Cuddle Avenue Academy

Parent & Family Handbook

A warm welcome, clear expectations, and a shared commitment to your child.

For center-based and group family child care families. Program-specific enrollment agreements, calendars, and applicable licensing requirements continue to apply.

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Program Locations, Hours & Licensing

Cuddle Avenue operates both center-based and group family child care programs. Please refer to your enrollment agreement for the location, licensed program, contracted hours, and services that apply to your child.

Infant/Toddler Center: 591 Third Avenue, Brooklyn, NY — Cuddle Avenue Infant & Toddler Program (Center ID DC42828; NYC DOHMH #106404). Standard program hours: Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m., subject to your contracted schedule.

Group Family Daycare: 71 16th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215 — Cuddle Avenue 2-K Program (OCFS License #959879). Standard program hours: Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m., subject to your contracted schedule.

3-K Program: 69 16th Street, Brooklyn, NY — Cuddle Avenue 3-K Program - NYC 3-K school day generally 8:40 a.m.–3:00 p.m.; optional extended care may be available from 7:30 a.m. and until 6:00 p.m. under a separate agreement.

Regulatory oversight varies by program. Center-based child care is overseen by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; group family child care is overseen by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. NYC 3-K programming also follows applicable NYC Public Schools requirements. Contact program administration if you need your site's current license information or annual calendar.

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Starting Daycare and Classroom Transitions

When a child joins Cuddle Avenue, we ask families about comfort items, routines, language, and separation needs. Teachers support a gentle adjustment through predictable greetings and responsive care. Before a move to a new classroom, we communicate with families about the new routine, teachers, and developmental expectations and arrange a gradual introduction when possible. When a child leaves our program, we help families prepare for the next setting and share records only with appropriate authorization.

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Welcome to Cuddle Avenue Academy

Welcome to Cuddle Avenue Academy! We are so happy your family is here. We know how much trust it takes to leave your child in someone else's care. Our promise is to offer a safe, loving place where children feel at home, friendships grow, and everyday discoveries become joyful memories. We look forward to getting to know your child and partnering with you.

1. Our Philosophy

At Cuddle Avenue, we believe childhood should feel warm, wonderful, and full of discovery. Children learn best when they feel loved, safe, and free to be curious. Our Montessori-inspired approach gives children room to explore, make choices, try new things, and grow in confidence and independence. We honor each child's unique pace, personality, and interests. Through play, gentle guidance, and meaningful everyday experiences, we nurture kindness, creativity, connection, and a lifelong love of learning. Above all, we want every child to know: you belong here, and you are loved.

2. Respect for Families, Cultures, and Home Languages

Every family brings something special to our community. We welcome different cultures, languages, family structures, beliefs, and traditions. Whenever possible, we greet children in their home language and include familiar words, books, music, and stories in daily life. We invite families to share meaningful traditions and holidays with us. Our program may recognize major cultural, religious, and federal holidays in age-appropriate, respectful ways; participation in particular celebrations is never required. We aim to help every child feel proud of who they are and curious about others.

3. Family Partnership and Communication

You know your child best, and we value what you share. At enrollment, we ask about your child's routines, interests, comfort needs, health, and family preferences. For infants, we work closely with families to follow individual feeding and sleep routines. As children grow, we gently introduce group routines and let families know about important changes. We welcome family ideas, photos, songs, traditions, and feedback, whether shared at drop-off, pick-up, or during a private conversation. We regularly observe children's development and share meaningful updates. Brightwheel is our main communication app for messages, meals, naps, diapering, activities, photos, and announcements. Families can also call 800-620-4221 or email customerservice@cuddleavenue.org. Please check Brightwheel regularly and discuss sensitive matters privately with staff.

Family Participation and Feedback

Families are welcome to share family traditions, favorite songs, home-language words, photographs, and ideas for learning. We invite families to share feedback through conversations, Brightwheel, and periodic questionnaires. Program leadership reviews feedback and uses it to identify improvements. Participation is voluntary; classroom visits or events require advance approval and must follow applicable visitor and child-safety procedures.

Family Resources and Support

We can share information about child development, early intervention, health and dental care, child care assistance, and community resources. Families may request information privately through Brightwheel or the program office. We can help families identify an appropriate agency, but families decide whether to contact outside services.

4. Arrival, Departure, and Authorized Pick-Up

Please bring your child directly to a staff member and complete check-in and check-out using the Brightwheel QR code, your individual PIN, and required electronic signature. Every child must be signed in and out. Families must provide at least two emergency contacts who are not the child's parents, and keep authorized pick-up information current. Children may leave only with a parent, legal guardian, or an approved adult age 18 or older. If another adult is picking up, a parent or guardian must notify us in advance with the person's full name; that person must be added or authorized in Brightwheel and show valid photo identification. We will not release a child without appropriate authorization and verification. Please notify us about absences or late arrivals. Arrivals before or departures after contracted care hours are billed at $1 per minute, starting with the first minute.

