



Family Handbook

August 23, 2023 – August 20, 2024

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Welcome to Morningstar Learning Center

We are honored that you have chosen Morningstar Learning Center (MLC) for your child's early learning experience. We expect our families to have questions to get acquainted with our program, and this handbook will help you understand our learning center and operational policies further. We reserve the right to update this handbook at any time, but we will let families know if we do. Please take a few minutes to become familiar with this information as it outlines Morningstar's family expectations, policies, and procedures that you will be asked to acknowledge you read and understand.

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About Us

Our Story

Morningstar Learning Center was founded in September 2006 to find a permanent home for childcare in Big Sky. After opening its doors as Big Sky's only full-time, year-round, state-licensed childcare provider, MLC was fully enrolled in approximately three weeks. With the move to the current facility in 2011 and addition of the Infant Center in 2018, Morningstar is now able to enroll up to 50 students daily when fully staffed.

Since 2021, MLC has been working on a strategic plan to address high-impact areas to improve the quality and reliability of our programming as we strive to best serve our community's children and families. Chief among our priorities is that we recruit and support dedicated, qualified, and professional staff who provide a safe, nurturing, and engaging environment with a focus on the joy of learning. Thank you for being on this journey with us.

Mission, Vision, and Values

MLC's vision is a thriving, healthy community where all families feel a sense of belonging.

MLC's mission is to develop and connect Big Sky's young children and families by providing reliable childcare, quality early education, and supportive resources from planning through parenthood.

MLC strives to foster a love of learning and stewardship for our community in an excellent early education environment.

We do this through our core values of:

Our Village: family, community, kindness

Excellence in Early Learning: safety, belonging, joy

Stewardship: responsibility, friendship, peace

Board of Directors

Since our founding in 2006 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, MLC has been guided by a volunteer Board of Directors, each of whom is appointed by majority vote to serve a three-year term. Board members give their time, talents, and enthusiasm to ensure that Morningstar is fiscally sound and maintains the industry's highest standards.

The board is led by the Board President, who is elected by the Board along with a Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer to serve a one-year term. Multiple consecutive terms are permitted. The board is organized by committees: Executive, Governance, Finance, and External Affairs. Committees meet monthly and/or as needed to support the business of MLC.

Requests to address the board may be submitted to the Executive Director.

Our Staff

The quality of our program is due to the quality of our staff. Our goal is to attract staff who have excellent experience and knowledge in the field of early childhood. We strive to provide a supportive and engaging work environment with opportunities for professional development and growth. We maintain a work environment that encourages a healthy work-life balance, so our staff can be successful contributors to the MLC community.

Each classroom is staffed to Montana state licensing ratio requirements with at least one lead teacher and one assistant teacher per room. From time to time, additional part-time staff or substitutes float between rooms to offer additional support or coverage where needed.

We also have an administrative team to support our teachers and families and conduct the business of running a childcare center and nonprofit organization.

Morningstar requires the following for all teaching staff:

- Registration with the Montana Early Childhood Project
- At least 16 hours of continuing education annually
- Current CPR/First Aid for Infant, Child, and Adult
- Proof of Immunizations: MMR and Tdap within
- Federal background check and fingerprinting
- New Hire Courses: Infant Safety Essentials, Early Childhood Essentials, Together we Grow, and Health and Safety Orientation

Licensing

Our school is state-licensed and regularly inspected to ensure everything meets or exceeds standards, including student-to-teacher ratios and safe facilities. Morningstar is subject to inspection by state and local health, fire, licensing, and building agencies. Regulations and inspections pertain to staff qualifications, the facility and playground, nutrition, health and safety matters, record-keeping, and student-to-teacher ratios. If you have any questions regarding licensing or regulations, please speak with the Center Director.

Enrollment Policies

Non-Discrimination Policy

Morningstar Learning Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, or national/ethnic origin in the admissions or hiring process.

Admissions Process

Children are eligible for admission at the age of 6 months. The admission process begins with a tour of the school and completing the enrollment application process, including paying the application fee. Children are enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis, depending on availability in the most developmentally appropriate class. Children are placed on a waitlist if there is no availability in the most appropriate classroom.

Spaces are filled from the waitlist according to the following priority system:

- Children of staff
- Siblings of currently enrolled children
- Children of locally employed families
- Children of full-time Big Sky residents

Children must be able to benefit from participation in an inclusive group setting. If, after a tour and discussion of the child's needs, it is determined that Morningstar is not a good fit for the child, Morningstar will attempt to give resources and information about other programs that may benefit the child and family.

Enrollment Forms

Once you have completed the admission process and are notified of an open spot, you will begin the enrollment paperwork to finalize enrollment. All enrollment forms must be turned in prior to your child starting at Morningstar. Via brightwheel, we will provide you with the enrollment packet, which includes records of immunization, policy form, medical release, medication form, the emergency contact form, and other forms required by the Center and Montana state licensing.

On the first day a child attends school, the office must have in each child's file:

- A completed Enrollment Application, including Schedule & Tuition Agreement
- A signed Enrollment Agreement
- A completed set of enrollment paperwork
- Medical Authorization forms
- Immunization Paperwork
- Signed health statement from Physician

Upon receipt of the enrollment application and payment of the enrollment fees, the parent receives the welcome packet for their child's classroom outlining staff, schedules, packing lists, and program specifics.

Calendar and Schedule

Morningstar is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 5:30pm with the exception of posted holidays and training days. Our 2023-2024 academic year runs from August 28, 2023- August 20, 2024. While we strive to avoid changes to our operating hours, MLC retains the right to alter our calendar at any point during the year. Updates to our calendar will be communicated to families via brightwheel.

