



Preschool

GREATER STARTS WITH A SPARK



2026 - 2027 FAMILY HANDBOOK LAKE NORMAN YMCA

YMCACharlotte.org

**GREATER
HAPPENS**

AT



YMCA OF
GREATER
CHARLOTTE

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Welcome to the Lake Norman YMCA Outdoor Experience Preschool Program!

We're thrilled to welcome your family to a new season of wonder, learning, and growth in the great outdoors! At the Lake Norman YMCA, our Outdoor Experience Preschool offers a nature-based, play-driven program for children aged 18 months through 5 years. We believe that the best classroom has no walls and that children thrive when given the freedom to explore, create, and connect with the natural world.

We're passionate about early childhood education that sparks curiosity and joy. Whether it's a muddy puddle, a pinecone, or a gentle breeze, nature provides endless opportunities for meaningful learning and discovery.

This handbook is designed to help you feel confident and prepared as we partner in your child's early learning journey. Inside, you'll find information on:

- What to expect from YMCA preschool and our outdoor-focused program
- How we'll keep your child safe, warm, and engaged year-round
- The rhythms and routines of our days
- Communication, logistics, and policies

We hope this guide supports a smooth and joyful transition into our program. If you ever have questions or need clarification, we're here for you—please don't hesitate to reach out.

Program Contacts

If you have questions or need to reach us:

Katherine DeMilt

Program Supervisor, Preschool and YKids

 Katherine.DeMilt@ymcacharlotte.org

For emergencies or urgent help, please call the Lake Norman YMCA front desk:

 704-716-4400

YMCA Program Policies and Guidelines

This handbook is specific to the Lake Norman YMCA Preschool program. To access general YMCA of Greater Charlotte youth program policies please refer to the YMCA of Greater Charlotte's [Preschool Resource Hub](#). It is strongly encouraged that you bookmark this page.

This page includes program cancellation policies, financial policies, childcare time limit guidelines, medical forms, and much more.

Our Purpose

To love, serve, and transform lives.

Our Mission

To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

Our Values

Caring · Honesty · Respect · Responsibility · Faith

Calendar & Hours

- Program Start and End: **August 31st 2026, to May 21, 2027.**
- Daily Schedule: **Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.**

We follow the **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS)** calendar, including holidays and weather closings

Program Philosophy

We believe children learn best through play, exploration, and strong relationships—especially in nature. Rooted in the Reggio Emilia philosophy and NAAEE best practices, our program supports curiosity, creativity, independence, and a deep connection to the natural world.

Social-emotional development is the foundation on which all other learning is built. Skills like communication, empathy, and self-regulation are essential and nurtured daily through play and community.

Academic learning emerges naturally—through counting acorns, journaling garden discoveries, building forts, and asking questions about the world. Our educators guide this learning with intention, honoring each child's development in a joyful, meaningful way.

What to Wear

Our preschool is outdoors every day—rain or shine—so dressing your child for the weather is important! **Please label all your child's belongings to help us make sure everything gets back home safely.**

Please make sure your child wears:

- **Comfortable, weather-appropriate clothing** they can move and play in.
- **Rubber-soled, closed-toe shoes** like sneakers or hiking shoes. (No sandals, flip-flops, Crocs, or slick shoes.)
- **Clothes you don't mind getting messy!** We'll be painting, exploring, eating, and digging in the dirt—it's all part of the fun and learning.

As seasons change, we'll share more guidance on gear for rain, cold, and heat. We want your child to be safe, comfortable, and ready for adventure every day!

What to Bring

- **Extra Change of Clothes**

Please send a full extra set of clothes (including socks and underwear) at the beginning of the year that we can keep at the Y. Outdoor play means kids may get wet, muddy, or otherwise messy! Swap these out as the weather changes, when they've been used, or as your child grows. Staff will notify families if clean clothes are needed.

- **Water Bottle**

Send a labeled water bottle with your child every day. Outdoor play keeps us busy—and thirsty!

- **Lunch & Snack**

Pack a **nutritious snack** and a **healthy, well-balanced, and nut free lunch** each day. We eat outside when possible, so consider easy-to-open containers and minimal packaging.

What *Not* to Bring

- **Toys from Home**

To avoid lost items and classroom conflict, please leave toys at home unless it's a special *Show and Tell* day (we'll let you know in advance).

- **Electronics**

We do not allow iPads, phones, handheld games, or other technology in preschool.

Label Everything!

