

# Empower Academy

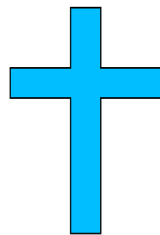
## Our Promise to Parents

216 W. Jefferson Street  
Sullivan, IL, 61951

Located inside of the  
First United Methodist Church

Open from  
6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

**Preschool  
Parent  
Handbook**



**DeP**endability

**C**reativity

**P**ositivity

**Com**Munity

**Cred**ibility

**Inclu**Sivity

**Int**Egrity

## Mission Statement

Our mission at Empower Academy is to provide a nurturing environment that promotes learning and development of the whole child, including spiritual, social, and academic. We value the uniqueness of each child and family we serve. Our educators' mission is to provide a safe and developmentally appropriate learning environment, which fosters a child's natural instinct to explore, discover, create and become a lifelong learner.

## Philosophy

Our philosophy is based upon our core values at Empower Academy.

**Dependability** - You can count on us to provide a safe, nurturing, and structured environment where your child is cared for with love, attention, and professionalism. We deliver reliable schedules resulting in consistent care allowing you to have peace of mind as a busy parent.

**Creativity** - We believe in nurturing each child's imagination, curiosity, and unique way of thinking. Children learn best when they are encouraged to explore, express, and invent through hands-on, meaningful experiences resulting in confident, independent thinkers.

**Positivity** - We provide an uplifting environment where children feel safe and surrounded by God's love. Our staff speak to children with kindness and encouragement focusing on each child's strengths and achievements.

**Community** - We are more than just a preschool, we are a family. Rooted in faith, we strive to create meaningful connections between children, families, & staff.

**Credibility** - Our staff are highly trained and grounded in Christian values, ensuring your child is in safe and nurturing hands. We are committed to doing what is right, keeping our word, and operating with excellence in all we do.

**Inclusivity** - Every child and family is welcomed, loved, and valued - just as they are. We teach children that God's love is for everyone and we model kindness, empathy, and compassion in our daily interactions.

**Integrity** - We speak truthfully with families and children, even in difficult moments, and always with grace and respect. You can feel confident that your child is being nurtured in a place where values aren't just taught - they're modeled by our staff and lived out daily.

## Staff & Contacts

Brightwheel is the main form of communication and should be used first unless in case of an emergency.

Empower Academy - 217-728-9111

Executive Director - Miss Melissa Krieger - [melissa@myempoweracademy.com](mailto:melissa@myempoweracademy.com)  
*Questions, concerns, suggestions 217-909-9111*

Associate Director - Miss Casey Smith - [casey@myempoweracademy.com](mailto:casey@myempoweracademy.com)  
*Day to day program information, questions, & concerns*

Office Manager - Melissa Lynch - [admin@myempoweracademy.com](mailto:admin@myempoweracademy.com)  
*Enrollment / Billing questions & concerns*

Visit our website for a complete list of all teachers & support staff.  
[www.myempoweracademy.com](http://www.myempoweracademy.com)

## Enrollment

Before you can attend you must complete our admissions packet through Brightwheel which includes providing the following documentation:

- Birth certificate
- Physical
- Immunization records

A one-time admission fee of \$25 is required at the time of enrollment.

## Program Overview

### **Preschool Full Day for ages 3-5**

Traditional preschool, full of hands-on activities and a rest period. Includes breakfast, lunch, and two snacks.

Our program is open for 11 hours daily, however children may only attend for a maximum of 10 hours daily. During enrollment you will choose the 10 hours your child will attend. Planning this out in advance is what allows our facility to be open longer and meet all families scheduling needs.

## Tuition

### Rates Per Week for Full Day Preschool

\$200 Monday - Friday

\$130 Monday / Wednesday / Friday

\$ 90 Tuesday / Thursday

## Payments

Tuition is paid via ACH auto-pay through Brightwheel. An invoice will be sent on Wednesday the week before tuition is due and will run automatically on that Friday with your saved autopay. Failed payments will automatically be re-processed. 72 hour unpaid invoices due to insufficient funds or errors on the parent's behalf will be charged a \$25 fee. Repeated incidents could result in the termination of childcare services. Your child will be dismissed from our program if you are more than 2 weeks behind.

