

EARLY
CONNECTIONS

PARENT
HANDBOOK



2011-2012



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About Early Connections

Early Connections Pre-K Learning Center operates as part of the Lamar County School District in partnership with the Institute for Disability Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi. The center provides early childhood education and developmental services for a diverse group of children including those who are typically developing and those who have special needs. Early Connections provides the following:

- Early childhood teachers with degrees in child development, elementary education, child and family studies or early intervention;
- Developmentally-appropriate learning activities including art, music, theater, science, literacy, math, Spanish, and physical fitness;
- Warm, supportive relationships that guide children's engagement and behaviors;
- Small classes with a lead teacher and at least one teacher assistant;
- Highly-trained professionals , including university professors, early interventionists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and a pediatric nurse practitioner. that provide assistance to early childhood teachers;
- Early intervention and related services for children with special needs;
- Families First Resource Center and Library (with parent and child play groups, materials and toys to check-out);
- On-site developmental screening and assessment;
- Access to parent enrichment activities, classes, and support groups;

Children served – Early Connections serves children ages 6 weeks to 5 years.

Hours – During the school session, Early Connections is open from 7:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Monday through Friday for the morning program and from 12:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. for the afternoon program. During the summer session, Early Connections operates from 7:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Enrollment applications - Applications can be obtained by mail, at the center, or through the Early Connections Web site at www.ids.usm/ids/programs/earlyconnections. A \$10 nonrefundable application fee is due at the time of application for each family. As space becomes available for your child, an additional \$40 enrollment fee is assessed. For children already attending, a \$50 registration/material fee is due August each year.

Tuition – For the school year, fees are \$125 a week for both morning and afternoon programs (full day). Parents may choose to enroll their child/children for only the morning program for \$100 a week or for only the afternoon program for \$100 per week. Fees are assessed based on the number of days that Early Connections is open per month. On days that Early Connections is open, fees are charged whether or not the child is in attendance. We do offer a limited number of part-time (2 days per week @ \$75) slots based on availability. Prior arrangements for these slots must be made with the Program Director. Parents may choose to send their child only 3 or 4 days a week, but must pay full fees. Certificates from the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District are accepted. Fees are subject to change at the discretion of the IDS Co-director and Lamar County School advisory board. A 10% discount is provided for parents enrolling more than one child.

Mission

The mission of Early Connections is to provide high-quality early education and care for young children so that they are prepared for school; enrich the community by providing support to families; conduct research that contributes to best practices for early education and intervention; provide a training site for university students; and serve as a model for other school districts and early childhood programs.

We support this mission through the following:

- Practices that build on each child's individual strengths and interests;
- Gentle guidance techniques, including modeling and providing appropriate choices;
- Integrated developmental and family support services and access to resources;
- Highly-qualified teachers and related service providers;
- Responsive attention to the needs of families and children;
- Carefully-planned learning activities that are both engaging and intellectually-stimulating;
- A commitment to professional staff development and incorporation of the most recent research on best practices.

Philosophy

- All children deserve the opportunity to learn and play with their age-appropriate peers and to be included in all activities and routines of a typical Pre-K educational setting.
- Children learn best when they are actively engaged in rich experiences that are in-tune with their interests. Daily experiences should enable creative exploration and play with a wide variety of developmentally-appropriate materials.
- Teaching practices build on each child's own interests with skill development infused through play.
- Skill developed infused with play fosters a lifetime love of learning, a sense of initiative, and feelings of self-confidence.
- Each child is respected as an individual and treated in a manner that recognizes his/her individual strengths, interests, personality and learning style.

- Learning is most meaningful when it happens in the context of the child's everyday experiences at home and in the classroom. Specialized services are most effective when they are integrated into everyday routines, activities and places.
- Learning occurs within the context of warm and responsive relationships with adults.
- The environment is arranged to foster educational growth and pre-academic skill development through play-based activities.
- Behavior problems are best addressed through prevention, carefully-planned room arrangements, age-appropriate expectations, and maintaining the active involvement and interest of all children.
- The goal of discipline is to teach children to control their own behavior and negotiate conflicts with others rather than rely solely on adults to intervene and solve disputes.
- Awareness of and respect for diversity is fostered by many opportunities for children to play with peers who have a variety of abilities and cultural backgrounds.
- Staff members work in collaboration with families to enhance each child's daily educational experiences and to promote optimal parenting skills.

