Welcome to the Family!

We are so happy you are here!

Happy Acres Ranch
“A place to play, to learn, to discover, and to grow”

2015-2016 Parent Handbook

Awarded a 5 Star Rating
★★★★★
Happy Acres Ranch
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Awarded a 5 Star Rating

Classroom Map
Welcome home to the Happy Acres Ranch Family! Thank you for choosing us to care for your child. We hope you and your child feel welcome here and enjoy your time with us. We are looking for long term relationships with families. As you read through the policies, please keep our commitment to your child in mind.

**Mission**
Since 1953, our goal has been to provide a safe place for children to play, learn, discover and grow. We believe that childhood is a time for children to learn through play and toward this end we adhere to the guidelines for developmentally appropriate programs of APPLE. Our curriculums are carefully chosen and developed with the whole child in mind. They provide a hands on learning experience in a relaxed, natural setting.

**Accreditation**
Our preschool and school age programs are fully accredited by APPLE (Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment) through the Florida Association for Child Care Management. We have been recognized as a Gold Seal Center by the state of Florida. Our Summer Camp is accredited with the American Camping Association. We adhere to the standards of these accrediting bodies at all times.

**Guiding Stars of Duval**
We have been involved with the Guiding Stars of Duval quality initiative since its inception. Happy Acres has consistently been awarded the highest possible rating of 5 stars. Parents and visitors are asked to assist us in upholding all standards in our center by cooperating with staff requests for handwashing policies and procedures.
Registration
It is your responsibility to keep your information up to date. In the event of an emergency, we must have accurate contact numbers. New registration forms need to be completed by September 1st of each year.

Attendance
Please inform the office if your child will be absent or on vacation. VPK, SB6 and School Readiness parents should make every effort to keep absences to a minimum to stay within your contracted absence allowance. Do to legal reasons, Happy Acres Ranch will not call to check on a child that fails to attend on a daily basis. Please note that the full tuition is due regardless of attendance. The expectation is for the two (2) weeks vacation discussed in section “Financial Policies”.

Records
Please make sure we have your most recent contact information. If your child needs you, it is imperative that we are able to reach you. It is also very important to keep pick up information updated. Childcare is more than just between the teacher and child, it is an entire family event. Families that fail to return phone calls in a timely manner will be dismissed from care.

Weather Days
It is Happy Acres Ranch policy to remain open even when schools are closed, unless it is unsafe to do so. Our goal is to accommodate parents who would still be required to go to work. We reserve the right to adjust our hours on these days for safety reasons. On DCPS school emergency closure days, there will be no VPK. These days are excused absences for VPK, School Readiness and Success by Six children.

Medication Guidelines
Happy Acres Ranch strictly follows the Florida Statute and Day Care Licensing policies administration of medication.

Medication Labeling and Bottling Requirements
1. All medication must be administered from the original container with the label intact and legible.
2. All medication must be identified with the child’s name.
3. No medicine may be given after the expiration date on the label.
4. Label restrictions and guidelines cannot be altered without a written physician’s statement.
5. Prescription medicine can only be given to the child named on the label, unless a physician’s statement is provided.
6. Do not add medication to infant formula or juice bottles.
7. Do not give medication that has been prepared by someone else.
8. All medications must be age appropriate and administrated according to the directions on the label.
9. All non topical medication will be stored in a locked container, administered by the office. All repellents are to be administered by the teacher. All repellents are considered medication by DCF. It is our policy not to administer any bug repellent contained DEET provided without a doctor’s note. We provide non DEET bug repellent which will be administered with written parent consent.
**Medication Authorization**

1. The parent must personally hand the medication and written authorization to the most senior staff member on duty daily. Medication is kept in the office. Do not give medication to teachers.
2. The authorization must be complete with the name of the medication, time, amount of dosage and parent signature. A new medicine slip must be filled out daily.
3. When medication is given by staff, the date, time, amount and initials of the person administering the medicine will be documented.
4. Parents will be notified if the medication administration has deviated from the requested dosage or schedule.
5. No medication will be given if there is any possibility of repeating an undocumented dose.
6. “As needed” medication must state the condition and frequency of dose, such as “as needed for cough every 4-6 hours”. The time of last dosage is also necessary to determine when the next dosage be safely given.
7. In case of emergency (high fever, allergic reaction). Benadryl and Tylenol may be administrated with written parent approval prior to the administration of such medication. All information will be recorded and a copy provided for the parent. The original will be retained by the center.

