



**GRACIA PROGRAM
FAMILY HANDBOOK 2024/2025**

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CONTENTS

- + WELCOME - 3-4
 - Our Story - 3
 - Core Values - 3
 - Mission and Vision 3
 - General Information - 4
 - Holidays/Vacations - 4
- + PROGRAM OVERVIEW - 5-6
 - Our Philosophy - 5
 - Our Methods - 5
 - Our Teachers - 5
 - Family Partnership - 6
- + ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES - 6-7
 - Inclusion Policy - 6
 - Enrollment Process - 6
 - Tuition, Fees - 6
 - Important Documents - 6
 - Withdrawal By Parent - 7
 - Termination of Enrollment - 7
 - Disclosure of Information - 7
- + TUITION AND FEES - 7-8
 - Registration Fee - 7
 - Tuition Payment - 7
 - Acceptable Payment Methods - 7
 - Late Pick Up - 7
 - Arrival and Departure - 8
 - Classroom Transitions - 8
- + HEALTH AND SAFETY - 9-11
 - Sick Child Policy - 9
 - Returning to Center after Illness - 9
 - Communicable Diseases - 9
 - Lice - 9
 - Fever - 9
 - Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) - 9
 - Diarrhea and Vomiting - 10
 - Allergies and Special Needs - 10
 - Medication Policy - 10
 - Biting Policy - 10
 - Child Abuse and Neglect - 10
 - Tobacco Policy - 10
 - Accident and Incident Reports - 10
 - Medical Treatment - 11
 - Fire Drills&Evacuations - 11
 - Emergency Relocations - 11
- + NUTRITION - 11
 - Meals and Snacks
 - Infant Feeding Procedures
- + DISCIPLINE - 12
 - Discipline Policy
 - Parent Interaction
- + PARENT COMMUNICATION - 12
 - Brightwheel Application
 - Inclement Weather
- + PARENT INVOLVEMENT - 13
 - Open Door Policy
 - Parent Volunteers
 - Birthday (Sun) Celebrations
- + OUR CURRICULUM - 14
 - Blended Curriculum
 - Infants (6 weeks - 12 months)
 - Toddlers (13 months - 24 months)
 - 2 and 3 Year Olds
 - Observations, Screening, Portfolios
 - Technology Policy
 - Spanish Immersion Program
- + INFANT & TODDLER CLASSROOMS - 15
 - Items Provided by Parents
 - Infant Sleep
 - Infant Food
 - Entry and Departure
- + PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS - 16
 - Items Provided by Parents
 - Clothing Tips
 - Potty Training
 - Bedding for Naps
 - Naps
 - Indoor Play
 - Outdoor Play
- + DAILY SCHEDULE - 17
- + GRIEVANCE POLICY - 17

WELCOME

Our Story

Over 12 years ago, while a Montessori teacher, Lala founded Casa Lala, driven by the strong demand of parents to have a **family-like environment** during after-school hours for their children. The program began small and although it has grown steadily since those days, Casa Lala's aim remains the same: to provide a joyful, nurturing and fun environment for the children of our community that could come to feel like a second home for them. Our Gracia Program cares for children between the ages of 6 weeks to 5 years and has been developed to support our families' desire for high-quality care.

Casa Lala's team is fully **bilingual** (Spanish/English), and our programs aim to provide a cross cultural experience for our children. Activities are developmentally minded and put a strong emphasis on creating **a sense of community**: dancing, arts and sciences and exploring nature. We are a small, family-owned business that believes fervently in the respect and natural development of the child.

We pull from the Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Forest Schools, and our own Casa Lala approach. Our program celebrates all cultures. We are a Spanish immersion program, though no previous language knowledge is necessary. We love our families and will always try and support you the same way you support us: **we aim to be a family rather than a 'business.'**



Core Values

We Value:

Joy through the arts (including music, dance, painting, and making).

Freedom for our children to explore. The child takes the lead and we give them time and space to develop their own innate interests

Learning through play and fun through learning.

Creating a sense of community is our backbone. We value our relationships with teachers, parents, and the greater community and seek to instill this in our children through group activities and the Montessori "grace and courtesy" lessons.

Mission and Vision

Our mission aims to provide children with an experience that feels like a second home, a "casa" where children can feel part of an extended "familia," where they can feel comfortable and safe, and where we seek to blend learning and playing as the children spend a fun time with their "amigos". We endeavor to provide **an environment for care that feels like home in a Spanish immersive and multicultural environment**, emphasizing practical life experiences, art, language, music, and movement and encouraging curiosity inspired by the Montessori approach to learning in both indoor and outdoor settings, as a preparation for and a complement to their education in school. We lean into the joyful and **close-knit community** we have forged between our center and the families we serve. We seek to support children physically, emotionally, and developmentally, starting at infancy, when their minds begin to observe and explore our wonderful world. We seek to provide an organic curriculum that places the child at the center, with age-appropriate activities, starting with Montessori-designed sensorial lessons that spark curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking, moving through practical life lessons and language over time, and supporting the natural need for movement and play. In Casa Lala, we carefully and deliberately work toward designing safe and beautiful "casa" spaces that complement these enriching experiences and where **a carefully prepared environment** is integral to learning, an environment that fosters love, care, and respect, setting children up for success in their lives as they move beyond our center.