We offer the following enrollment options:

- Full-Time (currently 4 days per week due to staffing)
- Part-Time (3 days per week)
- Regular Day (8:30am – 4pm)
- Extended Day (4pm – 5:30pm)

Any requests to change a schedule after the due date must be submitted to the Office Manager for approval, and a \$50 change fee will be applied.

Tuition and Fees

Morningstar uses Brightwheel for all billing purposes. Families will receive, view, and pay their bill in Brightwheel. In addition, families can view and print their statements in Brightwheel. See our website or [Appendix A](#) of this handbook for this year's tuition rates and applicable fees.

The following billing schedule will be enforced:

- Bills will post 10 days prior to the due date each month for the upcoming month.
- Tuition is due on the 1st of the month.
- A late fee of \$100 will be applied if no payment has been received by the 5th of the month. The fee will increase to \$200 on the 15th of the month.

Morningstar reserves the right to terminate services for families that have not paid tuition by the end of the month. Services may resume once tuition and late fees have been paid in full. Any days missed as a result of this termination will not be discounted.

Late Pick-Up and Early Drop-Off Fee

A child dropped off before 8:30am and/or picked up after their pick-up window (per their individual schedule) will be charged \$1 per minute. Families who enroll their children in a Regular Day schedule may request to add late pick-up (after 4pm) on a drop-in basis, pending availability, for \$25 per day up to two times per month. Requests must be submitted to the Office Manager no later than 4pm the day prior to the day being requested.

Closures Due to Unforeseen Circumstances

In the event of inclement weather forcing Big Sky School District to close, MLC will also be closed. If thermometers in the meadow read -20 degrees F or below at 7am, the Center will delay opening. We will recheck the weather at 9am and send an update after determining whether we will open at 1030am.

There may be other unforeseen circumstances affecting our ability to run our programs, including but not limited to teacher availability and utility issues. In those instances, we may close specific classrooms or the Center. Families will be notified as soon as possible. Refunds will not be given.

Withdrawal Policy

Parents who wish to decrease their student's enrollment midyear (including but not limited to complete withdrawal, full-time to part-time, and removing extended day) must give written notice to the administrative team and will be responsible for the following month's tuition at the original rate, whether or not the child is in attendance. If we can fill the spot, the family will be relieved of the tuition payment.

Attendance

Children get the most benefit from our programs by attending consistently. A consistent routine provides security for children, allowing them to learn more readily and feel safe in their environment. Furthermore, it is disruptive to other children and our teachers when children arrive or are picked up outside of our designated drop off and pick up windows. Please make every attempt to have your child at Morningstar from the start to the end of their scheduled day to ensure the best learning and care environment for all of our children.

Absences, Vacations, and Tardiness

For the children's safety and consistency of our programs, finding a regular schedule and attendance pattern is important. For participants in all of our programs, we must record attendance.

- Please notify your child's teacher ahead of time if you know that your child will be late or absent for any reason. For illnesses and unforeseen tardiness or absences, please notify us as soon as you can. You can send all notifications to your child's teachers via a Brightwheel message.
- Per Montana Child Care Licensing Requirements, we must have a reason for a child's absence before they may return to MLC.
- If MLC does not hear from a family about their child's absence, a teacher or administrator will check in and require a reply before the child can return.

For extended absences, families should contact center administration to notify MLC. If a child is absent for an extended period of time without communication, a member of the MLC team may reach out to the family to confirm that child's continued enrollment at MLC. Failure to respond or notify MLC in these instances may result in losing your child's spot and/or loss of tuition assistance.

If a family requests to change enrollment days instead of being absent, the drop in or schedule change fee will apply.

Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

Morningstar offers a need-based Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to provide financial aid to local families who qualify. A third-party financial aid company, FACTS, reviews and processes financial aid applications. Doing so ensures that families' financial information stays anonymous to school staff. FACTS reviews all applications and supports families with document submission and verification.

Families who apply for tuition assistance receive written notice of their award determination, and the discount is automatically applied to monthly invoices for families who qualify. Decisions may be appealed by written notice to the Executive Director including a letter explaining the financial situation with supporting documentation.

TAP awards are non-binding and subject to the availability of funds. Morningstar holds all information in support of these applications in strict confidence. Awards are confidential agreements between the recipient family and Morningstar. Morningstar does not share families' financial information, and families granted a TAP award are expected to keep all details pertaining to tuition adjustments confidential. We reserve the right to amend any grant in the event of a breach of this confidentiality.

Trial Enrollment

We understand that all new students have a transition period to adjust to their new classroom and environment, and we will do our best to support all students to be successful at Morningstar Learning Center. However, all new students are subject to a two-month trial period during which staff will monitor the integration of the new student to our Center.

As with all students, any challenges relating to the student's enrollment - including but not limited to behavioral disruptions, aggression towards self or others, developmental challenges the Center is not equipped to support, or any issue that jeopardizes MLC's ability to provide a safe, nurturing educational environment for all students and staff – will be discussed with the family with the intention of resolving these issues via an action plan based on best practices that is agreed to by both staff and family. If the issues are unable to be resolved, Morningstar reserves the right to discontinue services for that child.

Dismissal from Morningstar Learning Center

Morningstar Learning Center reserves the right to dismiss a child from our care for non-payment of tuition, inappropriate parent behavior at the Center, parent's unwillingness to cooperate with the teachers when dealing with Child Behavior Problem Solving tactics, non-communication about important changes in the child's life, and other issues that threaten MLC's ability to provide a safe, nurturing, educational/workplace environment for all children and teachers, including violations of the policies and procedures laid out in this handbook. Communication and cooperation are vital to your child's success.

