on these shared moments in the app.

Families of school age children also receive moments through the Kaymbu App. These moments are shared a few times per week. These shared photos will often include learning outcomes we intentionally plan for and that children experience. These outcomes are based on the Weikert Social and Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment tool. We use this school age assessment tool to help guide our programming and adult support in the classroom.

## **Annual Survey**

Gretchen's House distributes an annual survey to families and relevant stakeholders. This survey covers all aspects of program functioning and findings are shared with anyone who participates. Information gathered from the survey is systematically used to create action plans to help our program meet its goals.

## **GH Updates**

Gretchen's House publishes updates about events and early childhood information on our website and on our social media platforms. You can find us at: [www.gretchenshouse.com](http://www.gretchenshouse.com). And at Gretchen's House on Facebook and Instagram.

## **Gretchen's House Lending Library**

Gretchen's House has a resource library which includes books for adults that cover a variety of care giving topics as well as book bags for children with activities that you can do together at home. This library is located near the entry area to your center. We hope you take a moment to find these resources and use them often! We welcome your suggestions for additions.

## **Family Advisory Committee**

All centers are served by our Family Advisory Committee, which meets three to four times each year. The group is comprised of family and teacher representatives from each center. These meetings provide an opportunity for families and teachers to work together to improve programming and operations, as well as to advise the administration on issues as they arise.

## **Community Resources**

You can find many other community resources through [Help Me Grow Washtenaw](#) and [Child Care Network](#).

## **Eco-Friendly and Healthy Practices**

Gretchen's House is dedicated to supporting eco-friendly and healthy practices. Areas that we focus on include but are not limited to:

- We follow the recommendations of the Environmental Working Group (EWG) as closely as possible when buying consumables such as bug replant, sunscreen, and art supplies, as well as classroom materials and furniture.
- HEPA air purifiers are in every classroom to support healthy air quality.
- Each center has a recycling system that children help to maintain.
- All centers have gardens that children help to maintain and when possible, compost.
- We select and use fragrance free, 3<sup>rd</sup> party certified least toxic cleaning products
- Fruits and vegetables are thoroughly washed before being cooked, served or offered to children.
- Each center is routinely monitored by health and safety experts.



## *Making Your Child Comfortable*

Here is a list of items to bring to the center to help your child be comfortable. **Please label every item.** We will do our best to keep track of everything that you bring, but just like at home, things do get misplaced, and we cannot be responsible for replacing items. Families are responsible for laundering their child's naptime bedding, which will be sent home regularly.

### **Infants**

- Prepared bottles (to be labeled with your child's name, the contents and the date using the center labeling system).
- Two complete changes of clothes (extra socks are always useful!)
- New infants to our center benefit from a sleep sack or blanket from home that families have slept with for a few nights. The smell is comforting to them.
- Special blanket (optional)
- Two pacifiers (optional)
- Sleep sack or Woombie for naptime (optional)
- Diapers (if not provided by the Center)

### **Toddlers**

- Prepared bottles, labeled with name and date (if still used) Training pants (several pairs)
- Two complete changes of clothes
- Special blanket (optional)
- Pacifier (optional)
- Sleeping bag or blanket for rest time

### **Preschoolers**

- Two changes of underwear (If not toilet trained, disposable diapers)
- Complete change of clothes
- 2 pairs of extra socks
- Special blanket (optional)
- Sleeping bag or blanket for rest time

### **School-agers**

- Change of clothes
- 2 pairs of extra socks
- Lunch (no peanut butter please—some children have severe allergies)
- Blanket for rest time

Note: Families with children enrolled at WISD should provide breakfast if they want their child to eat this at the center, and lunch, unless a lunch is ordered from the cafeteria.

**GH-Mt. Vernon**

700 Mt. Vernon  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
734.769.4402 (machine)  
734.769.4403

**GH-Mt. Pleasant**

721 Mt. Pleasant  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
734.662.2739

**GH-Stadium**

1745 West Stadium  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
734.663.4720 (machine)  
734.663.4767

**GH-WISD**

Washtenaw Intermediate  
School District  
1735 S. Wagner Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
734.994.8111 Ext. 1696

**GH-Traver**

2625 Traver Road  
Ann Arbor MI 48105  
734.761.7030 (machine)  
734.761.7031

**GH-Oak Valley**

2340 Oak Valley Drive  
Ann Arbor MI 48103  
734.327.6125 (machine)  
734.327.6126

**GH-Dhu Varren**

1580 Dhu Varren Road  
Ann Arbor MI 48105  
734.821.2800 (machine)  
734.821.2801

**Little Huskies**

Michigan Technological University  
500 MacInnes Drive  
Houghton, MI 49931  
906.487.3528

**GH @ HighScope**

206 E. Forest St.  
Ypsilanti, MI 48198  
734.485-.2000 ext. 277

**GH - Zion**

Zion Lutheran Church  
1501 W. Liberty St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
734.845.8991

**GH - Northside**

Northside Community Church  
929 Barton Dr.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
734.492.2799

**GH - Manchester**

2015 Manchester Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
734.251.3860

**GH – Administration**

4531 Concourse Drive  
Ann Arbor, MI 48108  
734.761.2576