WELCOME

General Information

Contacts

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Ages

We offer care for children ranging from 6 weeks - 5 years of age.

Days and Hours of Operation:

We are open for care Monday - Friday from 7:30 am - 5:30 pm, with before care offered from 7:30-30 am and aftercare from 3:30 - 5:30 pm.

Holidays/Vacations 2024/2025 - Casa Lala is CLOSED:

Memorial Day, Monday May 27, 2024
Independence Day, Thursday July 4, 2024
Labor Day, Monday September 2, 2024
Thanksgiving Day, Thursday November 21, 2024
Day after Thanksgiving, Friday November 22, 2024
Christmas Day, Wednesday December 25, 2024
New Year's Day, Wednesday December 1, 2025



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our Philosophy

Casa Lala's unique philosophy, and all activities in all our programs, are a mix of four distinct educational methods:

MONTESSORI

Lala is an **AMI Montessori guide**, and passionate about Dr. Montessori's work. From Montessori, we take the respect for the child, we let the child lead the way in their own learning (primarily through child-led projects and outdoors exploring), we follow the **sensitive periods and learning planes**, the Montessori way of presenting new materials and projects, and, especially in our Gracia daycare group, use Montessori materials.

REGGIO EMILIA

Reggio Emilia shares many aspects of the Montessori philosophy, including the respect for the child and the **encouragement of self-directed learning and independence**. From Reggio Emilia we take the focus on group and hands-on approach to learning, open ended play and discussions that turn into projects, and we have borrowed **workshops** (particular to this methodology), especially those started by child-led interest. Reggio Emilia also places a big importance on community and families, which we also replicate.

FOREST SCHOOLS

In Forest Schools children are provided opportunities to **discover and explore nature**, spend as much time outdoors as possible, promote teamwork and independent problem solving, learn to manage risks, and learn about the numerous critical aspects of our natural world. All of these are directly applied in our «DC is our Classroom» program.



CASA LALA ALEGRIA

The Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Forest Schools philosophies are mixed with a fourth: Casa Lala Alegria, Lala's own methodology based on a deep belief in the effects of **JOY**, music, dancing, friendship, community, color, and **sazón** (seasoning in Spanish). Our team member's dedication to maintaining a happy environment for each child is, in our opinion, unmatched.

Our Methods:

Provide active and responsive care through consistent routines and intentional experiences. Establish meaningful relationships with families through effective and regular consistent communication.

Provide age-appropriate experiences and small group activities that encourage gross and fine motor development.

Curiosity and exploration of the natural world.

Mathematical thinking & reasoning.

Language and literacy skill development.

Social and emotional awareness and development.

Foster self-esteem while celebrating children's successes.

Provide continuous professional development and coaching support for our teachers.

Our Teachers

Our team is the soul of Casa Lala. It is our teachers and guides who create unforgettable memories for the children. Lala begins by setting an example, promoting a way of teaching and of delivering experiences with love, compassion and huge amounts of joy, which has made Casa Lala stand out among the families we serve.

Casa Lala believes in the importance of qualified and experienced teachers to maintain the safety and well being of the children. Beyond **meeting licensing needs of each staff through OSSE (Office of the State Superintendent) we offer a scholarship program for our teachers to attend Montessori training** through MOLAT (Montessori of Latin America) and continuous professional development.

Teachers strive to create positive social environments to promote children's social emotional skills; and help them become competent, enthusiastic learners. Teachers are facilitators of learning, by helping children to build knowledge and understanding. Teachers plan according to the interest and proficiency level of the children based on their observations and screening of the children. They ask open ended questions and encourage children to explore their natural curiosities, while encouraging and supporting them along the way.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES

Inclusion Policy

Casa Lala provides an inclusive learning environment that serves a diverse mix of ages, genders, race, and religions. No child will be denied enrollment on the basis of his/her race or religion, nor will a child be denied enrollment on the basis of having special needs. We make all reasonable arrangements to accommodate children with special needs. When a child with a specific need or medical condition is enrolled, we work with the parents and/or the healthcare provider to develop a care plan for that child.