Families will have a meeting with the teachers and Center Administration to ensure all measures have been taken to support them with following our policies and expectations. If we conclude that we cannot resolve the issue and meet the needs of the child and the child is not showing signs of improvement, Morningstar will give at least one week's notice for dismissal from Morningstar. Families who violate our Parent Code of Conduct or present an immediate threat to the safety or wellbeing of Morningstar's children or staff may be dismissed immediately.

Signing In and Signing Out

Parents are expected to sign their child in and out using the Brightwheel App by scanning the QR code located at each classroom entrance. If you are unable or forget to sign your child in or out, please contact a teacher or administration for support.

Approved Pick Up

The safety of our students is our top priority. Please notify your child's teacher if someone other than you will be picking up your child. Morningstar staff will only release your child to the parents, guardians, or other adults you authorized on the student's Enrollment Application or within the Brightwheel App. If you need to authorize a new pickup person, please send the request via Brightwheel Messaging and

ensure you have added them to your approved pick up list in your child's Brightwheel account. For your child's safety, any time a person we do not recognize comes to pick up your child, we will ask for a government-issued photo ID.

Parking and Entrances

To ensure our children's safety, it is of utmost importance that we practice safety and courtesy while in the parking lot. Cars should be turned off any time a parent is exiting the vehicle; we do not allow idling in our parking lot for safety reasons. Please watch out for others, drive slowly, and hold children's hands. Our parking lot is clearly marked as one way in and one way out. Please follow this procedure and signage for everyone's safety.

Each Classroom has its own entrance. Please use your child's classroom entrance to ensure we are not disrupting other classrooms and children.

Program Information

Classroom Placement

The individual developmental needs of each child are considered when placement decisions are made. For a child to develop a positive self-image and appropriate social skills, they need to be grouped with peers whose developmental age is similar to their own. In all groups of children, there will be varying ability levels. We will take all considerations into account and group children together who may best complement one another. Age is not the primary factor in determining a child's readiness to move to the next classroom. We have identified a few developmental milestones to consider when determining a child's placement. Please review your classroom welcome packet for more specific information.

The general age for initial classroom placement is as follows:

Infants: 6 months - 18 months with a 4:1 student to teacher ratio

Transitional Toddlers: 18 months - 2.5 years with a 4:1 student to teacher ratio

Toddlers: 2.5 years - 3.5 years with an 8:1 student to teacher ratio

Preschool: 3 years - 5 years with an 8:1 student to teacher ratio

If a child shows signs of readiness to move to the next classroom, our staff will communicate with the family regarding the move-up process, including shadow days to experience the next classroom. Morningstar is committed to having age-appropriate activities in each classroom as children develop throughout the year, and we are moving towards a model in which children stay in one classroom the entire year. For this year, there may be an opportunity to move up in January and/or April. If you have questions/comments or concerns about your child's placement, please contact your child's Lead Teacher or the Center Director.

Classroom Schedules and Activities

Each classroom follows a slightly different schedule that is customized for their students. The regular school day is from 830am-400pm, with a rest time in the afternoon. While all parts of the school day are important, the morning learning time is a significant part of the day. During this time, we heavily

focus on working in large and small groups, completing centers, circle times, free play, and outside time. It's important to find a consistent routine to be on time and present during their school day.

The extended day program is from 400-530pm. Extended day activities include arts and crafts, group free play, and outside time (weather permitting).

Teachers are sensitive to the attention spans of young children and plan accordingly, making activities extensive enough to be challenging and fun but short enough to avoid overwhelming a child. Each classroom has a schedule posted that lists approximate times of activities.

Each classroom has a welcome information packet that is customized to include their daily routines, schedules, and activities. Please be sure to read through this packet, which is shared in your child's document tab in Brightwheel.

Classroom Management and Guidance

Our teachers, parents, and children all have the same expectations to maintain a safe and fun learning environment. When a child is not able to follow classroom expectations, we use a positive guidance approach to support them in learning by modeling good behavior, praising the behaviors that are expected, and giving calm, direct, and consistent re-direction.

Physical punishment, including spanking or other forms of corporal punishment, is strictly prohibited at Morningstar. Any punishment or discipline which is humiliating, shaming, frightening, or otherwise damaging is strictly prohibited at Morningstar. Morningstar does not use timeouts to discipline children. Parental or guardian permission does not allow for the use of any of the prohibited punishments mentioned above. In addition to the prohibited punishments listed above, all of our teachers have been trained in identifying signs and symptoms of shaken baby syndrome as well as how to prevent it at our center. Please see CDC's website [Shaken Baby Syndrome](#) for more information.

When children are not making the best choices and after 2 reminders, we will ask the child to take a break, usually next to a teacher, and during the break a teacher will follow up with the child and have a conversation to find out what happened, how we can make it right, and what we can do differently next time. If a child is consistently not following these expectations, we will arrange a time to meet with the teachers and parents and make a plan to support the child's development and/or work through challenges.

Celebrations and Birthdays

Celebrations and birthdays are special days for kids, and we want families to share in the fun when possible! Our Toddler and Preschool programs have a special birthday celebration, including bringing a favorite snack (we ask that the cupcakes and treats are saved for another time) and special book to share with the class. The classroom teachers will arrange a time and day for families to participate in these special celebrations if they are able and interested.

Homemade or commercially packaged snacks are welcome; however, please share the ingredients, so we can be sure we're accommodating any allergies or dietary restrictions. Please do not send in any

snacks which may be a choking hazard to our students. Healthy snack options such as whole-grain items, vegetables with dip, fresh fruit, fresh fruit popsicles, or yogurt are always a great choice.

