

ATALA MONTESSORI



School for Creative Expression

PRESCHOOL, TODDLER, + VPK

PARENT HANDBOOK

2024–2025

Introduction

Dear Parents,

We are delighted that you have chosen **Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression!** This Preschool, Toddler, + VPK Parent Handbook is designed to better explain the policies and procedures of the school. We believe that through a strong partnership between the parents and school anything is possible!

Cordially,

Sra. Elizabeth Valle, Owner + Director of Toddler Education
Sra. Beatriz Scheff, Owner + Director of Preschool Education
Mrs. Patricia Howarth, Owner + Director of Elementary Education
Dr. Kristine H. Burns, Owner + Chief Administrator and Director of Middle School

The **Mission** of Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression is to provide an educational environment that enables each child to realize his or her richest potential for learning and to become a creative, self-directed, confident, and contributing member of the family, local, and global communities.

Philosophy

We at Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression believe in helping our students discover their inner creativity through exploring the arts. Our students have many opportunities to experience a wide range of artistic expression, developing their self-confidence and joyfulness. We work hard to foster a life-long love of learning, while stressing effective, positive communication skills and encouraging constructive decision making.

We embrace diversity at Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression. Students experience and learn to respect ethnic and cultural differences and are encouraged to seek and identify commonalities. This helps our students achieve personal growth which involves responsibility to others and to our earth.

Certification and Accreditation

All our teachers are Montessori certified. Together we have over 200 years of experience in education, arts, and Montessori teaching. The children of our teachers and administrators have been through a Montessori education, so we have experienced the classroom from a parent's perspective, as well as a teacher's point of view.

We are accredited by the Association of Independent Schools of Florida and are certified by the Early Learning Coalition. We are Associate members of the American Montessori Society.

Admission and Enrollment Requirements

The registration fee, materials fee, enrollment form, birth certificate, health form, and immunization records are required to complete enrollment. If your child is exempt from immunizations, a statement that meets the requirements of the Florida Minimum Standard Rules must be in our file.

For all Toddler and Preschool students, a non-refundable annual \$500 Registration Fee is required of all students at the time the application or re-enrollment form is returned. Tuition is billed through Blackbaud Management Company. There is an annual \$50 fee for each family enrolling in the Blackbaud system (the actual fee may vary slightly year to year). Arrangements can be made for single annual and biannual payments paid directly to Atala Montessori School. A late fee of \$50 will be added to your account if your payment is received late.

If a Blackbaud payment is declined and is past due more than two weeks, we will request a meeting between the owners of Atala Montessori and the parents. After six weeks of non-payment the student will not be allowed to attend class until the account is settled.

A \$300 materials fee is required for each academic year. This fee covers all our books, work books, art supplies, and related costs. The fee is also used to cover the costs of two field trips per year. The fee is to be paid in one lump sum prior to the beginning of the academic year.

For all VPK students, we require that all documentation including the signed and dated VPK Certificate be turned into the office in order to secure a space for your child.

Your child's immunization and health record, along with a copy of his/her birth certificate, must be maintained and current. Please submit any new shot records or health information promptly. If the immunization form is outdated, you will need to keep your child home until you are able to update it with your doctor and provide a copy to the office.

Students coming from non-Montessori backgrounds are accepted. We require a basic academic screening and transcripts from the student's previous school, as well as a good attendance record. Tutoring in math and language are offered at additional costs after school and during the summer. Atala Montessori admits students of any race, color, national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school.

Parent Open House and Orientation

Each year we also host a Parent Open House the Friday before school starts. This is a time of orientation and re-orientation for parents and children. During this time parents are invited to visit the classrooms with their children and meet the teachers and other classmates.

During this time, we will also collect updated Emergency Contact Sheets and Permission to Pick-Up forms, as well as distribute information such as the updated calendar. This is a great time to ask questions both of the teacher and the office if you so desire.

Once school begins, we have a Parent Night for each age group. This is a great time to ask questions and pick up classroom information for the school year.