Enrollment Process

- Schedule a Tour or attend an Open House
- Complete and submit an application form with a non-refundable \$75 application fee
- Once a space is offered, parents must accept the offer in writing within 2 days of receipt, along with a non-refundable registration fee of \$450

Important Documents

The following documents must be submitted to the office and updated in your Brightwheel account before your child's first day of school:

- Emergency information
- Authorization for Child's Emergency Medical Treatment
- Medical Authorization Form
- Immunization Records (all children must have updated immunization records unless written opposition to this on religious or medical grounds are on file)
- Child's historical information
- Getting to know your infant (if under 12 months)
- Authorization to pick up child (Release of Information Form)
- Food Allergy/Sensibility/Food Preference Chart



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Family Partnership

We value transparency and active parent engagement. Open and respectful communication helps the teacher bridge children's experiences in the program with their experiences at home. We encourage a safe and non-judgmental environment where teachers can learn from family members. Families are invited to share their unique knowledge and skills and are encouraged to actively participate in the school's life.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES

Withdrawal by Parent

Parents are required to provide the center with 30 days written notice before withdrawing their child. Any family wishing to return must re-register (subject to availability). All enrollment fees will apply.

Termination of Enrollment by Center

The center may terminate your child's enrollment for the following reasons:

- In the judgment of the management team, the child's behavior is a threat to the physical or mental health of the other children; after all interventions have been exhausted.
- If the child is brought to the center ill more than three times within a thirty-calendar day or is not picked up promptly when called due to a child's illness.
- If the center cannot meet the child's developmental or special needs.
- If the parent fails to abide by the terms of the center's policies as defined in the Parent Handbook.
- If the parent fails to complete and update the required forms for the child's file.
- If the parent fails to pay tuition or fees; by the due date and is repeatedly late.
- If the parent uses threatening behavior or language on campus in front of staff and/or children.

Disclosure of Information

Our center protects the rights and privacy of all of our children and families. Certain directory information (Name/Contact Information) will be gathered and shared for our Parent Directory. All families will be notified before this information is gathered and published with a reasonable time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them.

TUITION

The below are monthly fees.

Beforecare: 7:30am - 8:30am: \$125
 Aftercare: 3:30 - 5:30 pm: \$250
 Program hours: 8:30am - 3:30pm (see below for fees per age group)

Ages

6 weeks - 12 months: \$2150
 13 - 24 month: \$2,150
 25 - 36 months: \$2,150
 36 months - 5 year: \$1,950

Registration Fee

Upon registering your child with Casa Lala a one-time non-refundable registration fee of \$450 per family is required. Fees are payable prior to your child's first day.

Tuition Payment

Tuition is billed monthly. Parents will receive an invoice via the 'Bright Wheel App' on the last Friday of each month. Payment in full is due on the first of each month. Payments will be considered late on or after the 3rd of the month and will accrue a late charge of \$10 per day. Late fees may not be accrued more than \$50. Services may be suspended until your account is made current.

Repeated late tuition payments may result in suspension of care or unenrollment.

Tuition is due regardless of school closures or your child's absence.

Acceptable Payment Methods

All Tuition and fees are processed via the Bright-Wheel App. Parents may opt to use direct debit with no additional cost. All credit or debit card payments will incur a 2.9% processing fee

Late Pickup

We understand that sometimes events happen that will make a family late to pickup and thus will grant grace 2 times (if the pickup is under 15 minutes late). If pickup is late after 2 times or first time past 15 minutes late, the late fees are applied as follows:

5:31 pm-6:31 pm - \$20.00 and \$1 per minute thereafter.

TUITION

Arrival and Departure

At drop off, parents are required to sign in on the Brightwheel app and assist their child with putting belongings into their cubby. Please ensure a staff member is aware of your child's arrival. Children cannot be left in the classroom alone. Please inform the teacher or the director when your child will be absent or any changes to your child's schedule. We appreciate knowing about events that may affect your child's behavior in the center, such as an illness, death, changes, a crisis in your family, absence of a parent, moving, etc.

Likewise, at pick up, please sign your child out using the Brightwheel app and make contact with a staff member. Although we encourage open communication between parents and staff, we must ask that communication be brief during arrival and departure times. The staff member's attention must be with the children she/he is supervising to ensure the safety of all of the children. We recommend arranging a mutually convenient time with the Lead Teacher for a phone call or meeting if you need more time to discuss your child, concerns, or answer questions.

A child will not be released to an unauthorized individual. Any person picking up a child, including a parent, may be asked to show photo identification by the office or a staff member. No one under the age of 18 years old may pick-up your child and we request no more than 2 people enter the center to pick up a child. To ensure the safety of all children, parents need to supervise siblings closely to avoid accidents. Do not leave a child unattended in a classroom and always keep children with you.