Program Goals

- Ensure that all children are afforded a safe and nurturing environment that promotes learning across all developmental areas;
- Provide parent services and supports that foster the ability of parents to promote environments and interactions necessary for their child's successful growth and development;
- Link parents, schools, and community early in a child's life to promote the supports necessary for children to enter school prepared to learn and succeed.
- Promote social and emotional development so that children are able to self-regulate, interact successfully with peers, and make appropriate behavioral choices.

Children Served and Classroom Configuration

Early Connections has the capacity to serve 50 children from six weeks to five years of age. Early Connections is committed to serving a diverse group of children and families including children with special needs.

Early Connections consists of an infant classroom and one year old classroom in a building with indoor and outdoor play areas. Another building houses classrooms for two, three and four/five

year olds. This building has separate science, literacy and art rooms as well as indoor and outdoor play areas. All classrooms are designed with learning centers that contain designated materials supporting a weekly learning theme.

Class	Number of Children	Number of Staff (Minimum)
Infants	10	4
One-year Olds	12	2
2 to 5 year olds	10 per class	2 per class

Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs must be ruled eligible for services through the Lamar County School Division of Special Services (Director, Mrs. Terri Thomas; 601-794-8121). If eligible for services, placement will be determined in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. If Early Connections is determined to be the most appropriate placement by the IEP team, there will be no fee for “morning services”. Fees of \$100 per week are charged, however, if a child remains for the afternoon session.

Accommodating the Needs of All Children

Children with and without special needs, including children whose development is advanced, are provided with individual assistance as needed to support their full participation in classroom routines and learning experiences in a manner that supports their independence. Supports may include extra adult assistance, special materials, adapted equipment or learning activities that are designed to meet the specific developmental level of a child. Some children require special equipment, such as a wheelchair or walker, and the use of these types of supports are considered in classroom arrangement.

Operating Policies and Procedures

I. Admission and Welcome Process

Early Connections charges a nonrefundable application fee of \$50 (\$10 to hold an application and \$40 upon admission to the program). Applications may be picked up from Early Connections, will be mailed on request (call 271-9052 or 601-264-7645), or can be downloaded at www.usm.edu/ids/earlyconnections . If all slots are full, a child will be placed on a waiting list and the family notified as soon as a space becomes available.

Upon admittance, each family completes the following welcoming process.

- Initial meeting – The purpose of this meeting is to complete paperwork and introduce the staff and the family. Parents are provided an opportunity to ask questions regarding Early Connections services, policies, and procedures.
- Graduated classroom support – In order to ensure a smooth transition into the center, parents or other significant caregivers are encouraged to spend time with the child in the classroom. Although the amount of time may vary according to the child’s individual needs, a minimum time commitment would be four hours. This allows the caregiver and the child to become familiar with the routines, activities and expectations of the classroom. Children also are more comfortable exploring a new environment when a familiar caregiver is in proximity. This time also allows the family and childcare staff to lay a foundation for on-going communication. Early Connections staff value feedback and input from families especially regarding individual supports that may be helpful to the child.
- Two month follow-up conference - This follow-up allows the family and teacher to refine and identify individual goals and objectives, problem solve any challenges and continue to build a positive relationship.
- Yearly conferences - After the two month follow-up conference, caregiver and teacher conferences will be scheduled at least once every 12 months and more often if necessary. Parents are welcome to request a conference with the director or teachers at any time.
- *Families are always welcome to drop in and are encouraged to visit the center to observe or actively participate in classroom activities.*

II. Records

Each child’s file must contain the following information before the child will be admitted to the center.

- 1) Application to the program
- 2) Developmental and health history
- 3) Signed releases for persons other than legal guardian to pick up child;
- 4) Insurance information;
- 5) Up-to-date immunization records on Mississippi Form 121;
- 6) Recent health report certifying the child as being free from contagious disease;
- 7) Emergency information where parents can be reached, as well as other names and telephone numbers to be used when parents are unavailable to be reached;
- 8) Instructions for responding to a child’s special health care needs, such as allergies or chronic illness;
- 9) Records as required by public funding agencies.

The contents of a child’s file are confidential and are only immediately available to administrators and teaching staff, the child’s parents or legal guardian, and regulatory authorities on request. Files are updated at least quarterly or as needed due to a change in information.

II. Permission forms

Because Early Connections is a training program for the USM and other institutions of higher education, university students are often in the classroom either observing or working directly with the children. University students may screen or assess children’s development or develop educational programs for the children as part of their training. Pictures and videos of children are

taken for use in brochures, training documents, and class instruction. Parents must sign permission for children to be involved with university students and training activities.

III. Fees and Payment Plan

During the school year, fees are \$125 per week for the school day, \$100 per week for the morning session and \$100 per week for the afternoon session. A discount of 10% is made for families having two or more children enrolled at the center. The selection, made upon acceptance to the center, of the session a child will attend will remain permanent until the parent requests and is granted another program slot or withdraws a child from one of the programs. Certificates from the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District are accepted. Tuition may be paid at the beginning of the month or must be paid by Monday of each week. If parents do not or cannot pay for the week, the program Director must be notified. An additional \$15 fee will be added to each week's tuition that is not paid by Friday. Tuition paid later than two weeks from the time it is due will result in suspension of the child until paid in full. Tuition is calculated based on the number of days the center is open, whether the child is in attendance or not. Fees are subject to change as deemed necessary by the IDS Co-director and Lamar County School advisory board.

If a child will no longer attend Early Connections, at least one week notification must be given. Parents must submit notification in writing, and they will be billed for one week from the date the termination statement is signed.

The center will operate in a two-session fashion. The school year will run from the day Lamar County Schools begin in August through the last day of school in May. Summer session will begin three days after the last day of school and run through three days prior to the start of school. Separate applications must be completed for summer session. A child is not required to attend both sessions of the year in order to have his/her slot held for the following year. Fees for the summer session are \$125 per week.

IV. Enrollment Priority

The first tier of priority for enrollment in the center is given to teen parents who are currently enrolled or have recently dropped out of high school due to lack of child care necessary to return to school, go to college, or seek employment. Eligible teen parents will be served on a first come, first served bases.

The second tier of priority for enrollment will be staff and teachers of Lamar County School District.

The third tier of priority for enrollment will be community residents of Lamar County.

Enrollment slots are available for low income, and middle to high income parents, and parents of children with special needs who have been ruled eligible by the Lamar County School District. Low income families may be eligible for child care support from the Program and Development District. A co-payment is required by the District and is based on income.

V. Early Connections Holiday and Staff Development Schedule 2011-2012

Early Connections will follow the Lamar County School District calendar.

Labor Day	Monday	September 5
Fall Break	Monday	October 10
Thanksgiving	Monday-Friday	November 21-25
Christmas	Wednesday-Tuesday	December 21-Jan 3
Martin Luther King Holiday	Monday	January 16
Presidents Day Holiday	Monday	February 20
Spring Holidays	Monday - Friday	March 12- 16
Good Friday Holiday	Friday	April 6
Easter Holiday	Monday	April 9
End of School Year Break	Friday-Tuesday	May 25 - 29
Summer program begins	Wednesday	May 30
Independence Day Holiday	Friday	July 3, 2012

VI. Evacuation Procedures and Emergency Closures

Crisis plans and procedures for sheltering occupants and evacuating the facility include the following instances:

- (1) Shelter-in-place to designated safe areas inside the center
- (2) Evacuation to an outside area away from the building
- (3) Evacuation to a back-up shelter at the Oak Grove High School

Drills are conducted on a monthly basis to keep employees familiar with safety procedures.

In the event of inclement weather, Early Connections will operate under Lamar County School District procedures. Parents will be notified by phone of changes to the operating status of Early Connections.

VII. Arrival and Departure

All children must be signed in and out of the center by an authorized individual. Sign-in sheets are provided at the entrance to each center. All parents approved for dropping and picking up their children will be fingerprinted to engage entrance doors. Others authorized to drop off or pick up a child must use the door bell for entrance. Children will only be released to responsible persons who have been given written authorization and verbal notification the day before or day of pick-up. Permission must be provided *in writing* by parents for a non-designated person to pick up a child. All individuals that are unfamiliar to the staff will be asked to show picture identification upon entering the center.

Because Early Connections is a PreK program with Lamar County Schools and provides a training site for university students, children must be at school by no later than 8:30 for the morning session and 1:00 for the afternoon session. Parents should notify the center if a child will be late.

If a child is not picked up by the closing time of 5:30 p.m., a late fee of \$1 per minute will be assessed.

In the case of a divorce that has implications for who can and cannot pick up the child, a copy of the divorce agreement must be kept on file at the center. It is also helpful for the teachers to have a schedule of which parent will pick up the child.

By Mississippi law, all young children must be restrained in an approved car seat for travel. Parents seen arriving or departing the center without their child properly restrained in a car seat will be reminded to "buckle up". Repeated violations will be reported to the highway patrol.

A designated Director with CPR training must be present at the opening and closing of the school day. The name of the designated director will be posted on the outside door each day.

VIII. Curriculum, Assessment of Child Progress, Grouping, and Activities

a. Curriculum: The philosophy of Early Connections is that learning is best accomplished through play and responsive/ nurturing care from adults. Early Connections incorporates a variety of indoor and outdoor activities designed to encourage exploration and enhance development within the context of relationships. Activities are designed to be age-appropriate and balance a variety of both structured and unstructured time throughout the day.

The center uses the Transdisciplinary Play-Based Curriculum, Opening the World of Learning, and the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines along with other resources and teacher-designed learning activities. All curricula are based on the philosophy that children learn best through hands-on activities that address the needs of the whole child. In addition, all curricula reflect the belief that children need a balance of child-initiated and teacher-facilitated activities each day. Supplemental activities are drawn from a variety of developmentally-supportive curricula or by the teachers to reflect the interests of the children and address individual developmental goals. Learning centers that contain instructional and play materials related to a weekly theme are located in each classroom.

The infant room provides ample room for movement and exploring sensory and manipulative toys. The one year old classroom provides centers for art, sensory, manipulative and representational play. A large play room provides space for crawling, cruising, and walking. The large play room provides ample room for practice of gross motor skills. Children are taken outside to the playground twice a day when weather permits.

In the upper building, there is a separate art, music, science/math; and literacy room. Learning centers in each classroom provide enrichment for various literacy activities, science activities, and math activities that support a weekly theme. A large motor room and a separate room for art provide enrichment activities. Other enrichment activities include music, dance, theater, and Spanish. A low stimulation room is provided for children who cannot self-regulate and/or need a quiet environment for calming. Children play outside on the play ground for at least ---- minutes per day when weather permits.

b. Screening and Assessment: Early Connections incorporates continuous assessment of child progress to ensure that all children are learning and developing within expected ranges. A variety of methods are employed including informal information gathering from parents, information from parent and teacher conferences, teacher and staff observations, checklists from the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks, Individual Portfolios, the Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment, the Battelle Screener and the LAP-D.

If there are concerns regarding a child's development, a developmental screening will be conducted. Results of each screening will be shared with parents. Information will otherwise remain confidential. If a concern is raised based on screening results, the family has the option of having their children assessed for eligibility by the Lamar County School District. Diagnostic assessment is available through the Pediatric Evaluation and Developmental Services (PEDS) team with IDS/USM.

If a child is eligible for special education/early intervention services, Lamar County Schools and Early Connections will provide early intervention services that may include speech language, physical therapy, occupational therapy and special instruction in accordance to the child's IFSP/IEP.

c. Transitions to new classroom: The age ranges of children in each classroom are based on 12 to 15 month intervals in order to promote long-term caregiving by a stable teacher. When a child moves into the next age group, every effort is made for a smooth transition. Exactly what constitutes a smooth transition is determined in a transition meeting with center staff and the family and is based on the child's needs. At minimum, the child is able to spend short periods of time in their new age group and return to their familiar group as needed for at least a week.

Transition from Pre-K to K begins two months prior to a child's completion of their 4 year old class. Children are taken to the school for a visit, records are sent to the school, and, as necessary, Early Connection teachers meet with families and school administrators to discuss the transition process.

d. Field trips: Field trips provide excellent opportunities for teachers to augment classroom activities and for children to engage in active learning. Center staff will provide notification of these trips and a permission slip for each child. Families are always encouraged to accompany their child on a class field trip.

A list of children and parents attending a field trip will be made prior to leaving the center. This list will be used to keep a head count of all of the children in vehicles prior to leaving the center, upon arrival at the field site, upon leaving the site, and after returning to the center. Head counts will ensure that all children are accounted for and return safely to the center.

Precautions will be taken to ensure the safety of all children during outings. Center staff will carry a cell phone and first aid kit for emergency purposes. During field trips, all children and adults will observe the seatbelt and child restraint seat laws of the state of Mississippi and children will only be transported in car seats and in insured vehicles. The IDS 15-passenger van that is equipped with a lift for wheelchair access will be the primary vehicle for transportation.

e. Snacks: Children are provided a mid-morning and afternoon snack that comply State Department Nutritional guidelines.

f. Teaching staff: All lead teachers will have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in child development, child and family studies, early intervention or a related field of study. Caregivers also include graduate students within the fields of early intervention, education, speech-pathology, or psychology or undergraduate students completing a course of study in a related field. All teachers participate in a minimum of 15 contact hours of professional development per year and most are involved in more extensive specialized study. Teachers also participate in monthly staff meetings and First Aid and CPR training courses. Center Directors and Designated Directors, who serve as directors when the center director is absent, complete specialized training through the State Department of Health.

g. Items brought to the center: Examples of items that are appropriate for the children to bring to the center include a favorite blanket or soft toy for naptime or a book or other materials that support a weekly learning theme.

Examples of items that should not be brought include toys that are pretend weapons (swords, guns, etc), toys that are not age-appropriate for the children in the classroom (marbles in the toddler or two-year old room), or items that the child has difficulty sharing. Children should not bring treasured possessions that could not be replaced if lost or broken. *Early Connections is not responsible for the care or loss of toys brought to school beyond those brought for designated show and tell days.*

IX. Guidance and Discipline Policy

One of the goals of Early Connections is to foster the ability of children to self-control their emotions and behaviors. This self-control is essential for success in school. It is our philosophy that punishment does not teach self-control or problem-solving and, depending on the type of punishment, can increase out-of-control behaviors. First, behavior that may seem inappropriate to an adult may be typical for a young child who does not yet understand adult expectations or may not have the maturity to self-regulate behavior. For young children, inappropriate behavior is seen as an opportunity to teach and guide a child's ability to self-regulate and problem solve. Second, Early Connections believes that many behavior problems can be prevented and are best addressed through carefully-planned room arrangements, age-appropriate expectations, and maintaining the active involvement and interest of all children. The preventative practices embraced by Early Connections include the following:

- Learning centers to support children's active learning and to provide them with the opportunity to make choices. Centers also assist the teacher in following the child's lead.
- Expectations and clear and consistent rules that are appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child and reflect respect for each child;
- Schedules that incorporate substantial opportunities for center play, adequate rest, meal time, and outdoor play;
- Individualized planning to accommodate the unique characteristics and needs of children during the day – especially during daily transitions;
- Provision of a wide variety of interesting and engaging activities designed to stimulate development and keep all of the children engaged;
- Avoiding conflict by making sure that a number of materials are available in the classroom;
- Using conflict as a learning opportunity and helping children identify appropriate solutions rather than teachers always solving the problem for them;

- Modeling appropriate interactions and validating children’s feelings. Helping children to “use their words” (Can you tell Joe how you felt when he pushed you?);
- Adequate supervision by adults that are actively engaged with the children in the classroom;
- Frequent communication with families;
- Ongoing staff development in the areas of classroom management strategies, specific disabilities, and developmentally appropriate practices;
- Considerations for sensory regulation issues that might contribute to inappropriate behavior.

Inappropriate behavior is approached as an opportunity to teach rather than to control through punishment. If a child is displaying disruptive behavior despite the preventative practices listed above, staff will employ guidance techniques that include the following steps:

1. Each classroom with the exception of the infant room, will develop a short list of classroom rules that are age-appropriate;
2. Each classroom will have a designated quiet area that children can use to calm themselves;
3. Teachers and interventionists use redirection to a more appropriate activity when addressing the inappropriate behavior of toddlers and two year olds;
4. Teachers and interventionists help children understand the effect of their actions using language such as “Look! Tim is crying because he is sad. He is sad because you took his toy.” and offer children more appropriate alternatives such as “Use your words instead of hitting.”
5. Teachers will help children define their emotions such as “How do you feel right now? Are you mad?”
6. For children over two, teachers will ask children to define the problem behavior; state the class rule when appropriate; and decide on a solution to solve the problem. *Example: Billy takes Joey’s toy and Joey cries. Teacher places boys in chairs facing each other. **Teacher:** we have a problem. Billy can you tell me the problem? **Billy:** I took the toy. **Teacher:** what is our class rule about taking toys: **Billy:** We share **Teacher:** Why did you take the toy? **Billy:** Because I had it first. **Teacher:** Why is Joey crying? **Billy:** Because I took the toy. **Teacher:** What can we do to make this better? **Billy:** Joey can play with another toy. **Teacher:** Joey, will you give Billy the toy and we will get another toy? **Joey:** No **Teacher:** Joey does not want another toy, is there something else we can do? **Billy:** We can play with the toy together **Teacher:** Joey, is that ok with you? **Joey:** ok. Teachers work through solutions with the children involved until one is found.*
7. Teachers and interventionists will not respond in a manner that is threatening or overtly negative. When possible, staff will use positive language as opposed to negative directions. (“Our chairs are for sitting in” instead of “No! Do not stand in the chair!”);
8. Teachers and interventionists may not physically restrain a child outside of what is necessary to keep the child and other children safe;
9. Spanking is never used as a form of punishment;
10. Teachers never pick up a child that is aggressive or having a temper tantrum;
11. Quiet centers in each room are used for children who are unable to calm themselves and need extra support to self-regulate. These centers are not time-out centers and are not used as punishment;
12. Aggressive behavior is reported to the coordinators at Early Connections who will then contact the family to address solutions to behavioral issues.

X. Connections between Home and School

Teachers and staff at Early Connections recognize the importance of effective parent-teacher partnerships in fostering child development. To be effective, partnerships must include honest and ongoing communication as well as respect for individual differences in values and priorities. Early Connections staff is committed to frequent communication with families and encourages active parent participation in all center activities. Methods of communication may include informal conversations with teachers at the beginning or end of the day, written reports of daily activities, a quarterly newsletter, frequent e-mail updates, open houses and parent -teacher conferences.

In order to facilitate learning activities at home, Early Connections provides newsletters and take home activities that are designed to be extensions of classroom skills. A quarterly Early Connections newsletter keeps parents abreast of new research findings, center activities and upcoming events. In addition, parent-child playgroups are offered periodically to facilitate play and fun between parents and their child/children, thus enhancing attachment and bonding that are critical to a child's overall development.

As part of the mission of Early Connections, video recording systems are installed in each classroom and parents can request a password for computer access to the classroom. To ensure the safety of the children enrolled, families may not share their passwords with others. Because the center serves as a research and training facility, each parent must sign a release to allow video recordings and photographs of their child to be used for research and training purposes.

Each child has a folder for daily notes, curriculum related material and for families to send notes or questions to the teacher. Parents will also receive periodic updates by email from the graduate students and the center directors. A central bulletin board will be used to update families on pertinent information.

XI. Parent concerns

Any concerns or issues that may arise concerning a child's care or learning experiences during their time at the center should be brought to the teacher's or center director's attention. Concerns regarding a specific incident are documented and a plan is devised to address the issue. If the plan does not resolve the issue, or a family continues to have concerns, then the family should report the matter to the Early Connections Administrative Director. The Lamar County Superintendent and/or Early Connections Advisory Board is consulted as needed.

If an issue or concern is grave and requires immediate attention, then the Early Connections Administrative Director should be contacted directly.

XII. Health

A health history is completed on each child before admittance to the program. Changes to this history should be made known to the Early Connections coordinator and recorded in the child's file.

Any child with diarrhea or fever of 100 degrees or above will be classified as "sick" and parents will be asked to pick their child up from the Early Connections. Children must be fever-free for 24 hours before returning to the child care center. Below is a listing of diseases and conditions that classify children as "sick" and warrant exclusion from Early Connections:

<u>Disease</u>	<u>Exclusion from assigned classroom</u>
Chicken pox	Six days after eruption appears
Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)	Proof of treatment; pinkness and matting gone
Diarrhea	Free of fever and diarrhea has ceased
Fifth disease	Free of fever
Hand-foot and Mouth Disease	Lesions must be crusted and dry, free of fever
Hepatitis	One week after onset
Impetigo	24 hours after treatment
Influenza (Flu)	Free of fever and feeling better
Measles	Five to seven days after eruption appears
Meningitis	Clearance by a physician
Mumps	Clearance by a physician
Pediculasts (Lice)	Statement indicating treatment has been conducted
Pinworms	24 hours after treatment, must provide proof
Ring Worm	Must provide proof of treatment after treatment begins
Scabies	24 hours after treatment completed; must provide proof
Shingles	Lesions need to be covered if not dry and crusted
Strep Throat	24 hours after treatment; fever free; proof of treatment
Whooping Cough (Pertussis)	Five days after treatment began

Families will be provided with information regarding any unusual level or type of communicable disease to which their child was exposed and other factors related to the illness.

a. Return to the center after illness: Children must be free of fever for 24 hours without medication before they can return to the center. They also should not have experienced any episodes of vomiting or diarrhea during that time frame and should be visibly “well”. A child returning from surgery or hospitalization must have a doctor’s release stating they may return prior to being dropped off at the center. A release may be brought by the parent upon return or can be faxed by the doctor’s office to the Early Connections’ center director.

b. Outdoor play: All children have daily opportunities for outdoor play as long as the weather does not pose a health risk. When outdoor activity is not possible, Early Connections will provide movement activities indoors. Early Connections will ensure that any child involved in outdoor play is dressed appropriately, has the opportunity to play in the shade, and has sunscreen applied as necessary. When public health authorities recommend use of insect repellents due to high risk of insect-borne disease, only repellents containing DEET will be used and it will only be applied to children older than two months. The repellent will not be applied more than twice a day and parents must provide written permission.

If a child cannot participate in outdoor play for any reason, a doctor’s note must be provided. It is very difficult for Early Connections staff to keep a child indoors due to staffing, so please only request this accommodation if it is absolutely necessary and medical documentation is available.

c. Diapering: For children who are not potty trained, Early Connections will use only commercially available disposable diapers or pull-ups unless the child has a medical reason that does not permit

their use. Teachers check children for signs that diapers or pull ups are wet or soiled at least every two hours when the children are awake and immediately when the children awaken from a nap.

d. Handwashing practices: Teachers and staff members are required to use approved handwashing procedures on a frequent basis to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases to themselves and to others. Children who are able to learn personal hygiene are taught handwashing procedures and these procedures are followed to prevent transmission of infectious diseases. Hand washing or use of hand sanitizers is required.

- On arrival at the center
- After diapering and using the toilet
- After handling body fluids (blowing or wiping a nose, coughing on a hand, etc)
- Before meals and snacks, before preparing or serving food
- After playing in water that is shared by two or more people
- After handling animals or materials such as sand or dirt
- After playing outside
- When moving from one classroom within the center to another

Adults also wash

- Before and after feeding a child
- Before and after administering medication
- After assisting a child with toileting
- After handling garbage or cleaning

Proper handwashing procedures include the following.

- Using liquid soap and running water
- Rubbing hands vigorously for at least 10 seconds including back of hands, wrists, between fingers, under jewelry and under fingernails
- Rinsing well and drying hands with a paper towel and avoiding recontamination

e. Emergency treatment: During enrollment, parents sign a release for emergency medical treatment. Should an emergency arise, the Early Connections director or teacher will contact the parents and consult with the staff nurse practitioner and the child's pediatrician, as necessary. In the event of complications, the child will be taken to a hospital.

Medication administration

In order for the Early Connections staff to administer any medication, parents must fill out a permission to administer medication form. Do not leave medication in diaper bags or backpacks. Medication **MUST** be given to the center director (not teacher) and placed in the locked container designated for this purpose.

Only authorized individuals will be allowed to administer medication of any kind. For prescription medication, the original bottle or package must include a pharmacy label which shows the child's name, date prescribed, name and contact information of doctor who prescribed the medication, dosage and time for administering the medication. For liquid medications, an appropriate measuring device such as an oral syringe, dropper or measuring spoon must be provided. Over-the-counter

medications must be brought in the original package and the child's name and dosage information must be clearly labeled on the package. All medicine should be taken home each night and signed in again the next day or as needed.