Arrival and Dismissal

Preschool, Toddler, and VPK students should arrive between 8:00 and 8:30 am, as their days begin **promptly** at 8:30 am. The drop-off point is at the north side of our building outside the preschool playground. In order to maintain the flow of traffic, please do not get out of your car. An assistant will open the car door and help your child get out of the seat before taking him or her to the classroom. If you need to walk your child to class, especially in the first few days of the new school year, please park in the west or northwest parking lots and walk your child into the classroom.

Atala children will be counted in attendance only if they are actually present for at least three hours of the day or engaged in a school-approved educational activity that constitutes a part of the instructional program for the child.

Please note that all parents are required to sign in and sign out their child each day. If your child receives School Readiness funding, you will need to record the exact time of dropping off and picking up. At the end of each month, all VPK parents will need to sign and date the long form for submission. This needs to take place within the first two school days of the new month. The assistants and teachers will have class attendance sheets with them in the mornings and afternoons, and you will be asked to initial each time your child is dropped off or picked up from our care.

Late Arrival

We do not accept habitual late arrivals. If you are arriving late (after 8:30 am) for a documented medical reason, please bring your child to the office and we will take him or her to class. We try to minimize interruptions and the spread of outside germs during the day, and we appreciate your promptness. The parents of *all* students will need to adhere to the following attendance and tardiness policy.

Children need to be in attendance throughout the school day. **If a child is late to school or to be dismissed before the end of the school day (2:30 pm for preschool and toddler children), the parent needs to notify the office and teacher in advance and state the reason for the tardiness or early dismissal.**

In section 7.5 of the Handbook from the Department of Children and Families, the following requirements now apply:

“If a child does not arrive to the program or the agreed upon designated pick-up location, child care personnel must communicate as early as possible (within one hour of the child’s scheduled arrival) with the custodial parent/legal guardian; if there was no prior communication from the custodial parent/legal guardian of the child’s absence. If child care personnel are unable to reach the child’s parent/guardian, emergency contacts must be notified.”

At Atala Montessori, we strongly believe that punctuality and good time management skills are vital for children to be successful in life. Being punctual gives children a sense of stability, security, and self confidence. Furthermore, we have important academic time each morning and it is very disruptive when you bring your child late.

Dismissal

Full-day preschool dismissal takes place between 2:30 and 2:45 pm from the Preschool Playground gate. When picking a child up early, please come directly to the office, and we will bring your child to you. More than five early dismissals in a quarter will necessitate communication with the teacher.

No child shall be released within the final thirty (30) minutes of the school day unless authorized through a doctor’s note or emergency medical issue and toddlers cannot be picked up during nap time (12:45-2:15). Half-day dismissal takes place at 12:15 pm.

As a reminder, parents need to come to the office to drop off your child late or pick up your child early. **Do not go directly to the classrooms.** The staff has all been instructed not to open their doors.

Only those individuals listed on the “Permission for Pick Up” list will be allowed to take your child from campus. Please realize that we will ask for identification to insure that your child is picked up by correct person. We will not release a child to anyone appearing to be intoxicated or impaired in any way.

Before and After Care

Atala offers Before Care for children arriving between 7:00–7:45 am. There is an extra charge is \$4 per morning, per child. Please bring your child in through the “Dog” Gate (*not* the preschool playground) and take him or her to the preschool area for supervision.

After Care is available from 3:00–6:00 pm for an extra fee of \$4.00 per hour per student, with a 50% discount for all siblings. You will be billed every month at the end of each month. When you come to pick up your child, please park your car at the playground gate, step out, and sign out your child with the staff on duty. Children will be available for pick up on the playground or in the classroom. If you do not pay your After Care fees within

5 business days of the new month, you will be assessed a 5% late fee. If the payment is not received 5 days after that, your child will no longer be able to use our Before or After Care services.

Late Pick-Up

If you will be late in picking up your child, please notify the office right away. There is an additional charge of \$1.00 per minute late fee if your child remains after 6:00 pm. For half-day children, late is considered after 12:15 pm and you will be charged the same late fees as the full-day children. Payment is due to Atala Montessori within 24 hours.

All Before and After Care invoices are sent during the first 3 days of the new month. You are charged for the time your child spends with us. Payments are due within 5 business days and if the payment is not received, you will receive a second invoice with a 5% late fee added. You will be required to pay that additional late fee or the payment will be returned. If after another five days the bill remains unpaid, your child will no longer be able to use these services.

Absences

Students are to be counted in attendance only if they are actually present for at least three hours of the day or engaged in a school-approved educational activity which constitutes a part of the instructional program for the student.

Please notify the office and your child's teacher if you know your child is going to be absent. Any absences over five days in a single quarter will necessitate a conference with the teacher. If you have any questions, please contact the office.

For kindergarten students—in accordance with Miami-Dade County Public Schools policies, any unexcused absences over 10 days during a single academic year may necessitate summer school attendance or tutoring. In extreme cases, students may be asked to repeat a grade. Unexcused absences include:

- Vacations, personal services, local non-school event, program or sporting activity
- Older students providing day care services for siblings
- Illness of others
- Non-compliance with immunization requirements (unless lawfully exempt).

VPK Absences

Your child is allowed 3 unexcused absences per month. After that you will need to provide an original doctor's note for excused absences. Any child who accumulates more than 3 unexcused absences during any given month risk being dismissed from the VPK program. We strictly adhere to the Early Learning Coalition attendance policies. Atala staff do verify suspicious-looking doctor's notes.

All Early Learning Coalition VPK attendance sheets must be signed and dated no later than the first business day of the next month. You will need to 1) print your name, 2) sign your name, and 3) date the form each month or the Early Learning Coalition will reject the attendance form and you will need to reimburse Atala for the entire month.

Dress

We suggest uniform shirts be worn Monday through Thursday. While we recommend a basic khaki uniform pant, they are not required. Information on sizes, colors, and prices will be available prior to the start of school. Please label all coats, sweaters, and removable clothing with your child's name.

Sandals, flip-flops, Crocs, and clogs are not appropriate for regular school days, but may be worn on special occasions. They are not safe for running and climbing on equipment. Closed-toed, soft-soled shoes or sneakers are best for school.

Dress for Fridays is open, but short shorts/skirts/dresses, "belly" shirts, spaghetti straps, t-shirts with inappropriate text or images, and other improper clothing is not allowed.

Personal Phone Calls

In order to avoid interruptions in the classroom, we do not allow for personal phone calls between a parent and a child during school hours. Rather, the staff can pass personal messages to your child as needed (e.g. you are running late for pick-up and your child will be going to After Care, you are having a unanticipated person pick up your child from school, or you are questioning your child if they want to stay for club or After Care free time).

Snacks

Atala provides snacks for our preschool and toddler children during the school day. All children remaining in After Care will also receive a snack.

Your preschool, toddler, or VPK child is always welcome to bring a special snack from home to share with the class. The children feel very honored when they have the opportunity to serve snacks to their classmates, and they appreciate receiving a thank-you from everyone. Fresh fruits, muffins, bagels and cream cheese, kabobs of cheese and fruit, and pretzel sticks are a few examples the children appreciate. Please check with your room parent for further information.

Birthday Celebrations

Your child's birthday is a very special time, and children enjoy celebrating their birthdays together. We welcome birthday celebrations in the class. Please let the teacher know if you plan to bring birthday treats.

Rest and Nap Times

Each preschool and toddler child will have a rest time. Toddler parents, please send a small blanket and "lovey" for your child's nap time. Linens are sent home on Fridays to be laundered.

Show and Tell

The preschool, toddler, and VPK classrooms have a show and tell day and time assigned during the week. Children may bring in any item of educational or personal value. We discourage toys.

Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

Field trips are scheduled periodically in all classrooms. Please check the online calendar for updates. Permission slips will be sent home in a timely manner. Parents must let us know if they do not want their child to participate in a field trip. Preschool and toddler children are required to have an adult accompany them.

Lunch

For those children staying for the whole day of school, we recommend you pack a nutritious lunch including protein, cereal/grains, fruits/vegetables, and dairy. Independence is a basic principle of the Montessori environment, so please pack your child's lunch so it is easily managed. Your child should be able to open the lunch box, thermos, juice box, or water bottle, and all accompanying packaging. We do not have facilities to refrigerate or reheat lunches. Sodas, doughnuts, pop-tarts, chocolate, candy, and other high-sugar sweets are discouraged. If you forgot to send your child's lunch with him/her at drop off, please be sure to bring the lunch to the office no later than 10:00 am so we may get it to your child on time for lunch.

Friday Pizza Day

For children staying the whole day, pizza is available on most Fridays for an additional cost. Costs are variable based on the age of the class. You will be notified by your classroom teacher as to the monthly cost and deadline to pay. If your child chooses not to partake of Friday's pizza lunch, please send lunch as usual. Pizza money due on the first Thursday of the month and should be paid in cash directly to your child's teacher.

School Calendar and Holidays

In general, we follow the schedule of holidays of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. A list of days when the school is closed can be found on the Academic Schedule on our website. A monthly calendar is available on your child's room calendar on atalamontessori.org.

Atala Montessori is not affiliated with any religious organization; however, we do recognize and celebrate major holidays. Please advise us if your child does not participate in any of these.

Each preschool, toddler, and VPK classroom maintains a Child-of-the-Day Calendar that is passed out every month. This calendar has reminders and tells you what the children will be studying each month. Your child will have his or her special day where he or she will serve as the teacher's special helper. In addition you may wish to send in a snack or small items such as stickers to share with the rest of the class.

Medication and Illness

If a child becomes ill with fever, diarrhea, or vomiting the parent will be notified immediately by phone to pick your child up. If a child has symptoms of pink eye or lice, the parent will also be notified to pick the child up immediately. In either case, the child will not be allowed back into the classroom until all symptoms have cleared up. Please keep your child home for 24 hours until the symptoms are gone to help prevent spreading the illness to the other children. Kindly notify the school if your child has been diagnosed with a contagious illness so we may let the other families know.

All prescription medications must be signed in by the parent daily and left in the medication cabinet in the office, in the original container with the child's name on it. Medicine Authorization forms must be signed by the parent or guardian for the safety of the child. Our staff is not allowed to dispense any medication with phone permission.

If we have called to notify you that your child is sick, you must respond. If you are unable to respond immediately, we will begin calling the people on Emergency Contact list. If there is still no response or plan for pick up place and we believe that the child is needing medical attention, we will call 911. Per DCF regulations, if a parent does not respond to this type of situation, a Medical Neglect Report will be filed.

Emergency Situations

The Atala staff is trained in CPR and First Aid. In a medical emergency, the child will receive immediate attention and then the parent will be called to pick-up the child. In an extreme medical emergency, the child will receive immediate attention, 911 will be called, and then the parents will be called.

All numbers on the Emergency Contact and Medical Information Form will be called once. Per DCF regulations, if there is no response from anyone on the list, 911 will be automatically called. Therefore, it is extremely important that you answer your phones if the school calls.

If there is a request to pick up your child because of an injury or illness, you must arrange for someone from your Permission to Pick-Up List list to pick him or her up within the hour. If your child appears to get worse or if you take longer than one hour to pick up, per DCF regulations, 911 must be called.

Parents will be notified of any situation that may have endangered their child, such as exposure to severe illness, injury (minor or major) or situations that render the school unsafe.

We are not allowed to dispense any non-prescription medication and can only dispense prescription medications with the proper documentation (see above).

When the school goes on an emergency lockdown, we do not allow anyone to enter to exit the premises. You will be alerted by email and then receive updates as we are able. Once we receive the all-clear, we will send another email updating everyone. Please do not attempt to pick-up your child. We will not release them until we are all in a safe situation.

Policy for Reporting Abuse and Neglect

All Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression staff are mandated to directly report any suspicion of child abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse, and/or exploitation of children, elderly or adults. In all cases the State of Florida law on reporting child abuse and neglect will be followed by calling the State Abuse Registry at 1-800-962-2873.

Emergency Numbers

It is imperative that the office has current daytime numbers where a family member can be reached in the

event of an emergency. If your contact number should change, please advise the office immediately in writing.

Parent Involvement

We invite parents to volunteer at the school. Please communicate with the Room Parent or teacher about various projects in which you would like to participate and to arrange specific days and times.

Parent-Teacher conferences are held twice during the year and are mandatory. Additional times may be arranged by contacting the office or contacting the teacher directly through Class Dojo.

Potty Training

We help with potty training in the Toddler Room. The teacher will let you know when the process will begin and how you may support these activities at home.

Beginning in preschool, all children must be fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom without much assistance. We do, of course, expect the occasional accident, but your child must be able to go to the bathroom and wipe himself/herself. The teachers will help with clothing issues and they will also check that the younger children are learning proper bathroom hygiene.

Behavior, Guidance, and Discipline

Our children have daily lessons on courtesy and good behavior. Our teachers work on concepts such as be kind to your neighbor, keep your hands to yourself, and teeth are only for eating food. We provide information and insight into your child's behavior (positive and negative) during the school day and we hope that you will keep us informed of behavior and changes at home such as your child's possible inability to sleep well for several consecutive nights, the birth of a sibling, stress occurring at home or in school, etc. Parents are asked to inform the staff of such matters in person, by phone, or in writing.

If possible, in the classroom and on the playground, the children are redirected before a behavioral problem develops. At Atala we use positive discipline with children because we want to encourage children to learn responsibility and cooperation. We develop a strong connection with your child, teach with love, set clear expectations, demonstrate positive behavior, emphasize solutions, and focus on what to do to correct the situation.

Parents will be called for a conference if we have a repetitive disruptive behavior. Consistency between home and school is very important, and parents and teachers should work together to set clear limits. Consequences will be established and set in place.

Biting is a natural response of a frustrated young child who may not have the language skills to express himself or herself. We try to be vigilant of such a situation so the other children are not injured. When a child is bitten, the parents of both children will be called. If skin has been broken, we will make you aware of the possible exchange of bodily fluids and you will need to make the decision whether or not you want to take your child to a doctor as a precautionary follow up.

Legally, we are not allowed to release the name of either child and we are not allowed to tell the parent whether or not the other child was a boy or girl. If the biting behavior continues (either the same day or subsequent days), the parent will be requested to pick the child up for the remainder of the day and every day thereafter that he or she bites. If the child continues to bite repeatedly, he or she is subject to dismissal from the school until he or she outgrows this behavior and is more comfortable in a group environment.

Withdrawing from Atala

We reserve the right to withdraw your child from school for consistent behavior issues, non-payment, or any of the other issues outlined in the annual Parent Handbook and Enrollment packets. Should you need to withdraw your child from Atala, the office requires an official letter in writing 2 weeks ahead of time. Upon receipt of the letter, we will return your health forms and consider options for canceling your tuition contract for the remainder of the year. Please contact the office for any questions on this policy.

Emergency Procedures

Atala Montessori School will be closed if a hurricane warning is issued. If a hurricane or tornado warning is issued during school hours, we will notify you immediately of an impending early dismissal. We will follow the same actions of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. You may watch Channels 4, 6, 7, and 10 for school closing information. We will also post updates on our Facebook page. Following a hurricane, telephone communication may be interrupted. In this case, parents are urged to drive to the school and check the communication board that will be placed at the office entrance. Atala Montessori will reopen as quickly as is reasonably possible following a hurricane.

In accordance with policy, fire drills are held each month so your children will know the correct way to exit the building. All classes will meet in the west parking lot adjacent to ArtSouth. The teachers call roll, and once given clearance, everyone will return to the classroom. In addition, we practice weather-related and intruder drills four times per year so the children understand those procedures as well.

Physical Education, Music, Spanish, and Art Instruction

While many of our classes will incorporate aspects of movement, drama, singing, and visual art, we also offer dedicated periods of study during the class day and in after school activities.

Physical Education

Preschool students have one physical education class per week and are given instruction in basic skills for gross motor control, listening, and following a sequence of instructions. All classes have daily recess on our playground or in the courtyard.

Music

Preschool and toddler children receive music instruction once a week for 30 minutes for preschool and 20 minutes for toddlers.

Art

Preschool children receive art instruction once a week. Many projects are related to holidays, seasons, historical events, and cultural studies. Projects will be displayed throughout the year at various family events.

Spanish

The toddlers will be exposed to Spanish every day as these are bilingual classrooms. It is important to start foreign language instruction early because the children will easily absorb the language without any effort. Preschool children not in the Spanish program will work with a Spanish teacher twice a week and they will learn the basics of beginning Spanish.

Television and Videos

Although we discourage long sessions in front of the television or computer, some days we use these devices for educational videos and activities. On very rare days such as PJ Day or Crazy Hair Day, we may watch a movie, but we pay particular attention to our special age groups and movie ratings. If you have any questions as to the suitability of subject matter, projects, and activities, please check with your child's teacher.

Grievance Policy

We want you to be happy and comfortable with the faculty and staff at Atala Montessori. Our greatest concern is the safety, happiness, and education of your children. If you have a question or concern, please feel free to discuss the issue with your child's teacher in writing or in a conference. We are hopeful that the situation will be remedied by open communication between everyone involved. Our door is always open.

If you have a concern with an issue in the classroom, please speak to your child's teacher directly. If you do not believe the situation has been addressed, please request a meeting with the area supervisor. In extreme cases, you may wish to ask the office to coordinate a meeting with the five Atala owners. Each of the owners is responsible for separate areas of the school. Their assignments are as follows: Sra. Elizabeth Valle (Toddler classrooms and Preschool/Toddler after care), Sra. Beatriz Scheff (Preschool classes, VPK, art, Spanish for those ages), Mrs. Patricia Howarth (Lower and Upper Elementary classrooms in-

cluding Spanish, PE, and art for those ages), and Dr. Kristine Burns (office administration, Middle School classes, music for all age groups, elementary/middle school after care).

Updates

If you have updated telephone, email, or other contact information that needs to be updated. Please visit the office to update your child's information sheet. We will pass along these updates to all the classrooms and after care staff.

Please remember to check our website (atalamontessori.org) for updates on the school and our events. Each class maintains its own page with an activity calendar and reminders from the teachers. We notify parents through hard copy letters and email. You may also wish to join us on Facebook and Instagram for daily updates on the activities at school. You are invited to contact the school at 786-738-1210 or by email information@atalamontessori.org for any questions or concerns.

Parent Code of Conduct

We teach our children to be considerate of others and work out disagreements in a respectful manner. We expect our parents to act in the same way and treat our staff, volunteers, and other children with respect at all times. We ask that you take the time to read through our Parent Code of Conduct and use it as a way of handling possible conflicts with others at Atala.

1. Parents and other guardians are expected to follow the school rules of Atala Montessori and treat the staff, volunteers, and children with respect.
2. Parents who have any concerns about specific children, teachers, administrators, club directors, volunteers, or other staff members are expected to direct their concerns and comments to the classroom teacher first and then the owner who oversees that age level. Many of our staff members are not full-time employees so we ask that you begin a conversation with the classroom teacher or administrator when conflicts arise.
3. A parent or guardian who verbally mistreats another child or adult at the school will be asked to leave right away. Depending on the severity of the issue, their child may also be removed from the school for the remainder of the year.
4. If necessary and only in extreme circumstances, the police will be called to remove any parent or guardian who gets out of control verbally or physically with another person at Atala Montessori School.

Please sign and return to the office.

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4. If necessary and only in extreme circumstances, the police will be called to remove any parent or guardian who gets out of control verbally or physically with another person at Atala Montessori School.

____ (please initial) I have read the guidelines of the Parent Code of Conduct Policy.

Student Name (please print)

I have received, read, and understand the content of the Atala Parent Handbook.

Parent Signature

Date