Extended Leave

Casa Lala is unable to provide any discounts for extended leave. Tuition is payable on a continuous basis. However, if extenuating circumstances arise parents are advised to speak with the Director. If circumstances require an extended leave, parents may withdraw and re-enroll upon return based on availability.

Classroom Transitions

In order to help children and families adjust to our center, we require children to attend a classroom visit (scheduled with the director) with a family member present in the classroom, prior to the child's first day. Additional time may be requested based on the child's needs and sensitivity to transitions. Additional resources about separation can

be requested from the Program Director. Children transition into another classroom based on birthdate, teacher assessed readiness skills, and the spaces available. Parents should not expect their children to move into a new classroom on their birthdays.

We have a gradual transition process:

- Parents are informed in advance of classroom transitions.
- A Transition Form/plan is completed and shared with parents.
- The child visits the new classroom daily. Each day for an incrementally longer period.

Transitioning from one classroom to another can last up to 2 weeks, depending on the child's adjustment to the new class. Parents are encouraged to meet with the child's new teacher and visit the child's new classroom, prior to your child's first day.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Sick Child Policy

DC Child Care licensing regulations prohibit sick children from attending childcare programs or remaining in the center once a child becomes ill with a contagious illness or disease. Upon arrival and throughout the day, staff observes children for signs and symptoms of illness. If signs or symptoms develop, parents are notified to make arrangements to collect their child within an hour.

If a child in the program is diagnosed with a contagious illness (e.g.: strep throat), a health alert and information on the signs and symptoms will be posted throughout the center and emailed to all families.

Our childcare staff cannot diagnose illness. They are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of illness, and we reserve the right to determine when a child should go home.

The following signs and symptoms will be used to notify parents:

- Temperature of 100.5 degrees or higher*
- Deep chest cough
- Asthmatic symptoms
- Rash
- Stomach ache
- Diarrhea (2 episodes of unformed stools within 2 hours)*
- Vomiting*
- Headache
- Discolored discharge from nose
- Red, pink, itchy eyes
- Lethargy
- Change in behavior and inability to participate in everyday activities

Casa Lala cannot leave a child unattended inside. We cannot honor requests for children to stay inside during outside time. If a child cannot participate in gross motor or outside play, they may be required to stay home until they can participate in daily center/classroom activities.

Returning to Center after Illness

When a child has been absent due to illness for three or more days, we require a note signed by the doctor stating the reason for the absence and that the child may return to a regular schedule of activities, including outdoor play.

The center reserves the right to make the final decision on when a child may return to the program.

Communicable Disease

Casa Lala intends that all communicable disease cases be handled individually with an emphasis on the entire center's total care and safety. If diagnosed with a communicable disease, **the child may only return to the center with a doctor's note specifying the return date.** If it is found to be necessary, other families and the health department will be notified of the communicable disease. Likewise, we ask that families notify the center if a doctor diagnoses their child with a communicable disease.

Lice

We maintain a policy of NO LICE, NO NITS. If one "louse" or one nit (egg) is found on your child's body or hair, parents will be notified immediately and asked to be picked up from the Center within an hour. The child may return to the center 24 hours after treatment. Upon returning to the center, parents must provide proof of treatment (empty shampoo bottle), and a center staff member must check the child for absence of nits and lice. Please allow yourself time for the staff to examine your child.

Fever

In the event of a fever, a parent/guardian will be notified if the child's temperature is 100F or higher. If the temperature reaches 100.5F, the parent will be asked to arrange for the child to be picked up from the center within an hour. Our Center policy is that a child must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication or provide a doctor's note stating the child is not contagious and cleared to return to the Center.

Conjunctivitis / Pink Eye

No child will be admitted to the Center if they have or are suspected of having conjunctivitis. If a child shows symptoms of the illness while at the Center, the parents will be contacted and asked to pick up their child from the center within an hour. Although symptoms of allergies or colds can be mistaken for conjunctivitis, we are responsible for treating any possible illness with caution. A physician must treat conjunctivitis, and a doctor's note must be provided to the teacher or director upon the child's return.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Diarrhea and Vomiting

Diarrhea is defined as two or more loose or watery bowel movements within two hours. After a second occurrence, the parent will be contacted and asked to pick up their child from the Center within an hour. The child cannot return to the center until they are symptom-free for 24 hours.

Allergies and Special Needs

Parents whose children have special health needs such as food allergies, asthma, use a nebulizer, EpiPen, or other health needs are required to complete all health forms provided by the center and require a doctor's signature. Special instructions may require parent/staff training. Please ensure your child's health records and health plan are current.

Medication Policy

If your child is on a prescribed medication by a physician, we request that the dosage be scheduled so center staff is not required to administer the medicine. It is also recommended that parents administer the first dose of a newly prescribed medication at home to ensure there are no adverse reactions.