5. Daily Routines

Our days include a gentle balance of free play, small-group activities, circle time, stories, music and movement, sensory exploration, art, meals, outdoor play when appropriate, and rest. Infants follow individualized routines as closely as practical; older children become familiar with a flexible classroom schedule. We adjust activities to children's needs, interests, and the day's circumstances. Families can find daily updates in Brightwheel. A sample daily schedule may also be shared separately or on our website; actual timing varies by classroom.

Outdoor Play and Movement

Children have opportunities for active movement and outdoor experiences as weather, air quality, health, staffing, and safety conditions allow. Teachers offer age-appropriate active play throughout the day. Screens are not used as a substitute for hands-on play and responsive caregiving; any educational media use is limited and age-appropriate.

6. Curriculum and Learning

Our Montessori-inspired experiences encourage children to discover by doing. We draw on Experience Curriculum and Teaching Strategies GOLD, as applicable, to guide planning and observation. Beginning around age one, children participate in developmentally appropriate themed experiences such as circle time, stories, discovery activities, music and movement, and hands-on projects. Our enrichment may include yoga, Spanish, baby sign language, cooking, gardening, STEM, and creative expression. We share learning highlights, songs when helpful, and photos of children's work in Brightwheel so families can continue conversations and exploration at home.

Individualized Learning

Teachers use children’s interests, family input, and observations to plan activities and adjust the level of support. If a child is working on communication, movement, social skills, or another emerging skill, teachers may offer targeted play experiences and review progress over time. Families are encouraged to share goals and strategies that work at home.

7. Observation and Developmental Progress

Teachers observe children naturally during play, routines, and interactions to better understand their strengths, interests, relationships, communication, and emerging skills. These observations help us plan meaningful activities and identify when extra support may be useful. We welcome observations from home and discuss

progress privately with families. Observation is a tool for understanding each child, not comparing children with one another.

Developmental Screening and Assessment

We plan for each child to receive an age-appropriate developmental screening before or within 45 days of starting care, using a recognized screening tool and family input. We record the screening date and discuss results or concerns privately with families. Screening is not a diagnosis; when appropriate, we help families explore Early Intervention or other evaluation resources. Teachers observe children throughout their routines and document progress through work samples and age-appropriate assessments at least quarterly. Results help us adjust activities and individual learning goals. Families may request a private conversation about their child's development. This schedule describes our intended QUALITYstarsNY-aligned practice and must be implemented and documented at each site.

How We Protect and Share Assessment Information

Observation notes, screening results, assessment records, and developmental plans are kept in secured child files or access-controlled program systems. Access is limited to authorized personnel with a legitimate need and to the child’s parent or legal guardian, subject to applicable law. Families receive developmental updates through private conversations, conferences, and approved secure communication; staff will discuss significant concerns directly. Records are not posted in group messages or public displays.

Respecting Home Languages During Screening

We ask families which languages their child understands and uses. When screening or assessing a child, staff seek suitable language versions, interpreters, family input, or culturally responsive approaches when available. We consider language exposure and cultural context before drawing conclusions about a child’s development. Families may share words, examples, or observations from home.

8. Positive Guidance

Young children are learning to name feelings, express needs, wait, share, and solve problems. We guide them with patience, clear expectations, redirection, choices, and calm modeling. We never use physical punishment, threats, humiliation, withholding food, or frightening discipline. When challenges arise, we partner with families to find supportive, age-appropriate approaches.

9. Meals, Nutrition, and Infant Feeding

We prepare homemade breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack for children whose schedules include those meals. Mealtimes are relaxed opportunities to connect, try foods, and practice independence. Cuddle Avenue is a nut-free program. Please tell us about allergies, medical dietary needs, religious food practices, or vegetarian or vegan preferences so we can discuss suitable accommodations. We support breastfeeding families: labeled fresh or frozen breast milk may be supplied and will be stored and warmed safely according to feeding instructions. For formula-fed infants, please provide the requested labeled formula container and bottles; staff prepare feeds according to your child's schedule and safe handling procedures. Families should share any changes to feeding plans.

Breastfeeding-Friendly Care

We welcome breast milk provided fresh or frozen in clearly labeled containers and follow safe storage, warming, and handling practices. Families may share feeding preferences and discuss arrangements for

breastfeeding or expressing milk at the program, where space and program operations permit. Formula and bottles are prepared according to the child's feeding plan and applicable food-safety procedures.