Seriously—we can't say it enough. Label **everything** your child wears and brings to school:

- Clothes
- Jackets, hats, gloves
- Water bottles, lunch boxes, containers
- Boots, shoes, rain gear

Labeled items are much more likely to find their way home! If something goes missing, check with your child's teacher or look in our Lost and Found.

Daily Activities

Each day is full of hands-on, engaging activities designed to support your child's development across all areas—social, emotional, physical, and cognitive.

Our preschoolers spend most of their day outside, exploring and learning through play. Daily activities may include:

- **Circle time** for songs, stories, and sharing

- **Nature walks and outdoor exploration**
- **Learning centers and small group activities**
- **Creative play, music, and movement**
- **Art and open-ended projects** using natural materials
- **Social-emotional learning and community building**
- **Physical play** like climbing, running, balancing, digging, and building

Each class will have a consistent rhythm and routine, and your child's teacher will share a more detailed schedule at the start of the school year.

Academic Progress in Our Nature-Based Program

In our nature-based preschool, progress is measured through engagement and real-world learning experiences. Here's what that looks like:

- **Curiosity and Exploration:** Children are encouraged to ask questions and explore their environment—whether it's identifying plants, discovering animals, or investigating natural materials.
- **Foundational Skills:** Academic growth is observed through early literacy (like storytelling), math (counting objects or identifying patterns), and scientific thinking (asking "why" and "how").
- **Social and Emotional Development:** Skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving are integrated into daily interactions and play.
- **Hands-On Learning:** Progress is visible in children's ability to use natural materials for learning, such as journaling in the garden, building structures, or observing wildlife.

Teachers provide regular updates on your child's progress, noting strengths, challenges, and areas of growth. We value family input and believe in working together to support each child's unique journey.

In January, we will hold conferences to discuss your child's development and throughout the year we will share ways you can support their learning at home.

If you'd like to request a conference at any other time during the school year, please reach out to the Preschool Supervisor.

Lunch & Snack

Our schedule includes time for both snack and lunch. Teachers will monitor the children to ensure safety and provide assistance as needed during mealtimes. However, teachers will not be responsible for the amount or order of food your child chooses to eat.

Please note that we cannot refrigerate or heat lunches. We recommend using insulated containers to keep food at the right temperature.

Important Guidelines:

- No candy or soft drinks.

- No nut products (due to allergy concerns).
 - Pack items your child can open and manage independently whenever possible.
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Walking

In order to get the most out of the program, we ask that families with a child who is still working on walking independently contact program leadership to discuss possible supports and accommodations. This helps us ensure that all children can participate fully and comfortably. Program contacts are at the beginning of the handbook.

Pick Up and Drop Off

Pick up and drop off at the Lake Norman YMCA takes place at the double doors on the left side of our building as you enter the parking lot. Staff will be present during the designated times to walk your child to their class.

Arrival (8:45-9:00)

A staff member will greet your car and check your child into preschool. Please wait for the staff member to open the door and assist your child to their classroom. We ask that caregivers remain in the car to keep the carpool line moving efficiently.

Departure (12:45-1:00)

At pickup, please display the sign with your child's name in your car window. As you approach the Preschool entrance, show the sign, and we'll bring your child to your car. For safety reasons, please stay in your vehicle, and a staff member will place your child in the car. Avoid using your cell phone during carpool times as we have many children and staff moving in the parking lot.

Please Note:

- Staff cannot strap your child into the car seat. After pick-up, please pull into a parking space or fire lane to buckle your child in. This helps the carpool line run smoothly.
- North Carolina law requires a child safety seat or booster seat for children under 8 years old. We will not dismiss a child if the proper car seat is not in place.

Late Arrival

If arriving after 9:00 am please ring the doorbell outside the double doors for drop off and pick up. A staff member will come to check your child in

Late Pick-Up

Late pick-ups will incur a fee of \$10 for every 5 minutes past 1:00 PM. Fees will be automatically charged to the credit/debit card on file. If you arrive after 1:05 PM, you will need to pick up your child in our front lobby. If a child is not picked up within 10 minutes, we will contact someone on your emergency contact list.

If you are running behind please contact us ASAP through Brightwheel or the Lake Norman YMCA front desk at 704-716-4400.

Authorized Pick-Ups

For safety, children can only be released to a legal guardian or an authorized adult listed on their account. Every adult picking up a child must present a government-issued photo ID unless the person's photo is already in our childcare software. If

someone not listed on your registration form will pick up your child, please email the director with their name as it appears on their photo ID.

Authorized pickups and emergency contacts can be added and edited using the change form on our website. Please note that these changes can take several business days to process.