Staff may not receive any medication not accompanied by a completed Medication Order Form. These forms are obtained from the center, completed by parents, and signed by physicians. Medication is kept in classrooms in a locked box.

Staff can administer medicine only if:

- A completed Medication Order Form accompanies the medicine.
- The prescription is in an original container from the pharmacy, labeled with the child's name, date, and dosage for the child.
- Expiration dates are checked.
- Medication forms must be signed by a physician.
- A Medication Order Form must be completed for staff to apply any topical lotions, lip balm, sunscreen, diaper rash ointment, etc., and signed by a parent.

Staff may administer over-the-counter medicine with a completed Medication Order signed by your physician.

Parents of children with disabilities or special needs such as asthma or bee sting allergies must meet with the directors and/or the classroom

teachers. Each case will be handled individually.

Biting Policy

Although biting is a behavior that sometimes occurs in a childcare setting and is age-appropriate for ages 12 months–3 years old, Casa Lala considers it a serious matter. We address the issue by caring for the child bitten and the biter by:

- 1) Cleansing with soap and water; ice applied.
- 2) A biting report is written for both children and both parents are notified. As in the case with all incidents between children, names are not disclosed.
- 3) A written log is kept on the biter which the parents are informed of.
- 4) We will conduct a parent conference with the biter's parents if the issue is repetitive.
- 5) We will develop a plan for child to help modify the behavior.
- 6) We will ask parents to allow us to seek help from support services, if no improvement is shown
- 7) As a last resort we may suggest to the parent that their child may need a smaller environment and dismiss the child.

We understand that biting is age appropriate, but Casa Lala's mission is to provide a safe environment for all.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Under the penalty of law, staff is required to report suspected neglect or abuse to the Department of Social Services. Staff observe children daily for signs of abuse and neglect. Each suspected case is handled individually, with assistance from appropriate child protection agencies. Staff is not required to report suspicions to the director or the parents.

Tobacco Policy

Casa Lala is a tobacco-free property. Smoking and/or vaping is not permitted anywhere on the premises.

Accident and Incident Reports

A parent will receive an accident report if their child is injured while attending the Center. A phone call to the parent will follow any injury above the neck.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Medical Treatment

It is required that parents/guardians contact the Center within 24 hours of an accident in which a child/children sustained an injury at Casa Lala that needed medical treatment. If an accident or mishap does occur that requires professional medical treatment, an insurance claim form will be provided.

Fire Drill and Evacuations

The center is required to conduct monthly fire drills. Procedures and diagrams of exits are posted in each classroom by the door. During these evacuations, our staff follows appropriate procedures for exiting the building. Designated staff members have attended the "Emergency Blanket Training" presented by the Office of Child Care, in conjunction with the Howard County Resource Center.

The Center practices and documents Earthquake, Tornado, and LockDowns drills quarterly.

Emergency Relocations

During inclement weather and/ or in an evacuation that precludes the children from re-entering the center for an extended period, an off-site location has been identified and procedures established. If the emergency dictates that we leave the area, the children will relocate to Dorothy Height Elementary School.

NUTRITION

Meals and Snacks

Casa Lala is a **NUT-FREE** center; any items containing nuts or nut products are not permitted in the center.

No child shall go more than 4 hours without a meal or snack being provided. The parents provide meals. Please pack and label all containers. Casa Lala may provide you with a USDA approved chart of children nutritional guidelines if you need a food choice guide. Casa Lala will provide a nutritious snack if your child does not bring any snack for that day.

Round, firm foods that pose a choking hazard for children less than 4 years of age are not permitted. These foods include: hot dogs, whole grapes, whole cherry tomatoes, peanuts, popcorn, thickly spread nut butters and candy. Please do not send candy with your child to daycare.

Children are encouraged to self-feed to the extent that they have the skills. Children are encouraged, but not forced, to eat a variety of foods. While we do encourage each child to try one or two bites of everything, we never force a child to finish what is on his/her plate.

Infant Feeding Procedures

Infants will be held for bottle-feeding until able to hold his or her own bottle. Bottles will never be propped.

Infants are fed "on cue" to the extent possible (at least every 4 hours and usually not more than hourly) and by a consistent caregiver/teacher.

Breastfeeding may be supported by providing a place for nursing mothers to feed their babies, if needed. Expressed breast milk may be brought from home if frozen or kept cold during transit. All breast milk and formula shall be returned to the child's home or discarded at the end of each day. Previously frozen, thawed breast milk must be used within 24 hours. Bottles must be clearly labeled with the child's name and the date the milk was expressed. Frozen breast milk must be dated and may be kept in the freezer for up to 30 days. Breast milk and formula brought from home must be dated and labeled with the child's name.

Labels on all milk/formula containers should be resistant to loss of the name and date/time when washing and handling.