Outdoor Play

We provide opportunities for outdoor play as much as possible throughout the year. We have two play areas designated for age-appropriate exploration. Our outdoor environments encourage movement and provide a large space for children to play, move, and explore. Both of our play areas are completely fenced in for safety and security. Per Montana State Licensing, we follow the National Child Care Weather Watch Chart when determining safe temperatures and conditions. When the weather or air quality does not permit outdoor play, we dedicate a time of day for gross motor activities indoors.

Personal Belongings

To prevent items from becoming misplaced or lost, please label ALL items brought from home with your child's name. Within each classroom, each child has a hook and/or cubby assigned to them. This will provide storage space for your child's personal belongings. Please check your child's cubby daily for items that need to be taken home.

Clothing & Shoes

A full day at our school includes fun activities like singing, painting, playing indoors and out, dancing, and eating, so we recommend easy-fitting, washable clothes. Being comfortable lets kids focus on learning and having fun!

Make sure your child is wearing shoes for easy movement. Flip-flops, clogs, cowboy boots, and slick-bottomed shoes often cause children to fall when running outside and limit their play. Please be sure that your child's shoes are rubber-soled and closed-toed with a closed heel or heel strap. Shoes are required for all students.

- Please provide two complete sets of extra clothes, including socks, for your child. It's always a good idea to keep a sweater or sweatshirt at school.
- Clothing should be labeled with your child's first and last name and checked periodically to make sure it still fits.
- Please provide appropriately layered clothing to keep warm in cold weather, including mittens, hats, socks, and warm waterproof outerwear and footwear.
- Sometimes learning and fun can get messy! MLC isn't responsible for lost, stained, soiled, or torn clothing.

Diapers & Wipes

Parents of children in diapers and/or who are toilet training must provide an ongoing supply of diapers, wipes, and additional necessary clothing. If your child is wearing pull-ups, it is helpful to send in the type with Velcro sides. This allows us to help your child change without having to take off their pants and shoes. Cubbies should be checked daily for items that need to be laundered.

Belongings from Home

Your child will be provided with stimulating, educational toys every day. Special objects such as a blanket and one stuffed animal are okay for rest time in the Toddler through Preschool rooms. Please

leave other toys and belongings at home, as bringing a treasured object to school can create tension between children and stress for children and staff if something is lost or misplaced.

Toy weapons (guns, water pistols, swords, shields, or other items that resemble weapons) are not permitted at Morningstar Learning Center. Use of personal electronics is not permitted in the classroom. We cannot assume responsibility for lost or damaged personal belongings.

Mealtimes

Meals and snacks are an important part of the day at Morningstar. The routines we establish around meals and snacks help ensure the health and safety of children as well as support children in developing healthy relationships with food. Families are expected to pack their child's lunch and snacks daily. Lunch and snacks should be prepared and ready to reheat and/or eat during the children's scheduled mealtimes. Food to be reheated should be in a microwavable container and labeled with the child's name.

Lunch and Snacks must include the following food components:

- fruit, vegetable, or 100% fruit or vegetable alternative
- bread or bread alternative
- milk or dairy, or daily alternative
- protein

Please consider not packing food with a high sugar content, junk food, juice boxes, or candy.

Special Dietary Needs

Although families provide their child's meals, if your child has any special dietary needs or allergies, this must be disclosed in the enrollment paperwork. From time to time, we have special snacks or treats provided by MLC or other families and will need to know all children's food restrictions.

Rest Time

All children will participate in a quiet rest time. Children are not required to sleep; however, we have a very busy and stimulating morning, so most toddlers and preschool-aged children will nap when given a relaxing and quiet space to do so. Families provide one small blanket and stuffed animal that the center will wash weekly. MLC provides, cribs, cots, or nap mats that are sanitized daily.

During rest time, there are always teachers present and observing by sight and sound.

Toilet Training

High collaboration between you, your child, and your child's teachers makes for more successful toilet learning. Children learn toileting skills through consistent, positive encouragement from all the adults who care for them.

When your child shows an interest, you and your child's teachers will discuss how to work together to encourage toilet learning. We're committed to working with your child consistently so that toilet learning can be accomplished in a developmentally appropriate manner with minimum stress for you and your child.

Every child begins toilet learning at a different age and progresses at a different rate. We're always available as a resource to answer any questions about your child's progress. Several complete changes of clothes and two pairs of shoes should be kept at the center during toilet learning.

Transportation and Trips

Morningstar does not provide any child transportation. Our enrollment forms include a permission slip for walks or wagon rides within 1 mile of the center. Any field trips hosted by MLC will be communicated with families ahead of time and will have a separate permission slip specific to that trip.

Formula, Breastmilk, and Bottles

Morningstar does not provide formula or bottles. For Infants who use bottles, families must provide their own formula or breast milk and bottles. Milk and formula must be in their original container with clear label and instructions. Our staff will mix and warm up the milk and formula according to the state guidelines. All storage containers and bottles must be labeled with the child's name. Bottles are sanitized between use and can be kept at MLC.

Medical and Safety Information

At Morningstar the safety of our students always comes first. Our approach to keeping children safe starts with paying attention to all the details. Our staff are well trained in our safety and emergency procedures and are prepared to handle any situation, big or small.

Daily Wellness Checks

Each morning when your child arrives, we will conduct a daily health check. This is a quick physical observation where we check and observe a child's behavior/mood and physical condition, including breathing, skin, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Additionally, we ask that you please alert us of anything out of the ordinary we need to know regarding sleep, appetite, bowel movements and urination, mood, and behavior at home and/or unusual events.

First Aid, CPR, and Emergency Medical Procedures

All of our staff are trained and hold a current first aid and CPR certificate. Our staff know where the first aid kits are located, what's in them, and how to use them. While we do our best to ensure the safety of the children, accidents may happen. In the event of an accident, the child will be assessed, and appropriate supplies and next steps are applied. The child will be comforted as best possible when any injury occurs, and any injury that includes blood, bruises, bumps, or broken skin or requires medical attention will have an incident report recorded in brightwheel. Incident reports include a picture of the injury, description of what happened, and how it was handled. Parents receive a notification that an incident report has been added to their child's profile.

Injuries are broken down into 3 categories as follows.

Minor Injuries

Basic injuries and very common. For minor injuries, a bandage or ice pack will be offered or applied if necessary. The family will be notified verbally at pick up, and an incident report may be recorded if needed.

Larger (Non-Life-Threatening) Injuries

Injuries which include blood, scrapes, bruises, or cuts. For cuts or scrapes that do not appear serious, cleaning of the wound, bandages, or ice packs will be applied if necessary. For injuries which seem serious, the family will be notified immediately to determine next steps, and an incident report will be recorded.

Major Injuries

Injuries that are serious or a child is experiencing a suspected medical emergency. In these instances, MLC staff will immediately call 911 and then contact the parent, guardian, or emergency contacts listed in the child's file.

For injuries that include a fall on the neck, back, or head that result in pain or disorientation, the family will be notified immediately. If we cannot reach a parent, guardian, or emergency contact, we will call 911 to assess that injury.

If a child must be taken by an ambulance, a staff member will take the child's emergency information and accompany them. MLC staff will not leave the child until a parent, guardian, or emergency contact arrives.

If a child is suspected of having ingested any poisonous or toxic substances, we will immediately call the **Poison Control Center at 1(800)222-1222** and then call the parent to communicate next steps. If a parent is not responding an emergency contact will be notified. The child will stay with an appointed teacher or administrator in the office or alternative safe location while waiting to be picked up or assisted further.

An incident report will be completed and signed by the parent as well as reported to our childcare licenser.

General Emergency Plans and Drills

We make every effort to be prepared for potential emergencies. Morningstar has an emergency response plan for fire, shelter in place, or if a lockdown becomes necessary. This plan is updated annually and submitted to our state licenser. These plans are reviewed annually with the staff.

Additional precautions we take in the event of an emergency are:

- Emergency phone numbers are posted by all phones.
- Each classroom has an emergency "To-Go" bag with snacks, water, and emergency contact information for all students and staff.
- We conduct 10 Emergency Drills annually, including 8 fire drills.
- Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each room.
- Annual inspections by the Big Sky Fire Department.
- If an emergency requires evacuation, we'll notify you as soon as the children have been relocated to a safe area.
- The Center has a 72-hour shelter in place kit, which contains food, water, and flashlights for longer emergency situations and is checked annually

Notifiable Conditions and Disease Reporting

If Morningstar is informed about highly contagious conditions, families will be notified as soon as possible with more information regarding classroom exposure and next steps. All communicable diseases will be reported the Gallatin County Health Department.

Illness Policy

To prevent the spread of illness and provide a healthy environment for all, a staff member will assess each child's health upon arrival. Any child showing signs of illness will be excluded from Morningstar based on the state guidelines listed in [Appendix B](#). We realize that it is difficult for working parents to keep their children home, but exclusion from school will help prevent contagion and promote the health and safety of your child. Children should be kept home from school if they are feverish, have diarrhea and/or vomiting, have nasal mucous discharge that isn't clear, or if they show signs of becoming sick (listlessness/drowsiness, productive cough, sore throat, ear pain, eyes that are pink, burning, itching, or producing discharge).

If your child cannot comfortably participate in the day's usual activities or your child needs to stay indoors and/or have additional rest, these signs are generally indicative that the child should not be at school.

If your child becomes ill during the school day, every effort will be made to make them comfortable, away from the other children but with a familiar caregiver. A parent will immediately be called or messaged in Brightwheel to come and pick them up. Morningstar is not able to provide arrangements to care for sick children. Parents are required to respond as soon as possible and to pick the child up within one hour when contacted by Morningstar staff. If we cannot reach the parent within thirty minutes, we will reach out to the family's emergency contacts as stated on enrollment forms. If a parent is unable to pick up their child within one hour, they must arrange for an approved contact to pick up the child. If the illness warrants, the child's pediatrician will be contacted for consultation.

Children may attend with minor illnesses if it is not contagious and if it does not affect the child's ability to participate in the day's routine. Minor illnesses include:

- Mild respiratory infections
- Acute infections subsiding after treatment, such as pink eye, impetigo, ear infections
- Cold symptoms without a fever

With these minor illnesses. **It is always helpful if you can provide Morningstar with a doctor's note to return, when applicable.**

See [Appendix B](#) for Illness Exclusion Criteria.

Immunization Requirements

The Montana Childcare Licensing requires that all children in attendance at Morningstar have completed State Health Department immunization requirements. Morningstar requires proof of immunizations before attendance. Morningstar has the right to refuse or discontinue enrollment of child who is not up to date on the vaccination schedule.

See [Appendix C](#) for the detailed list of required immunizations.

Medication (prescription and non-prescription) and Over-the-Counter Policy

Medication Authorization

Per licensing requirements, the State of Montana Medication form is required to be completed, signed, and approved for staff to be able to administer prescription and non-prescription medications.

Prescription Medications must...

- be handed to a teacher or staff (not left in child's cubby)
- be kept in the original container
- be labeled and provided by a pharmacist
- be labeled with the date and child's first and last name
- contain specific legible instructions for administration and storage

Non-Prescription Medications (including Tylenol, Cough Syrup, Motrin, and Benadryl) must...

- be handed to a teacher or staff (not left in child's cubby)
- be kept in original container

- be provided by the parent
- be labeled with child's name

A Medication Log will be kept in the child's file. The staff person administering the medication will record the date, time, medication, and dosage with their signature. Medications are stored at the recommended temperature, in a safe child-proof location. When the medication expires, the parent will be asked to take home the medication for disposal.

Over-the-Counter Medications (Non-Ingestible)

Parents and guardians may give Morningstar a standing authorization for up to 12 months to apply over-the-counter topical ointments, topical teething ointments, or gels, lotions, creams, and powders, such as sunscreen and diapering creams to their child, when needed.

The Over-the-Counter Form (included in the enrollment packet annually) must be completed before we can administer.

Morningstar provides a basic 30spf sunscreen to all students when seasonally appropriate. Please apply sunscreen to your child before arriving at the center and dress them in hats/visors and tightly woven clothing to help prevent sunburn during outdoor play. Morningstar staff will reapply sunscreen in the afternoon before going outside if we have an up-to-date Sunscreen Permission Form on file. If you prefer your child use a different sunscreen in the afternoon, please complete the over-the-counter topical medications form.

Safe Sleep Policy

Morningstar Learning Center follows the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Consumer Product Safety Commission to provide a safe sleep environment for infants and reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Our protocol addresses infant sleep position, sleep environment, supervision during sleep, and staff training. Please inquire if you wish to read our full infant sleep protocol, which is also posted in the Infant Center.

Children with Special Needs

All families will be treated respectfully, and their individual needs or differences are welcome. Children with special needs will be accepted into our program under the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as long as our staff and facility are able to provide reasonable accommodation. Children with special needs will be given the opportunity to participate in the program to the fullest potential possible. We will ask families to share a detailed plan on how to best support their child with additional needs and may consult other guidance or agencies for additional support as needed.

Mandatory Abuse and Neglect Reporting

It's our mission to ensure all children in our center are safe and well cared for, not only while they are at our center, but at all times. Montana law requires everyone who works directly with children to report suspicions or evidence of child neglect or abuse to local law enforcement. Those who fail to report can be held accountable under the law. The law prohibits interference with an individual's attempt to report child abuse or neglect. Our school will offer full cooperation during the investigation of the reported incident.

- Should a staff member have reason to suspect abuse, they will contact Morningstar administration and follow up with an immediate phone call to Gallatin County Human Services. If an administrative staff member is unavailable, staff members have the authority to make the call and to prepare a written report of the account.
- Morningstar will not hire a person who has been convicted of abuse of any type, and all staff undergoes a fingerprint and criminal background check before employment begins.
- All staff members are responsible for protecting all children from abuse from any child or staff member.
- All staff members are required to report any suspected cases of abuse, whether it is suspected at Morningstar or away from Morningstar.
- All Morningstar staff receive training in recognizing and responding to child maltreatment, including abuse and neglect.
- Morningstar strictly prohibits the mistreatment, neglect, or abuse of any child in the program by any staff member. Any employee found in violation of the abuse and neglect policies shall be immediately terminated. If the charges are not upheld, the Center Director or Executive Director will determine eligibility for reinstatement.

Smoke- and Weapon-Free Environment

Morningstar Learning Center and its entire property are smoke-free and tobacco-free environments. Smoking and the use of any product containing, made, or derived from tobacco, including e-cigarettes, cigars, little cigars, smokeless tobacco, and hookah, shall not be permitted on the premises of the childcare center or during any off-premises activities. Additionally, firearms and ammunition are prohibited in all licensed childcare centers, including Morningstar Learning Center and its property, unless carried by a law enforcement officer.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Cleaning and disinfecting are part of our broad approach to preventing infectious diseases at Morningstar. Toys are regularly washed, sanitized, and air-dried. All surfaces and toys are sanitized daily upon arrival and departure. We use a soap and water solution for cleaning our environments and a bleach and water solution for sanitizing tables, toys, toileting, and diapering areas.

Additional Policies

Babysitting

Morningstar Learning Center is an academic environment, not a babysitting service. Teachers are not permitted to make babysitting arrangements during business hours, as their focus needs to be on the children and their job at hand. MLC does not condone families entering employment arrangements with staff. However, we recognize that our staff members are highly trained, wonderful people and are often the people who know your child best, next to you. Any arrangement between a family and an MLC employee for employment or services outside the program and services of MLC is an individual endeavor and private matter, not connected to or sanctioned by MLC.

Commitment to Diversity

Tolerance and understanding are fostered by positive exposure to various ages, genders, lifestyles, family structures, races, cultures, religions, and physical abilities. Therefore, we emphasize an environment that welcomes diversity and challenges bias and discrimination.

Grievances

Disagreements may occur, even with the best of intentions. Experience has taught us that open communication is the key to maintaining a positive relationship. The adults must demonstrate the cooperative, compassionate communication we want our children to imitate. If you have a concern, please discuss it with your child's teacher or the staff involved. If the concern is not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, a meeting can be arranged between the persons involved and a member of the administration. At that time, a course of action can be determined.

Family Code of Conduct

MLC is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and nurturing environment for all children and adults. Please refer to our Family Code of Conduct in [Appendix D](#).

Appendices

Appendix A: Tuition and Fees for Academic Year 2023-2024

Monthly Tuition Rates			
Item	Infant/Transitional Toddler Classes	Toddler/Preschool Classes	Description
Full-time Regular Day	\$1131/1315*	\$950/\$1105	Enrollment 4/5* days per week, 830am-4pm
Full-time Half Day	\$895/\$1040*	-	Infants only, 4/5* days per week, 830am-1pm
Full-time Extended Day	\$224/\$260*	\$224/\$260*	Enrollment 4/5* days per week, 4-530pm
Part-time Regular Day	\$855	\$725	Enrollment 3 days per week, 830am-4pm
Part-time Half Day	\$695	-	Infants only, 3 days per week, 830am-1pm
Part-time Extended Day	\$170	\$170	Enrollment 3 days per week, 4-530pm
Sibling Discount	10%	10%	Discount applied to younger sibling's tuition if not receiving other financial aid

*Please note we are not currently staffed to open on Fridays. For full-time enrollment, the first price listed is for a 4-day week, and the second price listed is for a 5-day week if staffing allows in the future.

School Fees			
Item	Infant Class	Toddler/Preschool Classes	Description
Late Pick Up	\$1	\$1	Fee per minute for picking up a child after their scheduled time
Drop-In Regular Day	\$90	\$80	Daily rate for part-time families to add days, pending availability, (830am-4pm)
Drop-In Extended Day	\$25	\$25	Daily rate for families to add Extended Day (4-530pm), pending availability
Schedule Change	\$50	\$50	Fee for any change to enrollment. Changes require written notice to the admin team and are based on availability.
Late Payment Fee	\$100/\$200	\$100/\$200	Fee for a late payment after the 5th and 15th of each month
Application Fee	\$75	\$75	Fee to apply for initial enrollment at MLC
Enrollment Deposit	\$250	\$250	Nonrefundable deposit to confirm enrollment; applies to the first month's tuition.
TAP Application Fee	\$40	\$40	Fee charged by FACTS (not MLC) to apply for financial assistance
Withdrawal Policy	-	-	Any family who withdraws from or decreases enrollment during the school year will require written notice to the admin team and be responsible for the next month's tuition

Appendix B: Illness Exclusion Criteria

Disease/ Condition:	If your child has been diagnosed with this disease, our program will:	When to allow your child to return:
Chickenpox (or rash suggestive of chickenpox)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the sick child from childcare • Notify all parents regarding possible exposure and include a warning about aspirin use. • Contact the Child Care Health Consultant if needed to find out other preventative measures to take • Unimmunized children must be excluded until they are permitted to return by their health care provider • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures 	Approximately 5-7 days after the rash begins or when ALL blisters have scabbed over
Bacterial Conjunctivitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the child from childcare • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	24 hours after antibiotics are started when the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the sick child from childcare • Contact the Child Care Health Consultant if needed to find out other preventative measures to take • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures 	Guidance from the state is updated frequently. Please contact the Center for more info.
Diarrheal illness	<p>Diarrhea is defined as an increased number of stools, increased water in the stool and or decreased form to the stool that cannot be contained by clothing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude a child that has had 2 or more diarrhea episodes in one day. • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures 	When the child is diarrhea-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication.
Fifth Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the sick child from childcare • The program will notify all parents • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures 	When the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Fever	<p>Fever of 101.0° will be excluded.</p> <p><u>For low grade fevers under 101.0°</u> Fevers between 100.5° and 100.9 and child is also exhibiting at least two symptoms from the following list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant and colorful nasal discharge • Persistent/uncontrolled coughing • Fatigue • Low-or-no appetite • Unusual irritability 	When the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and appearing well.
Generalized Rashes	<p>Includes rashes or unidentified bumps covering multiple parts of the body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the child • Carefully following handwashing and cleaning procedures • Child must be evaluated by a health care provider 	<p>When the child has been seen and their cause has been determined by a healthcare provider.</p> <p>Child must have a doctor's note stating they can return to the center.</p>
Hand Foot and Mouth Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclude if the child has an open, draining lesion on hand or has lesions in the mouth and is drooling. • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	When lesions heal and/or drooling ceases, and the child can participate in center activities (including meals)

Hepatitis A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the sick child from childcare Contact the Communicable Disease Section of DHHS Contact the Child Care Health Consultant if needed to find out other preventative measures to take Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures 	At least one week after onset of illness or jaundice. Permission to return should be sought from the local health authorities first.
Impetigo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	24 hours after antibiotics are started when the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Influenza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare The program will notify all parents Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	When the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Lice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare 	24 hours after treatment and no signs of nits or lice
Pink Eye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child with yellow eye drainage and itching Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	24 hours after the first dose of medication and symptoms are mild
Pneumonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare if they present with fever or difficulty breathing. Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	When the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Ringworm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child if lesions cannot be covered Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	If unable to cover the lesion(s), after treatment begins and the lesion starts to shrink.
RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare if they present with fever or difficulty breathing. Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	When the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Scabies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child until treatment is complete. Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. The program will notify all parents All clothing and blankets will be sent home to be laundered in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. 	Until treatment is completed.
Skin Infections	Such as draining burns, infected wounds, or hangnails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	24 hours after antibiotics are started when the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.
Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporarily exclude the child from childcare Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	24 hours after antibiotics are started when the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication and has the energy to participate in center activities.

Tuberculosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the child from childcare • Contact local health department and Childcare Health Consultant • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	Exclude until a health care professional provides a written statement that the child is not infectious.
Vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the child from childcare • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	When the child is vomit-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication.
Whooping Cough/ Pertussis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporarily exclude the child from childcare • Contact local health department and Childcare Health Consultant • Unimmunized children must be excluded until they are permitted to return by their health care provider. • Carefully follow handwashing and cleaning procedures. 	Exclude until five days after treatment has started. Exclude untreated cases for 21 days from the date cough began.

* This chart is not an exhaustive list of the communicable diseases and policies for exclusion from childcare. For more information, please contact a member of the Morningstar Administration team.

If a child develops symptoms of illness while at Morningstar after the parent has left, the staff must do the following:

1. Isolate the child from the other children.
2. Contact and inform the parents as soon as possible to request that they pick up the child.
3. Report communicable diseases to the Gallatin County Health Department.