10. Food Allergies and Dietary Safety

Please disclose all known allergies before your child's first day and notify us immediately of changes. Families must provide any required medical forms, individualized allergy or emergency action plans, and prescribed emergency medication before care begins. Staff follow documented instructions and take precautions to reduce exposure. We cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment beyond our nut-free program rules; please speak with us about individual needs. Food sharing between children is discouraged.

11. Health and Illness

Please keep your child home when they are not well enough to participate comfortably. Under our program policy, a temperature of 100.1°F or higher requires the child to remain home. After a fever, the child must be fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, be well enough for group care, and provide a pediatrician's return-to-care note. Unusual diarrhea, unexplained rash, or other concerning symptoms may require pickup, medical evaluation, and written clearance before return. Families must notify us of contagious illnesses; we will share relevant exposure notices without identifying affected children. Public-health directions and applicable licensing rules take precedence when they require a different response.

12. Medication

We do not routinely administer medication. Emergency medication, including an epinephrine auto-injector, may be handled only when required authorization, a child's emergency care plan, staff training, and applicable regulations allow it. Please discuss emergency medication needs with us before enrollment or whenever they change. For non-emergency medication needs, we will contact the family to arrange an appropriate plan consistent with licensing requirements. If a child has a life-threatening emergency, we call 911 and then notify the family.

13. Injuries and Incidents

Bumps and scrapes can happen as children play and explore. Staff respond promptly, provide appropriate first aid, document incidents, and notify families. When appropriate, we take a photo for the child's confidential incident record and contact parents directly. Serious or urgent injuries may require an immediate call to 911, followed by notification to parents or guardians. Incident information is shared privately.

14. Emergency Preparedness

We maintain emergency plans for fire, evacuation, shelter-in-place, severe weather, utility interruptions, and other situations that affect safety. Staff practice required drills and supervise children throughout emergencies. If we must evacuate or close unexpectedly, we communicate through Brightwheel, telephone, or email as circumstances allow. Families must keep emergency contact and authorized pick-up information up to date. In a medical or other immediate emergency, staff contact 911 first when needed.

Family Reunification

If evacuation or relocation is needed, staff bring attendance and emergency information, account for every child, and notify families as soon as it is safe to do so. Children are released only to verified authorized adults. Families should not travel to an emergency location until receiving instructions when doing so could interfere with emergency response.

15. Rest and Safe Sleep

Infants younger than 12 months sleep on their backs in an approved crib with a firm mattress and fitted sheet only, unless an applicable written medical direction provides otherwise. No pillows, loose blankets, toys, bumpers, or other soft items are placed in infant cribs. Appropriate wearable sleep sacks may be used. For children age 12 months and older, staff assess readiness for an approved cot or mat and follow applicable licensing and safe-sleep requirements; an age-appropriate blanket may be used when permitted. Staff supervise children throughout rest periods and work with families to understand individual sleep routines.

16. Diapering and Toilet Learning

We check diapers regularly, generally every 1½–2 hours, and change them promptly whenever wet, soiled, or needed. Families supply labeled diapers, wipes, and diaper cream with any required authorization. We notify families when supplies are running low. Toilet learning begins through conversation with families and is guided by each child's readiness, with encouragement and no shame or punishment. We encourage increasing toileting independence in 3-K, while supporting accidents, individual developmental needs, and disability-related accommodations. Toileting needs alone will not automatically prevent a child from participating in the 3-K program.

17. What to Bring

For infants under 12 months: labeled diapers, wipes, diaper cream if used, at least two changes of clothing, feeding supplies and labeled bottles, breast milk or formula as needed, a sleep sack if used, and a pacifier if needed. For children 12 months and older: labeled diapers or training supplies if needed, wipes, spare clothing (including underwear and socks), a water cup, and an age-appropriate rest blanket when requested. For 3-K: spare clothes and underwear, a labeled water bottle, and any classroom-specific supplies. Please label everything with your child's full name; staff will notify families when supplies need replenishing. Leave toys and valuables at home unless requested for a classroom activity.

18. Birthdays and Classroom Celebrations

We love making children's special days feel joyful! Please coordinate birthday plans, treats, decorations, and goodie bags with us ahead of time. If sending goodie bags, include one for every child in the group. All food must be nut-free and approved in advance, with allergies and age suitability considered. We prefer simple, child-friendly choices such as approved fruit, yogurt, or low-sugar treats over candy and chocolate. Do not send choking hazards such as popcorn, whole grapes, round sausage pieces, hard candy, or similarly unsafe foods. Decorations are welcome with prior approval. Family members generally do not attend in-class celebrations because our program follows controlled visitor-access and child-safety procedures; any exception must be approved in advance and comply with applicable rules.