Solid foods will only be introduced after consultation with the child's family and at their discretion.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline Policy

The goal of any necessary “discipline or guidance” at the center is to promote life-long self-control and self-discipline in children. In the context of early childhood education settings, discipline and guidance techniques take the form of creating an environment that is secure, predictable, and meets the developmental needs of the child. The environment must be designed to allow freedom of movement, opportunities to explore materials, participate in activities, and interact with other children and adults in ways that are age and stage appropriate to each child.

By creating a variety of engaging activities, we strive to prevent classroom problems. When difficulties do occur, we utilize supportive and fair discipline techniques that include: helping children acknowledge the behavior, redirection, offering choices about the solution, and accepting the consequences. Limits are fair and based on safety, responsibility, and respect. Time out chairs are not used at the center. Instead, we provide the child with an opportunity to self-regulate and calm themselves in a safe and separate area.

Serious behavior problems are discussed with the Program Director. The staff will be given assistance in planning solutions to behavior problems and the Program Director and teacher will meet with parents as needed. Outside consultations may be required.

It is the policy of the center to work with children with behavior problems unless their behavior poses a threat to the safety of themselves, other children, or the stability of the group.

Parent Interactions with Children

Parents and guardians of children who are enrolled in the center are required to abide by the center’s discipline policies when they are in the center. When adults interact with children in the center, the center’s discipline policy applies to your children as well as the children of other parents. When adults are in the center, they may not subject a child to treatment injurious to his/her physical or emotional well-being. Physical punishment such as spanking, shaking, hitting, slapping, pinching, or any other intentional infliction of physical pain, or isolation (out of sight or hearing of staff) of any child is prohibited. This includes shaming, ridicule, belittlement, threats, shouting or neglect of

basic needs, by any adult in the center. (Example: children cannot be denied food, snacks, or outside playtime.)

Injurious treatment of a child by a parent or guardian will be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS).

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Brightwheel App

Casa Lala utilizes the Brightwheel app as the primary means of parent communication. Parents receive daily reports via the Brightwheel app or email informing them of lesson plans, events, and special notes in their child’s classroom. Brightwheel allows teachers to send pictures and videos privately to the parent. Infants and Toddler daily sheet provides the parent with feeding times and quantity, diapering/potty times. It will inform parents if the child is in need of diapers, wipes or a change of clothes.

Brightwheel is also used as our emergency notification system. Parents will be notified of school closures, emergency evacuations, and health alerts via email and text message notifications through the app.

Parents may also utilize the app to communicate with teachers including medications, pick up times, and absences.

Inclement Weather and Emergencies

Casa Lala retains the right to close the center due to unforeseen emergency circumstances and inclement weather conditions. **School closures and delays typically follow DCPS.** Please note that fees are payable regardless of school closures. Parents are notified via Brightwheel with as much advance notice as possible.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Open Door Policy

The Center has an open door policy that welcomes parents and guardians to visit their child's classroom during the day. Prior notice is not necessary, however please be aware that an unannounced visit may be disruptive to your child or the classroom. It is always best to talk to your child's teacher regarding the best time for your visit in order to maximize the positive impact of your visit.

When non-custodial parents, grandparents, and other relatives wish to visit a child in the center, they must have prior authorization from the center's Directors and custodial parent.

Parent Volunteers

We welcome parent volunteers into the program and have many ways in which you can get involved.

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Share about your career with your child's class
- Special Guest Story Time
- Fundraising activities, donating materials to the classrooms, etc.
- Chaperone a field trip
- Share about your cultural traditions and customs.

All volunteers are required to sign in on the volunteer sign in sheet which is located at the front desk.

Birthday Celebrations (Sun Celebrations)

Parents should give the classroom teacher at least 1 week notice when planning a classroom celebration.

Please adhere to the following guidelines:

- Homemade foods are accepted (please bring a note that includes the entire ingredients list)
- Commercially prepared, store-bought foods in original packaging with complete ingredients list
- No hard candy
- No balloons
- No Candles. Matches are not permitted.
- No performances by magicians, clowns, etc.

Party "goodie" bags may be provided for children to take home.



CURRICULUM

Blended Curriculum

We utilize a blended curriculum inspired by Montessori philosophy, Reggio Emilia, and Forest Schools pedagogy. **Our program balances a child's freedom to work and learn independently and is complemented with several opportunities to work collaboratively on small group projects.**

Our unique curriculum applies the latest theory and research on best practices in teaching and learning with content standards developed by states and professional organizations. This program balances teacher-guided and child-initiated learning, emphasizing responding to children's learning styles and building on their strengths and interests. At each stage, our teachers provide the building blocks to develop the skills and tools needed to build confidence.