Morningstar may readmit a child excluded for illness whenever, in its discretion:

1. the child either shows no symptoms of illness;
2. the child has been free of fever, vomiting, or diarrhea for 24 hours; or
3. the child has been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours for bacterial infections.

Appendix C: Immunization Schedule Requirements

The Montana State Health Department requires that all children be up to date on required immunizations before enrollment. In accordance with state requirements, before a child may attend Morningstar, we must be provided with the appropriate documentation that the child has been immunized as required for the child's age group against measles, rubella, mumps, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, varicella, hepatitis B, pneumococcal, and Haemophilus influenza type B.

Age at Entry	Number of Doses – Vaccine Type	
By 5 months of age	2 doses of polio vaccine 2 doses of Hib vaccine 2 doses of PCV vaccine	2 doses of DTP vaccine 2 doses of Hep B vaccine
By 7 months of age	2 doses of polio vaccine *2 or 3 doses of Hib vaccine 3 doses of PCV vaccine	3 doses of DTP vaccine 2 doses of Hep B vaccine
By 16 months of age	2 doses of polio vaccine 1 dose of varicella vaccine *3 or 4 doses of Hib vaccine *4 doses of PCV vaccine	3 doses of DTP vaccine 1 dose of MMR vaccine 2 doses of Hep B vaccine
By 19 months of age	1 dose of varicella vaccine 4 doses of DTP vaccine *3 or 4 doses of Hib vaccine *4 doses of PCV vaccine	3 doses of polio vaccine 1 dose of MMR vaccine 3 doses of Hep B vaccine
By 6 years of age	3 doses of polio vaccine, 1 given after the 4 th birthday 4 doses of DTP vaccine, one given after the 4 th birthday 2 doses of varicella vaccine 2 doses of MMR vaccine 3 doses of Hep B vaccine	

*varies depending on vaccine type used or the ACIP catch-up schedule

A child seeking to attend Morningstar is not required to have any immunizations which are medically contraindicated. A written and signed statement from a physician that an immunization is medically contraindicated will exempt a child from the applicable immunization requirements for this rule.

Appendix D: Family Code of Conduct

Morningstar Learning Center is committed to being a welcoming, safe, and happy place to work, learn, and grow! We believe that children at our center are most successful when there is an ongoing positive relationship between families and caregivers. We are dedicated to practicing listening, mutual respect, and open communication to avoid misunderstandings. With our core values at the forefront and to ensure mutual respect and understanding between families, volunteers, and visitors who engage in the Morningstar community is maintained, MLC has adopted these policies and standards of conduct.

MLC requires that parents of enrolled children behave in a manner consistent with decency, courtesy, and respect at all times. It's our goal to provide the most appropriate and secure environment for children that encourages growth, learning, and development. Achieving this ideal environment is not only the responsibility of employees and board members at MLC; it is also the responsibility of each parent or adult who enters the center.

We are a close, family-like community here at MLC, and we are aware that staff and parents may be friends outside of the classroom setting. It is important for any personal conflicts or disagreements to be kept outside of the center. MLC shall be always a calm and positive place for children. Any concerns a parent may have regarding a member of staff will be listened to outside of the classroom and acted upon when needed. However, it is both the parents' and the staff members' responsibility to ensure that personal disagreements and interpersonal issues are kept outside of the classroom setting.

Inappropriate Attire:

Parents and staff members are expected to dress appropriately when present in the classroom. Revealing and inappropriate clothing should be avoided.

Communication:

All communication between teachers and parents during business hours must be through brightwheel.

No parent or adult shall be permitted to curse or use any other inappropriate or disrespectful language at Morningstar Learning Center. Such language will NOT be tolerated in the presence of the children, other families, or staff at the center or while representing MLC.

Threats, aggressive confrontation, and disrespect of any kind toward MLC staff, board members, other families, or children will NOT be tolerated. While it is understood that all parents may not agree with the staff of MLC or the parents of other children, it is expected that all disagreements be handled in a calm and respectful manner. This includes expressing concerns respectfully and directly with Center staff. Confrontational interactions are not an appropriate means by which to communicate a point and are strictly prohibited. The following list includes some examples of inappropriate behavior:

- Disrespectful communication directed towards staff and/or posted in public forums including social media platforms
- Excessive complaining and/or disrespectful communication regarding Morningstar in the community, especially when the concerns have not been brought to MLC staff's attention
- Contacting staff or community members in a manner that undermines MLC policies and protocol
- Shouting, raising of voices, or any unwanted physical contact with a member of staff
- Arriving at MLC under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or prohibited substances

PARENTS MUST BE RESPONSIBLE FOR AND IN CONTROL OF THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AT ALL TIMES.

If it is deemed that a parent is acting in an inappropriate manner with a staff member, child, other families, or community members, the following steps will be taken:

Step 1- A meeting with the parent and the Center Director will be held to find a resolution.

Step 2- A meeting with the Executive Director and parents, along with staff and board members as necessary, will be held to find a resolution.

Step 3- If no resolution has been found, and the parent continues to act in a manner that is inappropriate, the decision may be made to discontinue enrollment for that family.

Depending on the nature and severity of the issue, MLC reserves the right to discontinue a family's enrollment at any of the above stages.

With these policies, we hope to provide your child and family with a comfortable and safe environment as we help set the stage for a life full of learning ahead. We can only truly provide this with the help of each parent and adult who walks into our center. MLC promises to continue working in partnership with families to make learning fun!

Sign below to acknowledge receipt of this handbook and the policies therein.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Child's Name(s): _____

Thank you for committing to uphold all MLC policies and standards for the school year!