Inclement Weather and Outdoor Play

Our preschool program follows the guidelines set by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) to determine when indoor activities will be necessary. "Inside weather" refers to conditions where outdoor play would be unsafe or unsuitable, including but not limited to:

- **Extreme temperatures:** Below 32°F or above 95°F
- **Torrential rain:** Heavy rain or thunderstorms that cause unsafe outdoor conditions, such as slippery surfaces or lightning
- **High winds:** Winds over 30 mph, or gusts that may cause safety hazards (e.g., falling branches, debris)
- **Severe weather events:** Hurricanes, tornadoes, or other extreme weather that poses a significant risk to safety
- **Poor air quality:** Alerts for unhealthy air quality, such as high levels of pollution or smoke

If these conditions arise, we will move to indoor activities for the safety and comfort of the children. Families will be notified via the Brightwheel app if any changes to the outdoor schedule occur.

Health and Wellness Policy

For the safety and well-being of all children and staff, the following health and wellness guidelines will be strictly enforced in all youth programs. Please be considerate and do not send your child to programs when they are sick. If a child develops symptoms of illness while in our care, the family will be notified and the child will need to be picked up immediately.

Children who have the following symptoms should remain at home until they are symptom-free for a full 24 hours without the use of medication or unless a written note from the child's physician is provided, stating that the symptoms are not contagious and the child can attend programming:

- Fever (temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sore throat

- Undiagnosed rash, sore, or other skin condition
- Head lice
- Continuous and/or colored drainage from nose or eyes
- Persistent cough
- Any other contagious disease or symptoms

Allergies:

If your child has allergies, please fill out the appropriate medical forms attached to your welcome email. We can hold emergency medicines (e.g., EpiPen, inhalers) and as needed medicines. Please contact us in advance so we can meet their needs while they are in our care.

Staff will notify the family or guardian to pick up children when any of the following conditions exist:

1. The child displays any of the symptoms above.
2. The illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in program activities.
3. The illness results in a greater need than the YMCA staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children in the program.

We ask for your cooperation to help keep everyone healthy and safe in our outdoor preschool setting.

Medications

If a child requires medication during their time at the Y, families are responsible for updating the child's health profile in their YMCA account, notifying the program director, and completing our Medication Authorization Form.

Our team will administer medications prescribed by a physician with dosing that the family cannot provide at home. Medication must be in the original container with the prescription label attached that includes the child's name, date of birth, medication name, dosage, and expiration date. Over-the-counter medications must be in the original container and require a physician's note, as these will be treated as prescription medications.

Emergency Medications:

Emergency medications, such as EpiPens, inhalers, or other life-saving treatments, must be provided and clearly labeled. Emergency medication can be kept at the YMCA once the proper forms are filled out. Please contact the program director with any questions.

New Medications:

With the exception of emergency medications, the first dose of any new medications should be given at home with sufficient time before the child attends the program to observe the child's response to the medication.

Storage and Expiration:

We cannot accept, store, or administer expired medication. Medication must be picked up within one week of the program end date, or it will be disposed of.

For the health and safety of all children, we ask that parents/guardians ensure all necessary medications are up to date and available for outdoor activities. Thank you for your cooperation!

Behavior Guidelines

Philosophy

At the YMCA, we believe that youth development is built on a foundation of safety and character. We respect each child's unique needs and recognize that behavior is a form of communication. Our approach is designed to support individual development, understanding that not all children come in with the same social-emotional skills. We aim to create a positive, nurturing environment where every child can thrive.

Behavior Expectations

We help children learn and meet the following behavior expectations in alignment with our core values:

- **Caring:** Show a sincere concern for others.
- **Respect:** Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- **Responsibility:** Be accountable for your actions.
- **Honesty:** Be truthful in your words and actions.
- **Faith:** Center yourself around your own spiritual well-being.

How We Support Youth

To help children succeed and make positive choices, we:

- Build intentional relationships with each child.
- Create consistent routines to provide security and predictability.
- Encourage children to express their emotions in healthy ways.
- Use praise, rewards, and encouragement for positive behavior.
- Set age-appropriate expectations, while adjusting for individual needs based on maturity, ability, culture, and learning style.

- Work with families to ensure success in our programs.
- Stay calm and supportive in heightened situations.

Behavioral Expectations

Behaviors that threaten safety or disrupt the program experience may result in consequences, including:

- Behaviors that physically harm themselves, others, or staff.
- Behaviors that threaten the emotional safety of others.
- Behaviors that damage property.
- Behaviors that prevent participation in program activities.
- Behaviors that violate personal boundaries or involve sexual conduct.