Center staff will not serve juice or other fluids prepared at home that contain a child's medication. If the medication is to be administered at Early Connections, then center staff must measure and administer the dosage. All medication administration will be carefully documented.

f. SIDS prevention: Infant sleep guidelines:

- Infants, unless otherwise ordered by a physician, are placed on their backs to sleep on a firm surface manufactured for sale as infant sleeping equipment that meets the standards of the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- Pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, stuffed toys and other soft items are not allowed in cribs or on rest equipment for infants younger than eight months.
- If a blanket is used, the infant is placed at the foot of the crib with a thin blanket tucked around the crib mattress, reaching only as far as the infant's chest.
- The infants head remains uncovered during sleep.

g. Nutritional health: Two daily snacks and lunch are provided daily for students enrolled for the full day. Children enrolled for the morning session only are provided one snack and lunch. Children enrolled in the afternoon session only are provided one snack. Menus are designed in consultation with a registered dietician and meet all regulatory requirements with a focus on healthy eating choices. Meals and snacks are served at least two hours apart but not more than three hours apart.

All foods and drinks brought from home must be labeled with the child's name and date. If food is brought from home to share, the center encourages families to bring either whole fruits or commercially packaged foods in factory-sealed containers. Foods to share for special occasions such as birthdays should be kept covered or refrigerated as appropriate.

Early Connections supports breastfeeding and accepts, stores, and serves breast milk. Breastfeeding mothers are encouraged to feed their children at the center. A comfortable, private breastfeeding space can be arranged if a family desires. Breast milk should be brought to the center in ready-to-feed sanitary containers, labeled with the infant's name and date and will be stored in a refrigerator for not longer than 48 hours (no more than 24 hours if the milk was previously frozen).

Staff serves only formula and infant food that comes to the center in factory-sealed containers (e.g. ready to feed formula). Powder formula should be prepared at home and brought in bottles labeled with the child's name and date. Center staff will not give bottles containing solid food unless the child's health care provider supplies written instructions and a medical reason for this practice. After one hour, any formula or human milk that is not completely consumed or refrigerated is discarded. No milk, including breast milk, is warmed in a microwave oven.

Solid foods or fruit juices are not served to infants younger than six months unless it is recommended by the child's health care provider and approved by the family. For older children, the center serves only 100% juice and juice is limited to four ounces daily.

Whole milk is not served to infants under 12 months. Only whole milk is served to children ages 12 months to 24 months. Children over 24 months are served low fat milk. The center does not serve foods that are choking hazards such as whole grapes, hot dogs, popcorn, or chunks of raw vegetables.

Precaution is taken to ensure that children are not exposed to allergens and allergies that are harmful to them. Cautions are posted in each classroom and the kitchen area to ensure that children are not served foods that could trigger an allergic reaction.

XIII. Dress

In order to ensure full participation in all activities, your child should come to the center dressed appropriately for play. As weather permits, all children will play outdoors and should have appropriate clothes for each season. A change of clothes should also be available in each child's cubby at all times.

Parents provide disposable diapers and baby wipes until their children are toilet-trained. Parents are encouraged to provide a "snuggly" and a blanket once their child is over 8 months old.

XIII. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

The teachers and staff at Early Connections have a legal and ethical responsibility to report immediately to a supervisor and the local Department of Human Services (601.545.1460 ext. 50), the Youth Court, or the Hattiesburg Police Department via 911 any reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being neglected, abandoned, exploited or abused by the family, staff, volunteers or others. Staff who report suspicions of child abuse or neglect are immune from discharge, retaliation, or other disciplinary action for that reason alone unless it is proven that the report is malicious.

Staff members are also advised of the availability of a statewide 24-hour child abuse hotline at 800.222.8000 for immediate response and assistance.

XIV. Contact Information and Chain of Command

Lamar County Superintendent
Dr. Ben Burnett
601-794-1030

USM/IDS Co-Director and Early Connections Administrative Director
Dr. Jane Siders
601-266-5163

Early Connections Center Directors:
Mrs. Margie Pittman-Payton (Infant and one year olds)
Mrs. Alicia Sanders (two through five year olds)
(601 264-7645 or 601 268-0621)

Other relevant phone numbers:

Early Connections Advisory Board Members
Mrs. Carolyn Adams

601-794-5256

Mrs. Terri Thomas
601-794-8121

Mrs. Dahlia Landers
601-264-7964

Mrs. Rita Downs
601-794-3302

Mrs. Liz Dearman
601-758-4289

Mrs. Rita Bush
601-794-8518

Parents As Teachers
Mrs. Becky Hurston
Mrs. Alicia
601-794-5982

Families First Resource Library and Parenting Program
Ms. Julie Cooke
601-266-