## Subsidized Care - Illinois Child Care Assistance Program

Empower Academy accepts childcare assistance. Parents will be responsible for full payments until authorization has been received and then a monthly copay after a determination amount has been calculated. If at any time assistance is stopped, parents will be responsible for full tuition as of the date the assistance ended.

## Late Pick-Up Policy

The center closes at 5:30pm, Monday-Friday. Parents will be charged \$5 a minute for every minute a child is present after their contracted pick-up time. You will be invoiced & charged within 48 hours based off of the sign-out time in Brightwheel.

If parents do not arrive to pick up their child from the program by 5:30 p.m. staff will try to contact the parents using all phone numbers provided. If parents are unable to be reached, staff members will then try to contact all emergency/approved pick-up contacts. By 6:00 p.m. if staff members are unable to reach someone to pick up the child the Director present will notify the Sullivan Police Department.

## Holidays & Closures

To keep high-quality staff at our facility we have chosen to close to observe 7 holidays and hold 2 professional development days. That totals 9 days throughout the entire year that families WILL be charged while we are closed. This makes your weekly amount due the same every week.

- New Years Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas
- Two Professional Development Days
  - Day AFTER Memorial Day
  - Day BEFORE Sullivan school starts

If the holiday falls on a weekend day, the center will close during the week. For example, if New Year's Day falls on a Saturday, we may close on Friday or Monday. Families will be given notice ahead of time on which dates are chosen.

Note: To maintain your child's enrollment and reserve their spot, tuition must be paid in full regardless of vacation or absence. This includes family vacations, holidays or other planned/unplanned time off. This policy helps ensure consistent staffing, program quality and availability of care for all families.

## Curriculum

Our facility is very proud to be using the highly acclaimed Experience Curriculum in all our classrooms! This curriculum is designed to enhance your child's learning experience with hands-on, engaging activities that foster creativity, critical thinking, and early childhood development. What this means for your child:

- They'll be participating in fun, interactive lessons that are designed to build key skills for their future.
- We'll be using research-based activities that support each child's individual learning style and development.
- You'll see more purposeful play and projects that encourage your child to explore and discover the world around them.

We will also supplement our curriculum with Experience God Preschool Curriculum which is a Christian curriculum with the mission to teach children about the character of God, how He cares for them, and how He asks us to live and show His light.

What this means for your child:

- Learning a monthly bible story and verse with accompanying activities
- Prayer time before snacks & meals
- Games and projects that nurture Christian values

## Daily Activities

### Full Day Preschool

6:30-7:00 am	Table Toys / Fine Motor Activities
7:00-7:30 am	Breakfast
7:30-8:30 am	Learning Centers
8:30-9:00 am	Circle Time
9:00-9:15 am	Snack
9:15-9:45 am	Gross Motor
9:45-10:00 am	Circle Time
10:00-10:15 am	Music & Movement
10:15-11:15 am	Learning Centers / Art Activity
11:15-11:30 am	Clean up / Bathroom
11:30 - 12:00 pm	Lunch
12:00-12:30 pm	Storytime
12:30-2:30 pm	Nap Time
2:30-3:00 pm	Snack
3:00-3:30 pm	Small Groups
3:30-4:00 pm	Gross Motor
4:00-5:00 pm	Learning Centers
5:00-5:30 pm	Table Toys / Fine Motor Activities

### **Classroom Program Components:**

- Each classroom will operate on a daily schedule providing a planned program of activities geared to the individual needs and developmental levels of the children being served. These activities shall provide experiences that promote the individual child's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth and well-being.
- The daily program shall provide experiences in the following areas: Art, music, literature, manipulative, block building, science, dramatic play, nutrition and health, etc.;
- Indoor and outdoor play in which the children make use of small and large motor skills;
- A balance of active and quiet play, including group and individual activities
- Activity areas, equipment, and materials will be arranged so that the child's activities are visible to the teacher;
- Regularity of routines will afford the child security of knowing what is coming next;
- Sufficient time for activities and routines will assure that children can progress at their own developmental rate; and there will be no long waiting periods between activities or prolonged periods during which children must stand or sit.