19. Photographs and Media

Photographs and short videos help families see their child's classroom experiences. Because group activities may include multiple children, we explain our internal Brightwheel photo-sharing practices and request written consent from families. If a family declines or limits consent, we will discuss reasonable arrangements for the child's participation and privacy; public or promotional photography is never required for enrollment. Posting a child's image on our website, advertising, or social media requires separate, specific, optional authorization. Families must not repost images of other children without permission.

20. Confidentiality

We protect children's and families' personal information, including health records, contact details, developmental observations, and private family matters. Information is shared only with authorized staff, parents or guardians as appropriate, service providers when authorized, or others when required by law. Staff discuss sensitive concerns privately. We ask families to respect the confidentiality of other children and to use care when sharing classroom photographs or messages.

Privacy in Practice

We limit access to enrollment, medical, incident, developmental, and family records to authorized personnel. Records are stored in locked or access-controlled locations, shared through approved channels, and disclosed only with appropriate authorization or as required by law. Staff and families should not forward, post, or publicly share photographs or private information about other children.

21. Non-Discrimination and Inclusion

Every child and family deserves to feel welcome. Cuddle Avenue does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, language, religion, disability, sex, family structure, or other characteristics protected by applicable law. We work with families to understand individual developmental, medical, cultural, and accessibility needs and consider reasonable accommodations as required by law. We celebrate differences while making room for every child to participate and belong.

Children Who Need Additional Support

We work with families to understand children’s individual strengths and support needs and consider reasonable accommodations consistent with applicable law and safe program operations. Families may share evaluation reports, IFSPs, IEPs, or strategies from specialists as they choose. We coordinate with appropriate professionals when authorized and appropriate.

22. Questions, Concerns, and Feedback

Your questions and ideas matter to us. Please tell a teacher or program leader about concerns as soon as they arise, or contact us through Brightwheel, by telephone at 800-620-4221, or at customerservice@cuddleavenue.org. We will listen respectfully, review the concern, and follow up as promptly as practical. For sensitive issues, please request a private conversation. We welcome feedback about routines, communication, learning, and your child's experience.

Resolving a Concern

Please share concerns privately with a teacher or program leader. We will listen, review the circumstances, and follow up with the family. If a concern remains unresolved, families may request a conversation with program leadership. Families may provide feedback without fear of retaliation; urgent safety concerns should be reported immediately.

23. Program Closures

We close on the holidays and other planned dates listed in the annual calendar provided to families. Not every federal holiday is necessarily a closure; the site-specific calendar is the controlling schedule. We will share updates through Brightwheel and/or email. Unexpected closures may occur because of severe weather, unsafe building conditions, public-health directions, or other emergencies. Any tuition treatment for closures follows the signed enrollment agreement.

24. Tuition, Deposits, and Payments

Tuition is invoiced monthly on the 1st and is due by the 10th. Payments received after the 10th are subject to a $20-per-day late fee under our current policy, unless the signed enrollment agreement states otherwise. Tuition holds your child's reserved space and is not adjusted for absences, vacations, holidays, or missed days; make-up days and credits are not provided for those absences. A one-month nonrefundable deposit is required under our standard enrollment terms and is applied to the final month of care when the family fulfills the required 60-day written withdrawal notice and other agreement terms. Early drop-off or late pickup outside contracted hours costs $1 per minute. Families may pay using the methods available on their invoice; card processing fees, if any, are shown before payment. Your signed enrollment agreement controls your exact rate, schedule, and any site-specific terms.

25. Withdrawal and Final Month

Families planning to withdraw must give at least 60 days' written notice, subject to the signed enrollment agreement. Under our standard policy, notice must be submitted between the 1st and 5th of the month; families should request written confirmation of the effective notice date and final day. The one-month deposit is nonrefundable and is credited toward the final month of tuition when the notice requirements and other agreement terms are satisfied. Outstanding tuition and fees remain due. We help children and families prepare for a positive transition out of our program.

26. Keeping Family Information Current

Please update us promptly when your telephone number, address, email, emergency contacts, authorized pick-up list, custody instructions, health information, allergies, medication needs, or other circumstances affecting your child's care change. Changes to pick-up permissions must be communicated directly and reflected in Brightwheel. Accurate records help us care for your child and reach you quickly when needed.

27. Our Commitment to Families

We promise to treat your child with warmth, patience, respect, and genuine care. We will celebrate their discoveries, support them through hard moments, listen to your concerns, and work with you as a team. We are grateful to be part of your child's early years and hope Cuddle Avenue always feels like a place where your family belongs.

Family Handbook Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Cuddle Avenue Academy Parent & Family Handbook. I understand that I am responsible for reading program policies and asking questions when I need clarification. I understand that policies may be updated, with families notified of important changes. The signed enrollment agreement controls any specific financial or contractual terms.

Child's Name: _____
Parent/Guardian Name: _____
Parent/Guardian Signature: _____
Date: _____
Program Representative: _____
Date: _____