When inappropriate behavior occurs, it presents an opportunity for teaching. Unless the behavior is severe, we use the following approaches to guide the child:

- Redirect the child to a different activity or choice.
- Review the behavior expectations to ensure understanding.
- Provide a verbal warning, explaining the consequence if the behavior continues.
- Apply a logical consequence, such as a change in seating or restricted access to certain activities.
- Use “time-in” (co-regulation) instead of “time-out,” sitting with the child to talk about what happened, why it happened, and how to respond better next time.
- Contact the parent or guardian to discuss the situation.
- Work with the family to develop an individual behavior plan, if necessary.

Our goal is to help children learn from their mistakes and make positive changes for the future.

Biting, Pushing, and Rough Play

Preschoolers are still figuring out how to express their emotions and interact with others. Behaviors like biting, pushing, and rough play can happen and are not uncommon, especially when they don't yet have the words to communicate how they're feeling. We understand that these things are part of early childhood development, and we're here to guide kids through it.

If your child does engage in biting, pushing, or rough play, we'll address it calmly and safely, helping the child understand why these behaviors aren't okay and teaching them better ways to express themselves.

We'll work together as a team with you, the family, to ensure we're all on the same page. If these behaviors become more frequent, we'll collaborate on a plan to support your child and help them build positive social skills. Rest assured, we're all in this together, and we're committed to helping your child learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment.

Toilet Training

We know that potty training can be a big milestone for both kids and families, and we're here to support you through it. For children in our younger toddler class, we work closely with families during the potty training process. If your child is working on potty training, please let their teachers know so we can support the techniques you're using at home and create a consistent approach between home and school.

All children develop at their own pace, and we are committed to meeting each child where they are developmentally. The general expectation is that children approaching age three are either fully potty trained or actively working toward independence by the start of the school year. However, we know that all children develop differently.

If your child may need additional support—such as pull-ups, extra reminders, or a transition plan—please connect with the program coordinator or director before the school year begins so we can work together to support a smooth and respectful transition.

We also understand that accidents happen, and if one occurs, our teachers will help your child change into clean clothes. Please be sure to send an extra set of clothes with your child, just in case.

If your child needs additional support with toilet training, such as wearing pull-ups, please reach out to us ahead of time so we can create a plan that works for your child. We're always happy to work with you and ensure this milestone is a positive experience for everyone!

Childcare Time Limit

Preschool at the Lake Norman YMCA is not licensed or regulated by NCDHHS. Based on state guidelines regarding unlicensed childcare, children are not able to use Y Kids if they have already participated in YMCA childcare programs that total up to 4 hours on the same day (Preschool, Afterschool, Y Scholars, Out of School Days, Day Camp, etc.). Please note that our system will not allow children to be checked into Y Kids if they have met or are close to reaching this time limit.

Communication

We encourage open communication between families, teachers, and program leadership to ensure we're best supporting you and your child. Children's behaviors may reflect changes or challenges they're experiencing at home (like a new sibling, a loss, or family changes), so please let us know about anything that could impact your child's experience.

Email – You will receive updates from program leadership on school-wide activities and important information.

Brightwheel – Each class uses Brightwheel to share important updates, pictures, activities, and upcoming themes. You can also message your child's teacher via the app. Teachers are only expected to check the app during working hours. Out of respect for their time please allow up to one school day for responses. Any urgent questions or requests should be directed to the Program Supervisor – 704 416 4432

Feedback – We value your feedback! Please don't hesitate to email, call, or set up a meeting with us to share your suggestions or concerns. We'll also periodically send out surveys or ask for feedback to ensure we're continually improving.

Family Involvement

We believe that family involvement enriches the learning experience. We offer several ways for families to get involved throughout the school year.

Volunteer Opportunities – Please contact the Program Director if you are interested in registering as a Preschool volunteer. Please be aware that the YMCA requires all volunteers to be background checked and go through child abuse prevention training prior to volunteering.

- **Parent Committee** – Volunteer registration and a committee interest form submission is required to join. The Parent Committee is a volunteer committee that plays a vital role in supporting our preschool program by assisting with events, teacher appreciation, and enrichment opportunities.
- **Mystery Readers** – Volunteer registration is required. Kids love a surprise! Come read to a class and make their day

Events – With the support of the Parent Committee we put on several events throughout the year. Families are invited and encouraged to attend when able. Keep an eye on Brightwheel for event announcements and sign ups.

