

# Childwatch Parent Handbook



## **Welcome**

Welcome to the Foothills Area YMCA. We've developed this Manual to provide you with information on the guidelines and procedures for the Childwatch program. Please read this handbook thoroughly as it contains many important policies that pertain to the care of your child.

## **Y Mission**

The Foothill Area YMCA is a charitable organization dedicated to developing the full potential of every individual through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

## **Y Vision**

Our vision consists of five core mission strategies that create: a healthier and more socially engaged community; children who are successful through purposeful programs; a work environment that is inclusive, fun, and rewarding; and a Y that's financially viable for future generations.

## **Y Core Values**

At the Y, it's deeper here. We challenge our associates, members, participants, and volunteers to accept and demonstrate our four core values:

- Honesty
- Caring
- Respect
- Responsibility

## **What is Childwatch?**

The Childwatch program is a drop-in childcare program serving children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old. It is a benefit to those with a Foothills Area YMCA family membership and can be used for up to 90 minutes at a time. This service adds value to the family membership and provides parents with the peace of mind knowing their child is in a safe, quality environment while they achieve their health and wellness goals - all in one convenient location.

For many of you, this may be your child's first experience with the Y. Our goal is to provide your child with a safe, caring environment designed to stimulate intellectual, emotional, and physical growth.

## **The Childwatch Environment**

Typically the Childwatch program area is designed to separate the youngest participants from the older ones. An infant/toddler area for children ages 6 weeks to 18 months is sectioned off from the remainder of the program area. The remainder of the room is designed for a mixed age group, including children over 18 months, preschool and school-aged children.

Children of all ages love to play and it gives them opportunities to develop physical competence, understand and make sense of their world, interact with others, express and control emotions, develop problem-solving abilities, and practice emerging skills.

Research shows that an effectively designed program space has the potential for positively influencing all areas of children's development: physical, social/emotional, and cognitive. Our Childwatch program areas will:

- Be aesthetically pleasing
- Provide opportunities for both group play and independent play
- Contain a variety of age-appropriate equipment and materials
- Provide meaningful activities
- Have designated centers or play spaces
- Provide a quiet center (area in the room where a child can sit and read)
- Be safe, warm, and inviting
- Provide organization and consistency
- Provide pleasant sounds/music
- Provide opportunities for light, moderate, and vigorous physical activity

### **Planned Activities**

Like most philosophies on childhood development, the Y philosophy stresses the importance of play, hands-on learning, and the development of the whole child - spirit, mind, and body. Our Childwatch environment provides activities that support this philosophy. Childwatch staff will initiate activities to engage children in a variety of experiences, including arts and crafts projects, music and movement activities, and projects focused on building with the use of blocks and manipulatives.

### **Hours of Operation**

Monday–Thursday: 8:00 am-12:00 pm | 4:30 pm-8:00 pm

Friday: 8:00 am-12:00 pm | 4:30 pm-6:30\* pm

Saturday: 8:00 am-12:00 pm

Sunday: Closed

### **Holiday Closures**

The Childwatch program area will be closed on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day - All Day
- Easter Sunday - All Day
- Memorial Day - All Day
- Independence Day - All Day
- Labor Day - All Day
- Thanksgiving Day - All Day
- Christmas Eve - All Day
- Christmas Day - All Day
- New Year's Eve - All Day

### **Please note:**

\*Child Watch will close at 5:30 pm on Fridays when we host our quarterly Parents' Night Out program.

As noted above, Child Watch will be closed on holiday mornings where the facility closes at noon.

Children will not be checked in 15 minutes prior to closing.

## General Policies

### Toys and Other Personal Items

The Y recommends that toys, tablets, and electronic devices are NOT brought from home. However, if these items are brought in, then please abide by the following guidelines:

- The items should be clearly labeled with your child's name
- DO NOT bring in any items that pose a choking hazard to smaller children
- The Y is not responsible for lost, broken, or stolen items

Also, please note that if your child brings in a tablet or electronic device, he/she will not be permitted to watch any videos or log in to any websites that are not appropriate for small children. Our staff will monitor these devices to ensure that children are only watching 'G-rated' movies or child-friendly websites. If our associates discover that your child is logged on to or watching any inappropriate material, then he/she will not be permitted to bring the item back to the Childwatch area.

### Proper Attire

Child's play can be messy work. Your child may be painting and participating in other messy activities. As such, please don't send your child in their Sunday-best outfit. Water-based paint and markers still leave stains. For safety reasons, we recommend sturdy shoes that cover the entire foot. Flip flops and sandals aren't safe for dancing and rigorous physical activity on the playground.

- Shoes **ARE NOT** permitted on the soft play structure. Socks with grippers **ARE** permitted on the soft play structure. Kids with normal socks with no grippers will be asked to take them off as the floor and play structure are slicker with regular socks.

### Behavior Expectations of Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians are asked to remember that this is a child-centered program. Our children are easily influenced by our language and actions. The Y challenges staff and participants to accept and demonstrate our four core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. If a dispute arises, we ask that you move the discussion into a private area. At no time should any disputes be carried out in front of the children or other parents/guardians. We have a zero tolerance policy regarding threats of any type or rude, aggressive behaviors. Inappropriate behavior or failure to follow the expectations in this handbook may result in expulsion from Y programs.

### Behavior Expectations of Children

We encourage children to share our materials and to care for them accordingly. We do expect the children to clean up after themselves, and we ask that you encourage them to do so before they leave the Childwatch area.

We encourage the children to model our Y core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility; and to refrain from fighting, bullying, wrestling, or gunplay.

### Late Pick-up Policy

Members with a family membership can utilize the Childwatch program for up to 90 minutes at a time. If a child is not picked up within that 90 minute period or after childwatch is closed, then the parent is considered late. In the event that your child is picked up late, then you will be reminded of the 90 minute allowance or closing time. 3 warnings will be issued after your first 90 minute or closing time infraction, after your 3 warnings there will be a dollar a minute late fee that will be added to your account and you will not be allowed to utilize child watch until the fees are paid.

### **90 Minute Policy**

The 90 minutes for each child starts when a child is checked into Childwatch. Each child can only participate in Childwatch for 90 minutes per Childwatch shift. This means a child can attend for 90 minutes in the morning and 90 minutes in the afternoon, but no more than 90 minutes per Childwatch shift.

### **Discipline Policy**

For many people, discipline has only negative connotations. Some may regard it as punishment. If we look at the source of the word 'discipline', however, we find it has a very positive meaning. To discipline means "to teach." Through discipline, we teach self-control and responsibility which in turn minimizes disruptive behavior.

If a child is having difficulty following the rules, we will follow the steps below:

1. Redirection: provide other choices for the child that will allow them the opportunity to succeed in another center or activity.
2. If redirection does not work, we will give the child a 'cool down': allowing the child to sit at a table away from the activity for a short time until they regain control. Once the child calms down, we will sit and talk with them about the choice they made and provide examples of how they can make better choices next time.
3. If the child does not de-escalate during the 'cool down', we will offer them a puzzle or play-doh to work with while they are sitting. This may help calm their emotions. Once they are calm, our staff will talk to them about making good choices.
4. If none of the above strategies work, and the negative behavior escalates, the child may need to be removed from the area - in which case, a staff member will get the parent/guardian and document the behavior on a Behavior Report. The behavior will be discussed with the parent/guardian and the parent/guardian will be asked to sign a Behavior Report.
5. If a child's behavior threatens the safety of themselves or others, or is consistently an issue in the Childwatch area, then they may not be permitted to use the Childwatch program.

### **Screen Time Protocols**

Engaging with children is important in their development and in ensuring great service. As such, we will minimize the use of videos in our Childwatch program area, in order to enhance a lesson for educational purposes. We may also promote the occasional use of videos to encourage physical activity with follow along games, dances, and movement activities.

## **Cell Phone and Smoking Policy**

Transitioning into and out of the Childwatch area can be both overwhelming and exciting for your child. As such, we ask that you put your cell phone aside and provide your child with your full attention. The staff may have information to discuss with you and will need to know that you're available to talk without the distraction of a cell phone. Furthermore, for the safety and the privacy of the other children in the program, please refrain from using your cell phone.

Smoking is not permitted on Y property.

## **Safety Procedures**

### **Sign In and Sign Out Process**

#### **Sign-In Process:**

1. When entering Childwatch, please scan your card or give your name and your child's name to the staff to sign your child in
2. Indicate your intended location in the facility and if another parent/guardian will be picking your child up
3. You must remain in the building while your child is in Childwatch

#### **Sign-Out Process:**

1. When picking up your child, please sign your child out with a Childwatch Attendant and indicate your departure time
2. A staff member will validate your identification on our computer system
3. Our associates will only release the child to the same parent that signed them in or a legal adult on the account unless noted otherwise (if another parent/guardian is picking up the child, it must be noted under 'special instructions').

## **Ratios**

Childwatch ratios are set to ensure the utmost safety of our program participants. For the purposes of our programs, infants are defined as those children ages 6 weeks to 18 months. Whenever possible, infants will be separated from mobile toddlers and preschoolers to ensure their safety.

The ratio for infants is 1 staff person to 4 infants. The ratio for preschool children is 1 staff person to 8 children, unless the majority of the children are toddlers and two year olds (in which case the ratio will decrease per the supervisor's discretion). The ratio for school-aged children is 1 staff person to 14 children.

## **Maximum Capacities**

Childwatch areas should be bright, clean, safe, well-equipped and spacious enough for staff to adequately care for the maximum number of children allowed in the room. Maximum occupancies are set based on space and local codes and our staff will ensure that this number is adhered to on a consistent basis to ensure the safety of our participants. Our current maximum capacity is 25 kids.

## **Waitlist Procedures**

When our Childwatch areas meet maximum capacity, our staff will let you know that we can no longer admit any more children at that particular time. However, a wait list should be started. As space becomes available, an associate will locate the next family on the waitlist and let them know that they can drop their child off.

### **Child Abuse Prevention**

In addition to extensive training requirements, our staff are required to take training on the Prevention and Identification of Child Abuse. South Carolina law requires anyone working directly with children to report any suspected cases of abuse and/or neglect to Child Protective Services (CPS).

### **Babysitting/Outside Contact**

Employees are often asked to provide babysitting and other services on their own time to Y members and families. The Foothills Area YMCA does **NOT** permit employees to provide babysitting or other services to families or children they meet in Y programs. In addition, our staff cannot provide transportation in a personal vehicle or be in contact with children outside of Y programs. This includes non-program related emails, texting, phone calls, letters, and contact over the internet. Such policies are designed to protect children and staff from child abuse and/or false allegations. Parents/guardians are asked to report any violation of this policy to Y management at the Foothills Area YMCA.

### **Bathroom Breaks**

Y staff are not permitted to accompany a child one-on-one for a bathroom break. This policy is to protect both children and staff alike from child abuse and/or false allegations.

### **Diaper Changing**

Child Watch associates are **NOT** permitted to change diapers for Childwatch participants. If your child needs a diaper change, a Childwatch staff will locate you and you will need to report to the Childwatch area.

### **Inconsolable Child**

is a guideline designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children who are unable to calm down or regulate their emotions, while also addressing any immediate health concerns. The procedure outlines the following steps:

1. Initial Monitoring: If a child becomes inconsolable, staff will immediately assess the situation, offering comfort and attempting to soothe the child. This may include offering a calm environment, distractions, or other comfort techniques.
2. Time Frame for Intervention: If the child remains inconsolable for more than ten minutes without signs of calming down, the staff will take action to involve the parent or guardian. At this point, a staff member will come find you and ask you to please come to the child watch room

3. Health and Safety Concerns: If, during this process, the child begins to show signs of physical distress such as coughing, gagging, or vomiting, immediate steps will be taken to address the child's health. In these cases, the staff will immediately come and find you and request you come to the child watch room
4. If a staff member is unable to find you based on the location in the facility you told us you would be, we will look you up in our core system and call you and request you come to the childwatch room.

## **Injuries, Illness and Emergency Procedures**

### **Injuries and 'Ouch Reports'**

Unfortunately, even with the best safety guidelines in place, accidents do happen. In the event that your child is injured while in our Childwatch program area, Childwatch staff will notify you at pick up and ask you to sign an 'Ouch Report'. The 'Ouch Report' will provide you with a short description of the incident and details on the time, date, description of the injury, and first aid administered.

In the event of a medical emergency, you will be immediately notified and will be responsible for all medical treatment necessary for the well being of your child.

### **Sick Children**

Our Childwatch program is not equipped to handle sick children. We cannot permit children to remain in our care if they show symptoms of a communicable disease. Children who are ill should be excluded from care until:

1. a physician has certified the symptoms are not associated with an infectious agent (doctor's note may be required)
2. they are no longer a threat to the health of other children
3. symptoms have subsided

Children with a minor illness may attend Childwatch at the provider's discretion. It is important to realize that if a child is unable to participate in their normal routine or needs one on one care, then the child must stay home. Some illnesses/symptoms which would exclude a child from care include, but are not limited to:

- Fever - an axillary (under arm) temperature of 100 degrees or higher
- Respiratory symptoms - difficult or rapid breathing or severe coughing
- Diarrhea (child cannot return to care until he/she is symptom-free for 48 hours)
- Vomiting (child cannot return to care until he/she is symptom-free for 48 hours)
- Eye/nose drainage - thick mucus or pus draining from the eyes or nose
- Sore throat
- Rashes or infected sores (ringworm, chicken pox, etc.)
- Persistent itching or scratching of body or scalp (scabies and lice)
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Impetigo
- Scarlet Fever



- Hepatitis A, B, or C
- Flu
- COVID
- Hand Foot and Mouth
- RSV

If your child shows any signs of illness while in our care, then you will be asked to remove your child from the area immediately. In some cases, if your child needs to be seen by a doctor, then you will be required to submit a signed release from your doctor before your child can return. This is to ensure that a child does not return when he or she may be in danger of exposing others to an illness.

If your child was released from school or did not attend school due to an illness, they should not attend Childwatch that day.

In Childwatch, we serve a wide range of ages including infants. If someone in the household has a communicable disease, please do not send your children to Childwatch as they may be in danger of exposing others to an illness.

### **Hand-washing and Cleaning Procedures**

In order to reduce the spread of illness, we adhere to strict daily guidelines when cleaning the Childwatch program area. In addition, our staff are required to follow stringent hand-washing procedures for themselves and the children in their care.

### **Medications**

Only parents/guardians can administer medication to the children in our care. Childwatch staff can **NOT** administer medications to our participants; and the medications cannot be stored in our Childwatch program space.

### **Emergencies**

In the event of an actual emergency, the Childcare Director will provide Y staff with specific instructions according to our emergency preparedness plans. **DO NOT** enter the Childwatch area to retrieve your child. Instead, meet the staff at the designated evacuation area and sign your child out. Please check with your Childwatch staff for the designated evacuation area.

### **Snacks and Food**

At this time, no snacks or beverages are permitted in the Childwatch program area. Children will be provided water as needed. Please provide your child with a water bottle. Childwatch staff are permitted to bottle feed infants and toddlers if the bottle is prepared by the parent upon arrival.

## **Requirements for Stay & Play Associates**

### **Qualifications and Training Requirements**

To the Foothills Area YMCA, the protection and safety of children is our first concern. Our Y Childwatch staff undergo criminal background checks and reference checks. In addition, all staff must agree to random drug and alcohol testing.

Staff development is a central focus of the Y program enabling staff to provide comprehensive services for children and families. Because we are strongly committed to providing quality programs, the Y offers our staff the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally through ongoing staff development and training. Childwatch staff have the opportunity to participate in ongoing training each year on topics which focus on working with children. In addition, our staff are certified in CPR and First Aid and are required to complete a training on bloodborne pathogens and the prevention of child abuse.