Children can collaborate with other children and learn to negotiate, socialize, and develop their own questions and answers. This combination allows us to offer children both independent and collective learning in a safe and nurturing environment while building a community between students, teachers, and parents who are heard and input ideas and suggestions freely.

Infants (6 weeks - 12 months)

Establish predictable routines.
Talk, read, and sing to your child.
Encourage safe exploration and play.
Provide warm, loving and responsive care
Recognize & celebrate each child's unique qualities and background.
Build strong relationships with parents through ongoing communication

Toddlers (13 months - 24 months)

Balance child-directed and teacher-directed activities
Provide and rotate materials that encourage exploration.
Engage children in activities drawn from the child's interests.
Focus on pre-reading skills through reading and language development.
Provide a nurturing community that models and teaches caring and friendship.

Two and Three-Year Olds

Teachers utilize multi-disciplinary teaching methods, which include:

- Expansion of language skills to develop vocabulary.
- Daily lessons in phonological awareness, alphabet recognition, print, and oral language
- Weekly lessons in social studies, science, math, and music
- Activity and learning centers that encourage social and emotional development.

Observations, Screenings, and Portfolios

Infants and Toddlers

Teachers conduct on-going observations. These observations are used to screen children biannually utilizing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.

Preschool

Teachers conduct on-going observations. These observations are used to screen children biannually utilizing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. They also compile portfolios by collecting work samples and aggregating observations throughout the year to gauge children's development.

Technology Policy

Children at Casa Lala do not watch TV nor do they use laptops, tablets, etc. for viewing entertainment screen time.

Spanish Immersion Program

Our program is designed to provide a strong foundation to develop the life-long benefit that research associates with multilingualism. Children learn language best by experiencing it naturally, exposed to native speakers, and by being immersed in it. Our Spanish Immersion program is led by native Spanish-speaking teachers: a Spanish-speaking Montessori preschool head teacher and a Spanish-speaking assistant teacher. Both teachers speak in Spanish all day with the children so they can absorb it effortlessly.

The environment at Casa Lala supports optimal Spanish language learning by exposing children to a broad range of day-to-day activities, expanding on their vocabulary. Children learn Montessori preschool skills and activities, including

CURRICULUM

Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Math, and Science in Spanish, and thus naturally acquire a broad range of Spanish.

At Casa Lala, a Spanish cultural environment is created in the classroom. Children are exposed to a broad variety of materials, stories, songs, celebrations, and art that are imbued with culture from Spanish-speaking countries around the world.

In our Spanish Immersion Montessori programs, our goal is to help your child acquire strong Spanish language skills. Children will be able to:

- Understand instructions in Spanish.
- Communicate needs and simple sentences.
- Recognize Spanish letter sounds.
- Expand overall Spanish vocabulary.

As children acquire another language, it is normal for them to sometimes mix languages. We encourage parents to read up on language development in bilingual and multilingual children.

Because our immersion programs focus on building Spanish language and literacy skills first, your child's literacy skills in English may lag initially in comparison to peers that are only exposed to one language. Research shows that, even if there is an initial lag, children will stay on or ahead of track in English compared to children attending play-based or traditional preschools that offer only one language. This lag disappears when the child enters adolescence.

INFANT AND TODDLER CLASSROOMS

Items Provided by Parents

- Diapers and wipes labeled with the child's name.
- *Parents will be notified when diapers and wipes need to be replenished via the Brightwheel app
- Pre-prepared bottles with first and last name (labeled/dated breast milk if applicable)
- 5 months and older: age-appropriate snacks and lunch
- Sheet for the crib (no blankets, stuffed animals, or stuffed materials).
- If older than 12 months, nap in a sleeping bag.

- Sleep sacks for children under 12 months.
- Baby food/formula/snacks
- Change of clothes (3 full sets)

Please label all clothes, containers, blankets, and personal belongings.

Infant Sleep

Regulations require infants to be placed on her/his back in a crib. The medical community has reported that young infants should be placed on their backs to sleep to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). A doctor's note must accompany any request to place a young infant in any other position. Cribs are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized daily.

Infant Food

General Feeding Information for Infants

Feeding time is a social occasion and is an excellent time to build a close relationship with an infant. Our teachers feed children at eye level, making eye contact and communicating while feeding.

Casa Lala follows Bright Horizons Best Practices and Feeding Policies for Infant Feeding.

Entry and Departure

Parents must remove shoes or put booties on their shoes before entering the classrooms. We ask that only the person picking up the infant walk into the classroom.

Parents are to sign their child in and out every day and will receive a daily communication report via the Brightwheel App.

Diapering

Diapering for children will only occur in designated areas. Surfaces are covered with disposable liners and have all supplies at arm's reach (diapers, wipes, ointment, gloves, trash). Teachers will follow hygiene protocols and wash their hands before and after each change and record all changes within the Brightwheel app. Casa Lala follows CDC Guidelines of Diaper Changing Steps in Childcare Settings.

PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Items Provided by Parents

- A complete change of clothes (clothes should be labeled and suited for the appropriate season).
 - A sheet, blanket, and a bag for storage (no plastic or paper bags). The Center is not responsible for cleaning items. Parents are to take these items home on their last day of the week and return these items on their first day back.
 - Diapers and wipes labeled with the child's name.
- *Parents will be notified when diapers and wipes need to be replenished via the Brightwheel app
- Lunch/Milk/Snacks
 - Pull ups and/or underwear for children working on potty training.

Clothing Tips

It is recommended that children wear comfortable clothing and sneakers to the center. Daily activities include both active and messy play. Please no open toed shoes and all shoes must have a backing. Children need to feel comfortable enough to enjoy themselves without worrying about the condition of their clothes. It is important to dress them appropriately for the season and outside play. (hat, gloves, jackets in the winter)

Potty Training

The most important factor in making the toilet learning experience successful and as low-stress as possible is a family-teacher partnership that supports the child. Research indicates that children cannot successfully learn how to use the toilet until they are physically, psychologically, and emotionally ready. Many pediatricians say that most children under 24 months of age are not physically capable of regulating bladder and bowel muscles. Most positive toilet training occurs only after children show signs of physical control or awareness of their bodily functions and when they demonstrate an interest or curiosity in the process. We are committed to working with you to make sure that toilet learning is carried out in a manner that is consistent with your child's physical and emotional abilities and your family's concerns.

Bedding for Naps

Parents shall provide a bottom sheet, a top sheet and/or blanket, and small pillow for children (if

desired), as well as any other small object that is a comfort to your child when he/she sleeps. Children under the age of two may not bring in pillows or comfort items.

Per licensing requirements, children cannot be placed on a cot without bedding. Bedding will be sent home every Friday and must be returned on Mondays. Bedding is kept at the center in a pillowcase, canvas bag, backpack, etc., which is provided by parents. Plastic bags are not permitted in the center. You will be contacted by the center if you forget to return.

Naps

It is the policy of the center and the Office of Children and Families that each child is provided a time to rest or sleep daily. Each child is assigned his or her own cot/crib. While all children are encouraged to sleep, those who do not nap after approximately 20 minutes are allowed to take a book or puzzle to their cots.

Indoor Play

Indoor play constitutes much of our playtime. As a way to foster social-emotional, physical, and language development the center will provide the children with a variety of age-appropriate toys for your child to play with. It is preferred that no toys are brought from home unless requested as part of materials for project learning. Casa Lala will not be responsible for toys from home that are broken or lost while the child is in the care of the Casa Lala staff. The responsibility remains with the child and the parents.

Outdoor Play

Health experts are unanimous on the importance of fresh air, and the negative health consequences of children spending too much time in closed, indoor settings. Except in extreme weather, all children (including infants) are taken outside twice daily. The Program Director determines if conditions are acceptable for outdoor play. Children must be dressed properly with hats, gloves/mittens and warm clothes for cold weather or sun hats in the summer months. Infants and toddlers should have snowsuits to wear in the stroller for their daily walks. Casa Lala follows the health quality codes provided by the Health Department when considering summer outdoor play time.



DAILY SCHEDULE

- 7:30 - 8:30 am Before-care/breakfast
 - 8:30-9:30 am Welcome, morning greetings, circle time, free play
 - 9:30 am Diapering/bathroom and Montessori time
 - 10 - 10:30 am Morning snack provided
 - 10:30 - Diapering/bathroom and Montessori time
 - 11-11:30 am Outdoor play
 - 11:45 am Lunch
 - 12:15 - 2:00 pm naptime
 - 2:30 - Diapering/bathroom and then afternoon snack
 - 3:00 - 3:30 Outdoor play/pickup
 - 3:30 - 5:30 Aftercare (outdoor play, special activity, aftercare snack)
- * This is a general schedule structure and is subject to change based on individual classroom needs.*

GRIEVANCE POLICY

Casa Lala wants to ensure that all families have a direct line of communication with our center. Procedures:
If a family has issues and/or concerns regarding their child's care, please reach out to the Program Director or our Family Communication office by emailing paulina@casalala.org. Families may also report complaints regarding child care services to the Complaint and Unusual Incidents Hotline: (202) 727-2993 or by sending an email to osse.childcarecomplaints@dc.gov. Complaints may also be faxed to the Licensing and Compliance Unit at (202) 727-7295.

I have received, read and understood Casa Lala Program Policies. I will abide by those policies as stated.

Child's Name:

Parent's/Guardian Name:

Signature:

Parent's/Guardian Name:

Signature:

Date: