



# Curious Critters

## Early Learning Tree

Where curiosity is encouraged!



7415 Buchanan St.

Hyattsville, MD 20784

301-577-KIDS

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## Welcome

Welcome to the Curious Critters Early Learning Tree (**CCELT**) community. Thanks for allowing us the opportunity to care for your child. We take pride in our program and vow to protect, nurture and encourage your little critter in being awesome citizens of the world.

We're on a mission to raise the standard of childcare in Prince Georges County! Our all-inclusive program offers a wide range of amenities geared to help ease the stress families may experience when balancing their home and work lives.

This handbook is merely a guide to **help you, help us**. We want this to be an excellent experience for your family. If you have a question that is not addressed here, please feel free to contact us directly.

Sincerely,

Dominique Walker

& Kimberly Walker-Bellamy

## The Basics

Curious Critters Early Learning Tree is located at 7415 Buchanan St, Hyattsville MD. 20784, inside Ascension Lutheran Church. We are not a faith-based program but we're good people. 😊

CCELT is a full-time center caring for children 6 weeks through 5 years. We operate year-round, M-F, 7am-6pm, (closed most federal holidays).

There is a daily max of 10 hrs. of care per day. **New in 2023\***There may be a penalty for repeat offenders (exceeding the 10-hour max).

**New beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023**, we will close for Spring Break, Summer Break and Winter Break, 1 week each. Please see our 2023 calendar for those dates.

You can reach us by phone, email, web and *once you're a part of the family*, the **Brightwheel App!**

**Phone:** 301-577-KIDS (5437)

**Email:** [admin@curiouscritterselt.com](mailto:admin@curiouscritterselt.com)

**Web:** [www.curiouscritterselt.com](http://www.curiouscritterselt.com)

## Registration Process & Tuition Rates

**Step 1:** Schedule a tour to view our facilities.

**Step 2:** Print out the enrollment forms found on our website, [www.curiouscritterselt.com](http://www.curiouscritterselt.com). Complete the forms and email them along with all supporting documents to **admin@curiouscritterselt.com**. All documents must be completed in its entirety to enroll. There is a one-time, non-refundable registration fee of \$50 per family.

**Step 3:** Once we have completed the enrollment process and set the start date, you will be invited to join our parent communication app, Brightwheel. Through this app, you will get your billing invoice, direct messages from your child's teachers and other important information.

The first week of tuition is due at least one business day PRIOR to the start of service. WE DO NOT HOLD/RESERVE SPACE WITHOUT PAYMENT.

### 2023 Weekly Tuition Rates

**Infant/Toddler (6 weeks-23 months) - \$414**

**Two Year Old's - \$299**

**Preschool (2-5-year old's) - \$264**

## What's included

What's included in the cost of tuition?

Aside from a safe and fun learning environment we include:

- Breakfast, Lunch and 2 snacks daily – our healthy and delicious meals are prepared fresh daily. Milk and bottled spring water will be served at each meal.
- Disposable Diapers/Potty training pants & Hypoallergenic Baby Wipes
- Crib/Cot Linens- 100 % cotton sheets and wearable blankets (infants)  
100% cotton sheets & fleece blankets (toddlers-5 y)
- Field Trips & Special Events
- All school supplies
- Brightwheel App – a user friendly communication app that allows our teachers to communicate directly with our parents throughout the day. This is where you view details of your child's day, meals consumed, potty notes, naps and health checks. You will receive pictures & videos and other alerts. Brightwheel offers convenient e-payment options and easy access to download billing statements for tax or employer reimbursement purposes.

**Our weekly menu is posted on Brightwheel on Sundays by 5pm.**

**Please note: Parents are responsible for providing infant formula and baby foods. If your child has food allergies, please carefully review the weekly menu to decide if you will need to send in a replacement meal.**

**For instance, *There's Shrimp Alfredo on the menu on Wednesday. Your child has a shellfish allergy.* You must supply a meal from home on that day.**

## Payments and Fees

**Tuition is due every Friday (the week prior to service) by 7:00pm.** We accept cash and electronic payments via the Brightwheel app. For your convenience, Auto-Pay via the app is available. *Personal checks are also accepted when paying monthly.*

**Please note:** if paying in cash or check, please make your payment on Fridays by the close of business. *If we are closed on a Friday, please make your payment on the last business day of that week to avoid a late payment fee.*

**Electronic Payment Fees:** E-payments made via the Brightwheel App are subject to a fee of .60 cents per ACH transactions (Bank Account) and a 2.9% fee when using a credit card.



**If your payment fails due to insufficient funds (and is late), you will be charged a late payment fee of \$30 per day. All fees and full tuition must be paid before your child can be dropped off.**

*CCELT reserves the right to refuse a request for refunds and/or terminate service for any reason.*

## Payments and Fees -cont'd

**Question:** *How do I avoid the late payment fee?*

**Answer:** Pay the full tuition by 7pm each Friday!

### UNDERSTANDING LATE TUITION FEES

If tuition is not paid by 7pm on the Friday prior to the week of service, you will be charged a late payment fee.

**Note: All late fees are per child.**

Please see the following for help understanding when those fees are assessed:

**Friday** 7:01pm-11:59pm Add \$30.00

**Saturday** 12:00am- 11:59pm  $\$30 \times 2 = \$60.00$

**Sunday** 12:00am – 11:59pm  $\$30 \times 3 = \$90.00$

**Monday** 12:00am – 11:59pm  $\$30 \times 4 = \$120.00$

\*All financial obligations must be satisfied by Monday morning, prior to drop off. In some cases, Curious Critters Early Learning Tree will accept payment arrangements. Failure to adhere to the arrangement may result in termination of service until the full balance (including late fees) has been paid. An agreement to accept payment arrangements is a courtesy, in no way is CCELT obligated to agree to such arrangements.

**Late Pick Up Fees:** There is a fee for all students picked up after closing. The fee is \$5 per child, per minute starting at 6:01 pm. The rate increases to \$10/minute as of 6:06pm. Please contact admin if you anticipate a late pick up. Late pick up fees are due **in cash** no later than the next business day at drop off. This fee is non-negotiable and must be paid directly to the teacher who stays late to care for your child.

**NEW!** A \$30 fee will be imposed for any child in our care beyond the 10-hr. daily max!



## Attendance, Holidays & Vacation

Our full-time tuition rates are based on 5 days per week at 10 hours per day.

Tuition rates are not adjusted due to your child's absence, this includes family vacations, illness, scheduled school closings or any other personal family event. As a courtesy, please let us know if you plan to have your child out for an extended period.

### CCELT Holiday Closings in 2023

- Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> – Observed for New Year's Day
- Monday, January 16<sup>th</sup> - Martin Luther King, Jr Day
  - Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup> - Presidents Day
- Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup> - Good Friday Close at 3pm
- NEW!** • Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Spring Break
  - Monday, May 29<sup>th</sup> - Memorial Day
  - Monday, June 19<sup>th</sup> - Juneteenth
  - Tuesday, July 4<sup>th</sup> - Independence Day
- NEW!** • Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> - Summer Vacation
  - Monday, September 4<sup>th</sup> - Labor Day
  - Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup> – Indigenous Peoples Day
  - Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup> - Observed for Veteran's Day
- Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>- Close at 3pm Thanksgiving Break
  - Thursday, Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup> & Friday, Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> - Thanksgiving Break
    - Monday, December 25<sup>th</sup> - Christmas
- NEW!** • Tuesday, December 26<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> – Winter Break

# New in 2023

## Vacation/Scheduled Breaks

### Spring/Summer/Winter Breaks!

Curious Critters Early Learning Tree will close for 1 week each in the Spring, Summer and Winter. **Full tuition will be due during these closures.**

**The dates for 2023 are as follows:**

- Spring Break - Monday, April 10th - Friday, April 14th
- Summer Vacation - Monday, August 21st - Friday, August 25th
- Winter Break - Tuesday, December 26th – Friday, December 29th

We suggest that families schedule their personal family vacations during this time to avoid the inconvenience of having to find alternate childcare.





## **Weather Related School Closings and Delays**

CCELT will announce school closings, delayed openings and early dismissals via the Brightwheel App, automated phone calls and/or our website.

If CCELT is closed due to inclement weather, power outages, water main breaks, etc. for more than 3 days within the same week, a credit will be issued for the inconvenience.

Please make sure your Emergency Contact information is up to date. We are not responsible for missed communications due to phone number changes, full voicemail or notification settings.

### **Early closings**

**If necessary to close early, it is expected that your child is picked up within 1.5 hours. Please notify CCELT admin if you must arrange for an alternate pick-up person. A Photo ID will be required.**

## **Curriculum and Learning Activities**

CCELT follows Creative Curriculum.

The Creative Curriculum program allows children to learn by hands on exploring and discovery. Our classrooms are designed to make sure your little ones can touch, climb and explore. All activities are planned to promote physical, social emotional, cognitive and/or language development.

Our teachers are given weekly themes which they use to create their age-appropriate lesson plans. We recognize that all children are unique, this too is considered when creating lessons that are developmentally appropriate for each child.

## **Education and Health Accommodations**

If your child has an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or requires special accommodation regarding learning or general care, please speak with a member of the admin team and/or your child's teacher. It is very important to communicate with CCELT if your child has been screened and diagnosed with any form of disabilities or special health care needs. We will work together to create an action plan that provides the support your child needs to succeed.

We want to ensure we're providing an environment that's inclusive for children of all abilities.

## Classroom Management

Our classrooms have a teacher to student ratio that is set by MSDE and implemented by CCELT Staff. This helps to ensure proper supervision of the children at all times. As an added safety protocol, our teachers are prohibited from using their personal cell phones in the classrooms. iPads are provided for the use of communicating with parents via the Brightwheel App, lesson planning and other work-related activities.

Parents should look to the Brightwheel app for updates on their child's day. Caring for our children is the teacher's #1 priority. Non-urgent messages, requests for pictures, phone calls etc. will be answered during our downtime.

**Infants and Toddlers -1:3**

**Two's - 1:6**

**Preschool - 1:10**

(Ref. MSDE Child Care- COMAR 13A.16.08 Child Supervision)



## Birthday and Holiday Celebrations

**We love to party but due to Covid-19 and other communicable diseases we have scaled back on how we do so. We appreciate your understanding.**

Parents are asked to coordinate all birthday celebrations with their child's teacher or the CCELT admin team at least a week in advance. Please take into consideration the class schedule, dietary concerns and age-appropriate activities/gifts when planning your child's celebration.

The following guidelines are in place to ensure the safety of every child in our care:

- Absolutely NO lit candles
- All cakes/cupcakes, food and drinks must be store bought and sealed prior to being served.
- "Goody Bags" will be inspected for age-appropriate items and will be distributed by CCELT staff ONLY.
- **Parents:** please inspect all goody bags to determine what you will allow or not allow for your child. For ex. slime, candy, tattoos etc.

Holiday celebrations are planned & hosted by CCELT staff. Your written permission (for your child to participate) may be requested in advance for certain activities. For example, a visit from Santa or the Grinch.

\*If your child is exhibiting behavior concerns or emotional distress, they may be excluded from the activity.

## **Field Trips and Onsite Events**

As we move into a new year, we'd like to resume off site/on site field trips.

These special events will be announced in advance through the Brightwheel App, newsletter and/or permission slip. All children must have a parent or guardians written permission to participate.

\*If there are behavior concerns with your child, a parent or guardian will be REQUIRED to chaperone for them to participate.

If permission is not granted for a child to participate in an activity or field trip, we will do our best to accommodate the child by temporarily reassigning them to another class. If there is no other teacher/staff member to remain with the child, the parent may be asked to keep the child home or pick up early.

All classrooms are required to keep their Emergency Contact binders with them during onsite and offsite activities. At least one member of the admin team will be present during all events/field trips. Please make sure your Emergency Contact information is up to date.

Field trips and special activities are included in your child's tuition.



## Illness, Incidents and Boo-Boo Reports

### When sick...

To reduce the spread of germs and viruses, children should not attend school if they are experiencing fever, vomiting, diarrhea, conjunctivitis (pink eye), cold/flu like symptoms, etc. We ask that the child is kept home until they are totally free from symptoms for at least 24 hrs (without medication).

If your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease or virus, please share that information with the admin team so that we can notify other parents and take the necessary precautions to prevent further spread.

We will contact you and/or your emergency contact person(s) if your child becomes ill while in our care. A pickup is required if there is:

**Fever:** body temperature at 101. degrees or higher

**Diarrhea or vomiting:** 2 episodes within the same day.

**Coughing:** excessive coughing

**Runny Nose:** excessive and/or green - yellow mucus

**Skin Irritation:** allergic reaction, severe rash, blisters, open sores with pus or bleeding (not the common diaper rash)

Or any other signs of illness such as lethargy, disoriented, unusual loss of appetite, excessive crying (as if in pain), etc.



## Illness, Incidents and Boo-Boo Reports-cont'd

### Accidents happen...

No matter how big or how small, all incidents will be documented and parents will be notified. Small scratches, scrapes and cuts will be cleaned, bandaged and documented by CCELT staff. Larger scratches and wounds will be cleaned, bandaged, documented and parents will be notified via Brightwheel. **Parents will be contacted immediately for all head injuries.** In the event of a life-threatening injury or incident, CCELT will call **911 AND** will call the parents. If emergency medical attention is necessary, a member of the admin team will escort your child to the nearest emergency room and stay with your child until a parent or guardian arrives. Incidents that occur at home should be communicated with CCELT as well.

### *Baby Sharks bites*

Babies love trying out their new teeth! In the event of a bite, both families of the children involved will receive an incident report. The injured child will be given first aid and comforted. The “biter” will be separated and strategies will be put into place to prevent future incidents of this nature. If the bite breaks the skin, parents will receive an urgent incident alert via Brightwheel including a picture of the wound.



Habitual biters may be subject to discipline policies (see pages 21-23).

## Medication Administering Policy

**All prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, ointments, lotions, sprays etc. MUST be accompanied by a signed medication administration form.**

A physician's signature is required for ALL prescriptions. Specific instructions from your doctor such as the dosage, times and dates are required. The form must be completed in its entirety before CCELT can administer the medication.

Over the counter medications must be new and sealed when dropped off for the first time. **OTC medications must be age appropriate. For example, a 3-year-old cannot be given adult Benadryl.**

Please do not send in any medications that are not approved. For example, Tylenol left in the diaper bag or cough drops kept in a backpack. These things should not be stored in a child's personal belongings.

Effective March 2020, CCELT will not administer any fever reducers or medications to treat cough/cold or flu symptoms. \*Children taking fever reducers or cold/flu medication should remain home until symptoms have cleared 100%.

There is a staff member in each classroom who is trained and certified to administer medications.

## **Emergency and Evacuation Policy**

CCELT will conduct monthly fire and evacuation drills to ensure all staff and students are well prepared in the event of an emergency.

Families will be notified via the Brightwheel app, broadcast message and/or phone call if there is an actual emergency in the building or in the nearby community.

**Plan A:** If there is a need to evacuate the building, the meeting point will be on the open field in the rear of the center.

**Plan B:** Should the local fire department or police deem it unsafe to congregate on the same side of the street as the center, CCELT staff will transport all children to the far end of the parking lot of Ebenezer Church of God at 7550 Buchanan St.

In the event of a widespread communications outage due to loss of power, wi-fi or cell tower outage, we keep hard copies of our evacuation plans and emergency contacts in binders stored in our emergency backpacks. We will work with the local authorities to contact our families. The admin team will stay onsite until all children are reunited with their families.

It is imperative that your contact information is up to date.

## **Drop Off / Pick Up Procedures**

**At drop off:** a CCELT staff member will greet your child at the front door/main lobby. A quick wellness assessment (temperature check and visual inspection) will be conducted. The staff member will then escort the child to the classroom and sign them in.