Authorization for medication must be maintained in a child care facility for 4 months from the last day the medication was administered.

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**Financial Policies**

The registration fee of $50 per family is due by September 1st of every year. Tuition is due by Monday mornings before dropping off your child. Since tuition is due by 10 am on Mondays, families are encouraged to pay the week before. A late fee of $25 will be charged if the tuition is not paid by Tuesday at drop off. Even if your child does not attend on a Monday, tuition is still due by Monday at 10 am. We do not prorate fees nor do we have daily rates for preschoolers. Our costs remain the same regardless of your child’s attendance. If your child is out an entire week, the full tuition is due. Starting January 1, 2016, each family is allowed two (2) weeks of “vacation” from care each week. The charge for these weeks are $50 per child. Vacation weeks must be taken in full and you must give management a one (1) week notice. Vacation weeks are per family, not per child. You may not disenroll your child and reenroll to avoid this policy. The current policy does not limit the number of vacation weeks and the cost is $35 per child. It is your responsibility to get a receipt for any cash payments. The preferred payment method is by credit / debit card. Payments, including recurrent payments, may be made by visiting www.happyacresranch.com and clicking on “$ Pay Online”.

Please make every effort to keep your account current. If tuition is not paid by Tuesday of the current week, you child will not be accepted for care the next day (Wednesday). In the event of unexpected financial difficulties, please make an appointment with Colleen or Katie. We reserve the right to charge interest on past due balances. If it becomes necessary to turn the account over to collections, not only will you be responsible for any fees but your family will no longer be welcome to attend Happy Acres Ranch in the future. Tax statements are available after January 31st each year.

Our Tax ID# is 59-1848104
Non English Language Speakers
If you do not speak English or do not speak English well, please inform the office at enrollment. Mr. Charles, a member of our maintenance staff, is a fluent Spanish speaker and can assist Spanish speaking families. If you require the free services of Mr. Charles, you must prearrange this with the office. Although our language resources are limited and we will direct you to someone who can assist you. Many forms for VPK have been translated and will be made available upon request. We also have a limited number of books in Spanish in our library for check out.

Child Abuse and Neglect
Each staff member at Happy Acres is a professionally mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect. As such, we are required to report to DCF any suspected abuse or neglect of children in our care. Please read all accident or incident reports carefully and keep us informed of home accidents.

Dress Policy
We have an active program. Please send children in play clothes appropriate for the weather since we will play outside every day. Children should have a jacket in the cubbie or class bin from September to April. A complete change of clothes should be kept at school for those occasional accidents and messy play. The best type of shoe is an athletic type shoe. Boots or dress shoes may be worn if the sole grips. Sandals, flip flops, or shoes with any openings in the front, sides or back are never allowed! All removable clothing should be labeled with the child’s name. Children will not be accepted into care if they arrive in inadequate clothing.

Illness Pick up Policy
Happy Acres Ranch strictly follows the Florida Statute and Day Care Licensing policies on illness.

Parents will be called to pick their child under the following conditions:

Fever over 101 degrees – The child cannot return until he/she has been fever free without medication for 24 hours. We take temperature under the arm and will add 1 degree to the number you are given.

Vomiting – The child cannot return until 24 hours after last episode.

Diarrhea – The child cannot return until 24 hours after the last episode and has had a normal bowel movement.

Ear Infection – The child can return to the center the next day if the fever is below 100 degrees and has verification of a doctor’s visit.

Colds – If a child has a constant runny nose, persistent cough, and / or green mucus from the nose, we request a statement from the doctor or medication. If the illness affects the child’s disposition or the child needs excessive attention, we will notify the parent.

Head Lice – If your child is frequently scratching his/her head, watch for signs of head lice. After treating with the appropriate shampoo (follow directions carefully) and removing all nits, a head inspection by staff and the box top of the shampoo is required for the child to return.
**Illness Policy**

Happy Acres Ranch will not keep sick children and it is the parent’s responsibility to make alternative arrangements in the event of illness. A child must be picked up within one hour of the first attempt to contact the parent. Management, not the family, will decide if the child meets the criteria to be sent home sick.

A written statement of good health will be required in order to return to the center when a child has been

a. diagnosed with a communicable disease (Strep, pink eye, impetigo, etc.).

b. hospitalized or undergone surgery

c. frequently sent home with the same illness/condition

A visual check by management is required for a child to return after contracting chicken pox or lice.

If your child becomes sick over the weekend or in the evening, please call and let us know that the absence is due to illness. If your child wakes up with a fever, do not give Tylenol and send him/her to Happy Acres Ranch. This practice will only get other children sick. Families who continually send in knowingly sick children will be dismissed from care. Your child will recover much quicker when they are allowed to rest quietly at home.

If medication is required, it must be age/weight appropriate and in its original container. All medication is to be delivered to the office and a medicine slip filled out daily. All medication should go home each night. This prevents medicine expiring and the forgetting of antibiotics.

**Personal Belongings or Items**

We have lots of toys at Happy Acres Ranch and so we ask that you leave all toys at home. Children are territorial and most have difficulty sharing toys brought from home. All personal belongs must be labeled. This includes the items your child is wearing (i.e. t-shirt) and the items they are bringing in (i.e. jackets). Do not send any item which is breakable, expensive or irreplaceable. Please do not allow children to wear jewelry which they may attempt to remove. Happy Acres Ranch is not responsible for loss of or damage to any personal belongings. Please remember to check cubbies daily. All cubbies need to be emptied on Friday and any cloth items washed.

**Animals at Happy Acres Ranch**

We are blessed with a variety of God’s creatures at Happy Acres. We have cats and horses at the barn. We have rabbits and chickens in the Life Lab. We have fish in the lake as well as herons and egret. We have ospreys, owls and the occasional eagle in the woods. We have classroom pets such as fish. We have an ever changing variety of animals on display in the Nature House. Because we have a natural setting, we have a wonderful assortment of woods creatures which we learn to protect and respect. If your child is allergic to any animals, please notify the office in writing.

We continue to offer Pony Rides, arts and crafts, daily story times and lots of outdoor play. Each group has a weekly theme and corresponding special activities.
**TV / Videos / Computers**
We are strongly committed to developmentally appropriate curriculum and learn through play philosophy and therefore, we do not use TV or videos in our center. Ipads are occasionally used by the teacher to aid in instruction. Teacher Ipad use is required by Teaching Strategies Gold.

**We are Proud to be Electronic Free!!!**

**Summer Program**
Happy Acres Ranch offers a more relaxed and active program during the summer months. We have a large summer day camp with a variety of traditional camp activities for school aged children. We also have an awesome Preschool Camp that is specifically designed for the 3-5 year old child. Children must be 5 to enroll in the school age camp. Most children do best once they have completed Kindergarten although some children are ready before Kindergarten. All children who are 4 or who we deem ill prepared for the school age camp will be enrolled in the Preschool Camp. Placement is at the decision of the Camp Director. Our day camp has been accredited by the American Camp Association since 1958. Camp enrollment forms are available from the office and online after January 1. Spaces in our school age camp are not reserved for our year around children. There is a separate enrollment form that needs to be completed before the camp sells out.

We continue to offer full time care for preschool age children during the summer months. Children over toddler age who are completely potty trained may start swimming lessons in our fresh water lake. Diapered Toddlers participate in water play. We administer a solution of vinegar and alcohol as eardrops after swimming. This helps prevent swimmer’s ear.

**Drop off Policy**
You must park, turn off your vehicle and walk your child to his/her teacher to sign them in. Make sure the teacher has acknowledged your child before leaving. Do not leave your other children unattended in the car while you drop off. The state of Florida punishes adults who leave children under 6 years old unattended in a motor vehicle, whether the vehicle is running or not. Only an adult (18 years or older) may sign in a child. A child must be handed off from adult to adult. The only exception is a 16 or 17 year old driver is the sole person dropping off. Due to the disruptions it causes in your child’s routine, you may drop off no later than 10 am. When dropping off this late, your child still needs to have the typical morning routine. Routines are very important for the health and well-being of children. You need to stay on whatever schedule you have decided is best for your family. If your child has stayed up considerable late the night before and needed to “sleep in”, please keep your child home that next day. Staying up late or sleeping in, even as little as 1 hour, can negatively and severely impact their day and cause a lot of stress on the child, the teacher and the other children in the class.

**Parental or Custody Disputes**
Occasionally situations arise when management may deem it unsafe to release a child. Parental and custody disputes should be resolved between the parties involved and decisions submitted in writing to management. Legally, the only orders we can follow are those listed in custody papers and/or orders of protection. Both parents have equal rights under the law unless these rights have been specifically removed by a judge. Parent requests around a judge’s order will be granted by removing the child from the area and calling the other parent. Please understand that if JSO is called, we must follow the court orders.
**Pick up Policy**
You must park, turn off your vehicle and walk your child to his/her teacher to sign them out. Never leave without signing a child out and letting his/her teacher know. Only an adult (18 years or older) may sign out a child. A child must be handed off from adult to adult. The only exception is a 16 or 17 year old driver is the sole person picking up. Do not leave your other children unattended in the car while you drop off. The state of Florida punishes adults who leave children under 6 years old unattended in a motor vehicle, whether the vehicle is running or not.

Children may be picked up for the day by the parents or guardians at any time. Friends and other family members may pick up only with parental permission. ID will be required until the person is personally known to the staff member on duty. You may add and remove persons from your child’s pick up list at any time.

If there is ever an issue at pick up and the staff member feels unsafe, we will call DCF and JSO for assistance.

**HAR Refusal at Pick up**
We reserve the right to refuse a person to pick up any child. This is only done in cases where we think allowing the person to take a child will cause harm to the child. This includes if the person is intoxicated, under the influence of a drug, or does not have an age appropriate car seat. Please make sure that the person picking up your child is of sound mind. We will always err on the side of the child’s safety.

**Food and Nutrition**
We provide home cooked, balanced meals which include milk, protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. We offer and encourage the children to try a variety of foods. If your child has special dietary requirements, allergies or restrictions, you are required to provide a doctor’s note for any menu substitutions or deletions. In the unusual case of food restrictions, it may be necessary for you to provide food for your child. Other wise, outside bringing lunch or snacks are prohibited except on bring your own lunch days and for parties. Children are taught to serve all meals themselves. Children are served a nutritious child friendly breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack. School age children may choose to purchase their afternoon snack from the camp store. Breakfast is available for Preschool and School Age children in the dining room from 7:00 to 8:00 am. Please sign your child into their teacher and our staff will escort them to the dining hall. No child will be offered breakfast if arriving after 7:50. Breakfast supervision ends at 8:00. Infants and toddlers are served breakfast, and all other meals, in their classroom. VPK only children be dropped off for Breakfast Club as early as 7:45 and stay until 12:30 for Lunch Bunch. There is an additional charge for the additional supervision hours.
Discipline Policy
We strive to help every child be successful by providing a variety of fun, age appropriate activities. A successful child is generally a well behaved child!

We encourage children to practice self-control and respect for others. We employ a variety of positive techniques such as classroom and transition routines, varying activities, distraction, positive reinforcement and modeling appropriate behavior.

The first line of discipline is a “toy time out”. This could be a toy being put away for a length of time, a child not being allowed in a center, or an entire center closed. When the child is still having stress over play and cannot maintain self-control, they may need to some “thinking time”, away from the group but under adult supervision. Isolation from the group by sitting apart for a limited time while others play is usually effective. Corporal punishment, humiliation and threats are not allowed at Happy Acres Ranch.

Frequent use of bad language, spitting, biting, fighting, bullying or hurting others or any other serious behavior problems will be recorded and a copy given to the parent. In cases of ongoing behavior challenges, we will send the child home and request a conference with the parent. We have a zero tolerance policy for children that physically hurt others. Any child who hurts another will be sent home for the day. Families who refuse to work with us on their child’s behavior will be dismissed from care.

We encourage parents to help keep us informed in writing of any special circumstances or changes in the child’s life which may influence a child’s behavior.

Volunteers
Parents and family are encouraged to volunteer in our program. All volunteers must check in the office, leave their ID, and obtain a volunteer badge. You may volunteer during a typical day (with approval from the classroom teacher) or during a special event. Special events are listed in our monthly newsletter: the “Happy Times”. Any person may volunteer 10 hours a month or less without additional screenings. If you wish to volunteer more than 10 hours per month, DCF requires you to complete a level two background check. Volunteers will never be alone with children and may not accept money as payment for services. No volunteer will be allowed without a proper ID.

Visitors
Parents and guardians are welcome to visit at any time. Other visitors are admitted only with permission of management. Any stay longer than five (5) minutes at drop off or pick up is considered a visit. Please understand that although parents are welcome to visit, it is generally disruptive to a child’s day. Children are sometimes confused by this and do not understand why you are leaving without them. Parents are encouraged to exercise discretion in timing these visits. When arriving for your visit, you must check in at the office, leave your ID, and take a visitor badge. All visitors must be accompanied by a staff member while on the property. No visitor will be allowed without a proper ID. Visitor procedures are not required for large center wide event. All family members who chose to stay after the event has ended are required to obtain a visitor badge.
**Parent Rights and Responsibilities**

Parent have the right to:
1. Be fully informed of all matters regarding their child.
2. See their child at any time.
3. Be informed in advance of any closing days or fee changes.
4. Have concerns addressed in a timely manner.

Parents are responsible for:
1. Providing up to date information regarding contact and custody.
2. Picking up the child within one hour of first contact when the child has an illness.
3. Assisting the center in resolving behavior issues of their child.
4. Providing spare clothing, diaper and wipes as needed.
5. Providing accurate information and food substitutes for special dietary needs.

**Assessments and Conferences**

The progress of each preschool child is assessed three times each year during October, January and May. In addition, VPK students are assessed for progress in the areas of Phonological Awareness, Print Knowledge, Oral Language and Mathematics. Parent conferences are held at the conclusion of each assessment period. These conferences do not require a visitor badge. Parents may request conferences at any time during the year with VPK teachers between 7:45-8:00am. Parents may request additional conferences with Infant, Toddler and Preschool teachers and administrators by contacting the office or the teacher directly. Conferences at those times require a visitor badge.

**Potty Training**

Potty training starts at home. Once your child has had success on their own at home, we will gladly assist them. Indicators for potty training readiness are as follows:
- Naming body functions
- Expressing a need to be changed
- Actively participating in potty training
- Using the potty successfully at home

When both parents and the teacher are in agreement about the child’s readiness, your child will need each day:
- 5 pairs of underwear
- 5 complete changes of clothes
- A small supply of pull-ups for non-successful days

Do not send our child with these items until you have discussed the plan with your child’s teacher. We send home soiled clothing daily. Please resupply as needed. When all parties work together, the process is usually fairly quick and easy!
**Parent Involvement**
We believe that the parent is the first and most important teacher a child will ever have. We encourage parents to be involved in every aspect of their child’s development. Please keep the classroom calendar posted and refer to it often to stay involved in your child’s activities. Parents can also get involved by sending their email address to colleenhappyacres@gmail.com and become part of the email blast. It will have our weekly menu and communication with the parents. Several times a year, we send home family projects. Please take time to do these projects with your child and return it to the classroom for display. Projects do not need to be elaborate. The important thing is your child understands the importance you place on their education. We also have lending libraries in each preschool classroom. Each day your child will check out a book. Please read it together each night. There are also book contests and a spring book fair.
Involvement in these activities helps your child develop a love of reading. Families who routinely do not participate in their child’s early childhood educational experience will be dismissed from care.

We host two community outreach activities each year. In October, we hold a Trike-A-Thon to benefit St. Jude’s Hospital. In March, we participate in the Pennies for Pasta Drive for Leukemia Research. The opportunities help your child develop a concern for others.

We offer several activities each year that we encourage your participation. These events are Mother’s Day Tea, Thanksgiving luncheon, Easter and Halloween parades. These events are other opportunities for you to be involved with your child’s education.

**Parent – Teacher Communication**
Frequent communication is encouraged, especially with young or new children. Feel free to talk briefly (no more than 5 minutes) with your child’s teacher at drop off and pick up each day. Conferences, by phone or in person, can be made for longer discussions. Visitor procedures are required for in person conferences. The transition period is much smoother if the teacher and parents are both aware of any changes in the child’s life, routine or health. It is best to submit this information in writing. Please do not hesitate to schedule a conference if you need more time to discuss a particular concern. You are welcome to address concerns with the administration at any time. We would much rather you let us know if you are unhappy and give us a chance to remedy the situation than pull your child out. Please schedule a conference with your child’s teacher before their first day. Our doors are always open to you!