## Please Provide

Please bring your child in comfortable play clothes and shoes. Play is usually active and often messy; comfortable, washable clothes are important if your child is to participate fully in the program. Outdoor play is scheduled every day as an essential part of our planned curriculum.

- One complete change of clothing (including underwear & socks) to be kept at school and replenished as needed. Please label or place in a labeled baggie.
- One blanket and/or stuffed animal for quiet/rest time that must be labeled and will be kept with their cot or in their backpack.
- If not completely potty trained - pull-ups & wipes
- Backpack, folder & re-usable water bottle - labeled with their names
- Children are not allowed to bring toys, electronics, or other non-essential items from home unless specifically requested for a special event ( e.g. Show and Tell)
  - If brought - the teacher will instruct the child to leave it in their backpack and a warning will be given.
  - The center is not responsible for lost or unmarked items.

## Arrival & Departure Procedures

### Arrival

Please accompany your child to their room and check in with the iPad into Brightwheel.

### Departure

Retrieve your child from the classroom and check out on the iPad using Brightwheel.

We encourage parents to communicate with their child's teacher about their child's temperament that day, how he/she slept the night before, whether he/she has eaten that morning, etc. Most children go through periods of difficulty with separating from their parent(s). This is common and developmentally appropriate.

Try these tips for a successful drop-off:

- Establish a regular, predictable routine. Whether you have a kiss and a hug and go or help your child put his things in his cubby first, do it the same way every day. What often makes separating stressful for children is uncertainty. If your child can predict what will happen, separation won't be as difficult.
- Separate once. If you come back into the classroom again and again, it will increase your child's stress. Remember the moment of separation is the worst part for your child, so doing it more than once makes it more stressful for your child

ONLY adults listed in your Brightwheel as authorized pick ups will be allowed to pick up your child.

## Attendance

Regular attendance is strongly encouraged for the benefit of the child as well as the classroom as a whole. Any time your child will be absent, please notify your teacher via Brightwheel. You are charged the same whether you attend or not. Enrollment will be terminated if a child is absent for a period of a week or more, and no notice has been received or contact made by the family.

Illinois Child Care Assistance Program: If a child's attendance falls below the required 80% attendance rate, Empower Academy has the right to terminate services.

## Health & Safety Policies

### **Illness**

Our first priority is providing a healthy, safe learning environment for all children. Children cannot be in a group setting if they have any of the following:

- Temperature above 100 degrees
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Rash, sores, or open wounds - unless cleared by a doctor
- Head lice

If symptoms develop during the day, the child will be isolated until someone can come and get them. The child must be free of symptoms 24 hours before returning to the center. Parents will be notified of communicable diseases contracted by any child at the center, so symptoms can be observed (Licensing #407.31) The center reserves the right to make the final determination of exclusion due to illness.

### **Medications**

#### **Prescriptions**

If your child will take prescription medication during the day in our care, the Prescription Medication Authorization Form must be filled out FIRST by the child's doctor and is available in Brightwheel.

#### **Non-Prescriptions (Over the counter)**

If your child needs non-prescription (over the counter) medication during the day in our care, the Non-Prescription Medication Authorization Form must be filled out FIRST by the parents. Common uses for this include: Desitin, Specialized sunscreen, motrin, etc.

Both of these forms are accessible in Brightwheel and can be submitted there as needed.

All medicine must be accompanied by written instructions on the bottle: child's name, doctor, dosage, method and time. Medication will be properly labeled and stored in a designated refrigerator, out of reach of the children, outside of the classroom.

Prescription and non-prescription medicine must be in original containers.



### **Hand Washing**

Frequent hand washing with soap and warm, running water is the most effective way to reduce and prevent the spread of illnesses commonly found in childcare such as the flu, diarrhea, and pink eye.

Times your child (and staff members) will be expected to wash their hands:

- Arrival
- After using the toilet
- Before and after mealtimes
- Before and after administering medication
- After handling bodily fluids (mucus, blood, vomit)
- After coming indoors from the playground
- After cleaning or handling garbage

Warm, running water (no colder than 60 degrees F) and soap must be used. Hands must be rubbed vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including the backs of hands, between fingers, under nails, and under any jewelry. A disposable paper towel should be used to dry hands and turn off the faucet. Help reinforce the importance of hand washing by encouraging frequent hand washing at home as well.

### **Accident or Injury**

In case of accident or injury, the Director and/or a staff member using his/her discretion, will follow the procedures listed below.

1. Emergency first aid will be administered.
2. The parent/guardian may be called and requested to come immediately and attend to the child's needs.
3. If the Center cannot reach the parent or another emergency contact, the child's physician will be phoned for instructions.
4. If a child requires emergency medical care, he/she will be taken to the emergency room and the parent/guardian will be notified immediately.
5. An accident report giving an account of the incident by the staff member who witnessed it will be completed and kept in the child's file. Parents are informed via Brightwheel.

### **Mandatory Child Abuse Reporters**

As childcare professionals who interact with children daily, each staff member of Empower Academy is a mandatory child abuse and neglect reporter and must contact the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services whenever abuse or neglect is suspected.

### **Drug Free Premises**

Empower Academy is a drug, alcohol, and smoke free working environment. Smoking or vaping of any kind will not be allowed on the premises. If your child is dropped off smelling like marijuana or other "distracting" odors you will be contacted to pick them up and change their clothing and/or belongings. Parents who smell of marijuana or other "distracting" odors will be asked to leave the premises.

## Guidance & Discipline

Guidance and discipline are essential parts of a supportive learning environment, where children feel safe, respected and empowered to grow. Our approach is grounded in mutual respect, clear expectations and positive relationships. Discipline is not about punishment, but about teaching. We strive to help children understand the consequences of their actions, develop self-regulation skills and make responsible choices. Guidance involves helping children learn from their experiences. We value open communication, active listening and problem solving to help children reflect on their behavior to understand how it impacts themselves and others. Ultimately, our goal is to foster an environment where every child feels valued, understood, and capable of becoming a kind, independent and responsible individual. Positive reinforcement and praise are effective methods of behavior management of children. When children receive positive, nonviolent, and understanding interactions from adults, they develop good problem solving abilities, self-discipline and confidence. Based on this belief, Empower Academy uses a positive approach to discipline and practices the following discipline and behavior management techniques.

### **We Do:**

- Communicate to children using positive statements at their level
- Talk to children in a calm, quiet manner
- Establish consistent daily routines to provide structure and stability
- Model appropriate behavior
- Reward good behavior with praise, attention or small rewards to encourage repetition
- Use storybooks and discussions to work through common conflicts
- Listen to children and respect their needs, desires and feelings
- Provide brief, calm periods used for children to cool down and reflect on their actions (no longer than 1 minute per their age)
- Involve children in finding solutions to behavior issues to teach problem solving skills
- Guide children towards appropriate activities to distract from undesirable behavior
- Allow children to experience the natural outcomes of their behavior or apply related consequences to teach responsibility
- Use simple, direct language to explain the rules and expectations
- Show empathy for children's feelings and help them understand the impact of their actions
- Limits and consequences will be clear and understandable to the child and explained before any disciplinary action is taken.

- Discipline will be developmentally appropriate and related to the behavior. The teacher will relate the act to the consequence to make it a learning experience.

### **We Do Not:**

- Inflict corporal punishment in any manner upon a child (Corporal punishment is defined as the use of physical force to the body as a discipline measure. Physical force to the body includes, but is not limited to, spanking, hitting, biting, shaking, pinching, pushing, pulling or slapping)
- Use any strategy that hurts, shames or belittles a child
- Withhold food, rest or use of bathroom as a form of punishment
- Withhold physical activity as a form of punishment.
- Leave any child alone, unattended or without supervision
- Allow discipline of a child by another child
- Discipline or punish for toileting accidents.
- Use any abusive or profane language in the childcare setting
- Use any form of emotional abuse, including shaming, rejecting, terrorizing or isolating a child.
- Any form of public or private humiliation, including threats of physical punishment

Staff will build strong relationships with children by using positive language. Teachers will create and follow a consistent schedule and use visual cues to be helpful. They will ensure transitions between activities are smooth and well managed. All staff will model positive behavior and handle conflicts calmly and peacefully. Empower Academy will promote a social-emotional learning program that will help teach children empathy, self awareness and cooperation. Staff will encourage problem solving and reflection when conflicts arise, helping children to solve problems and learn to make better choices. They will work with families to make discipline consistent and share concerns with guardians as well as successes. Only those with ongoing relationships with the child will have responsibility in the discipline of the child. When there is a specific plan for responding to a child's pattern of unacceptable behavior, all staff who affect the child shall be aware of the plan and cooperate in its implementation.

It is important for parents and staff to be consistent and use the same language and expectations for the child. Ongoing communication between parents and staff helps with behavior expectations. Parents are encouraged to give feedback to staff to help with behavior. It is pivotal for children to see parents and staff working positively together.

Children are not just recipients of discipline, they are also active participants in learning how to behave, solve problems and care for others. The goal is to guide them toward self regulation and social understanding in developmentally appropriate ways. They can

help make rules, pick their outcomes and solve the problem. Preschool children shall have reasonable opportunities to resolve their own conflicts. Learning conflict resolution is helpful for child growth for their school age years and beyond.

Empower Academy is very proactive in prohibiting suspensions in our childcare program. When a teacher is faced with a child with challenging behaviors, the following steps are taken:

1. The teacher will document the child's behavior over a two week period using a behavior log.
2. Teachers will provide redirection, transition strategies, special attention, communication, ensure the child is getting adequate food, see if they need a nap or encouragement to the child during the two week period to assist the child in changing the behaviors.
3. If the challenging behavior rises to the level of violence to staff or other children, the teacher will immediately meet with the director to request a parent meeting to get their input into strategies that may be implemented at home or how they believe we can better help their child. The plan will include support strategies for the child, i.e. schedule change, picture charts or other modification of the classroom environment. A written plan will be developed at this time and agreed upon by all parties.
4. After the two week documentation period and after a written plan has been in effect for an additional two weeks, if the challenging behavior persists, then the teacher will meet with the director to contact the mental health specialist and request an observation with the permission of the parent. The teacher will then meet with the mental health specialist to discuss the challenging behaviors and other pertinent information prior to the observation day.
5. After the mental health specialist has completed their observations, staff and parents meet to discuss their classroom strategies with the permission of the parents.
6. The teacher then documents the behavior of the child for another two week period. If the behavior persists and all strategies are exhausted, another parent/staff meeting is scheduled to discuss future steps and in some cases the parent will be directed to discuss the issues with their child's doctor and report any changes, suggestions, medications that their doctor may advise.
7. If the child receives an updated medical plan, then staff continue to work with the child for an additional two weeks to determine if there is a change in behavior.
8. Should a situation arise where there is documented evidence that all possible interventions and supports recommended by a qualified profession have been exhausted - and it has been unanimously determined by family, teacher,

program and other service providers that another setting is more appropriate for the well-being of the child in question- all parties, will work together to develop a seamless transition plan to use that plan to implement a smooth transition into another program, if possible.