**At pick up:** we ask that parents send a message via Brightwheel to advise when they have arrived to pick up. The teacher will acknowledge receipt of the message and prepare the child for dismissal. A staff member will message that the child is ready and escort them to the front door. If your child is new to our program, please be prepared to show your photo ID at pick up. You may be carded until all members of our team becomes familiar with the new faces. If someone other than the parents will be picking up, please be sure they are listed as authorized pick-up persons and advise them to bring their photo ID.

We ask that all students 2 years and older arrive by 9:00am for circle time and other morning activities. Arriving by 9am also minimizes class interruptions and allows children a stress-free transition from home to school.

**It is important to keep all emergency contact and alternate pick-up information updated, we will not allow your child to leave with anyone not on that list.**

## Code of Conduct & Discipline Policy

We're proud to be a part of the widely diverse CCELT Community. Our families come from all walks of life and cultures. This is what makes us so special! When it comes to child rearing there is no one RIGHT way. We respect and trust our parents to create the methods that work best for them.



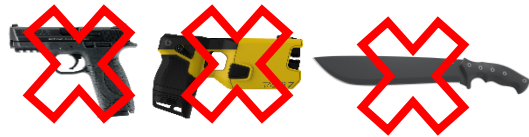
### Follow the Code

**CCELT has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to adults behaving badly!**

We expect our staff to be respectful to our children, their families and each other. We expect our parents to show that same respect for our staff.

Cursing, yelling or any intimidating/aggressive behaviors are unacceptable. If a staff member or parent violates this policy, they will be banned from the center permanently! If an interaction turns physical, the police will be called and charges will be filed.

Weapons and Guns are strictly prohibited!



### Discipline Policy for Children

When your child enters our doors, we expect them to be kind and respectful to their parents, our staff and to each other.

At CCELT we teach and model respect for ourselves and those around us. We practice using good manners, "yes, please & no, thank you". We encourage empathy, kindness and patience. We implement positive strategies such as the *reward system* to encourage positive behaviors and healthy self-esteem.

## Code of Conduct & Discipline Policy - cont'd

*In a perfect world we would all be Happy Little Citizens, all day every day!*

We know this will not always be the case. While everyone is entitled to the occasional *off day*. Our goal is to make sure that those “off days” are not the norm!

We understand that children may act out aggressively when they're struggling with change.

*New baby is taking all the attention. Mom is working later than usual. The family dog ran away.*

If you believe your child might be sad or stressed about something going on in the background, please share that with us. We don't need all the details, just a quick note:

*“Tyson's grandma moved to Florida over the weekend. He's having a hard time with the change.” Or “Lucy is out of her crib and now sleeping in her own room, she may be more emotional than usual” ...*

This tells us that your child may need a little extra attention. A hug, a high five or an extra five minutes driving the Dino Cozy Coupe. We care and want to support your child's emotional well-being.

In trying situations, we teach the frustrated child to *slow down* and to use their words to express themselves. We might have an angry child *take a break* (time out) and use breathing techniques to calm down. We will attempt to redirect a child towards other activities when we see a tense situation brewing. Sometimes allowing an aloof child to lead the class or choose how they want to learn will help get them out of their funk. Most often these tactics work.

## Code of Conduct & Discipline Policy - cont'd

On the days when redirecting and other strategies DO NOT WORK, you may receive a behavior alert in the app or a phone call. Sometimes all it takes is a talk from mom or dad to fix a grumpy mood.

If the behavior is **extreme** and becomes physical, such as hitting classmates, spitting on the teacher, throwing objects or violent tantrums (*we have seen it all*) ... **immediate pick up will be required!**

If our teachers are unable to maintain a safe and productive learning environment, CCELT management will intervene. When appropriate, a parent-teacher conference may be the next step. CCELT and the parents will discuss the behavior concerns and hopefully come up with an action plan to correct those issues.

**If we are unable to curb the extreme negative behaviors, termination of service may be the last resort.**

Please sign and date this page acknowledging that you have read all 3932 words of this 2023 Parent Handbook.

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Thank You.

We look forward to building a strong partnership with your family. And hope to provide your child with the necessary tools to succeed academically *and socially* in Big Kid School and beyond!

~ Dominique Walker

~ Kimberly Walker-Bellamy

Curious Critters Early Learning Tree