## **Rules and Regulations**

### **Classroom Rules:**

- Use walking feet while inside
- Use good listening ears
- Be kind to others
- Use a quiet inside voice
- Use gentle hands
- Share & take turns
- Have fun
- Follow directions
- Take care of classroom materials
- Keep hands and feet to yourself
- Keep the classroom clean & neat

### **Playground Rules:**

- Only go DOWN the slide
- Do not jump off equipment
- No rough play
- Include others
- Play safe

## **Food Service Policy**

At Empower Academy, children are provided with nutritious meals and snacks. The center follows the nutritional guidelines established by the child and adult Food Program. Menus will be shared via Brightwheel. Children will be encouraged to sample all foods that are offered but will never be forced to eat. Please inform your child's teacher if your child cannot eat a certain food or has different dietary needs (e.g. vegetarian, vegan, lactose intolerant) so a substitution can be made. For certain dietary restrictions, you may be asked to provide food from home for your child.

## Food From Home - Birthday Celebrations

Children are welcome to bring in treats to celebrate a birthday or holiday. Due to various food allergies and dietary restrictions in our classrooms, we require items to be store-bought, in the original packaging, and items pre-approved by the staff. Please make sure to message your teacher at least 1 week in advance to plan the treat.

## Connected Community

### **Brightwheel**

Brightwheel is an app to help parents stay connected with their child and teacher during school hours. Empower Academy uses Brightwheel to communicate, share photos, notes and incidents.

### **Newsletters**

A weekly newsletter will be posted in your child's classroom and sent via Brightwheel. This newsletter provides you with general information and announcements about the program and the detailed weekly themes and announcements.

### **Parent Participation**

Parent participation is strongly encouraged in our program. Some possible opportunities to participate and contribute to your child's experience:

- Construction or collection of raw materials for art projects, dramatic play props, etc
- Classroom parties / celebrations
- Optional take-home learning activities

### **Program Evaluations**

Empower Academy asks parents to complete a program evaluation annually. The information gathered from these anonymous surveys is used by the staff to develop goals for our center and to improve the overall quality of care at our center. A parent's point of view is different from a teacher's point of view. Therefore, parent feedback on the program evaluations is very important to the success of our program and satisfaction of our families.

## Emergency Procedures

A monthly fire drill and two seasonal tornado drills will be established and implemented to assure prompt evacuation of the building in case of an emergency. This will be done in a manner as not to frighten your child, but to assure him of his safety.

## **Fire**

In the event of a fire and/or the fire alarm is set off, all teachers and children in the center will exit through the exits located off each of their classrooms. Teachers will be responsible for counting heads to ensure that all of their students have exited the building. When all children have evacuated the building, the designee will be responsible for exiting with the master attendance record and will check roll.

## **Tornado**

In the event of a tornado, children will be placed in the designated area throughout the building. They will be instructed to kneel and cover their heads. Teachers will space themselves among the children. The designee will take attendance into the designated areas and record attendance.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a top priority for Empower Academy. Personal information from families and staff will not be shared for any reason without prior written consent of the individual. When discussing a child's activities and friends in the classroom, only the first names will be used. In situations regarding behavior problems and/or Incident/Accident Reports, names of children involved will never be given to families. Brightwheel is an app used to communicate between parents and staff. Please know that staff can read messages sent via Brightwheel. Please keep Brightwheel communication information to things that you do not mind staff reading.

## **Records**

Each fall, Empower Academy completes an audit of enrollment records. At the conclusion of this audit, families will be notified if anything needs to be updated per Illinois DCFS rules.

## **Physicals and Immunizations**

Each child must have a current physical and immunization record on file to attend. The physical on file must be updated every 2 years; immunization records must be updated whenever a new immunization is received.

Other records must be updated throughout the year, such as physical and immunization records. When visiting your child's physician for a yearly "well-child" appointment, please request a copy of your child's physical and most recent immunization record. In addition, any time a family's information changes such as address, place of employment or health insurance provider, new forms must be completed.

## Insurance

Empower Academy has a liability insurance policy that covers general liability of \$1 million per occurrence and \$2 million aggregate. Also a policy covering transportation of \$500,000 combined single limits.

## Lead Testing

In accordance with Illinois Licensing Standards, Empower Academy used lead free plumbing and fixtures to meet federal and state requirements allowing us to not have to test at this time. If regulations change or testing becomes required in the future, we will complete all testing and notify parents of results.

Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.  
-Proverbs 22:6