



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT[®]
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



THE MAGIC OF CHILDHOOD YMCA Preschool

HARRIS YMCA

2024-2025

Family Handbook

ymcacharlotte.org

Greetings!

On behalf of the Harris Preschool Academy, we would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to educate your child with our preschool program. Our goal is to offer developmentally appropriate early-learning environments, rich in social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth. You are encouraged to have open communication with us, ask questions and make suggestions. Your child's success depends on close cooperation and understanding between caregivers and staff.

Again, thank you for allowing us to minister to you and your family! We're glad you're joining us for your child's preschool adventure!

Kim Rowe
Early Childhood Development Director

Program Information

The YMCA Mission/Vision

The YMCA Mission: "To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all." The YMCA Vision: "To be a catalyst to transform lives and communities."

Our Philosophy/Goal

At the Y, we believe childhood is a magical time and understand the importance of learning that takes place in these early years. Building on the natural curiosity and energy young children bring each day, our preschool programs focus on developing the whole child – physically, emotionally, socially and academically – through developmentally appropriate experiences and environments. Play-based learning is at the heart of our programs, and our early childhood educators use a theme-based curriculum to teach foundational skills in fun and meaningful ways.

About Our Program

YMCA Preschools provide developmentally appropriate early-learning environments, rich in social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth and learning opportunities. The Harris Preschool Academy offers a variety of activities that include circle time, learning centers, small group lessons, creative play, music and drama, social and emotional learning, physical fitness, prayer, while also incorporating fine and gross motor development. All our classes are planned to develop each child's self esteem and a strong image of self-worth through learning and sharing in a fun, structured environment. Children are encouraged to explore, ask questions and solve problems in a warm setting.

Our program is a combined system of concept explorations, play based learning, and multi-sensory activities. We believe that through play and other process-oriented experiences, children gain confidence in their ability to learn. From circle time to their adventures through the learning centers, from the organized classrooms to the playground, we strive to provide an atmosphere where children can laugh, learn and play; a place where a child can be a child, growing intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually every day.

Classroom Ratios (Teacher: children)

Toddlers- 2:10

Twos- 2:12

Transitional Threes- 2:12

Threes- 2:14

Transitional Fours- 2:14

Fours- 2:16

Transitional Kindergarten- 2:16

Curriculum

The Harris Preschool Academy prides itself on a play-based curriculum. Giving children opportunities and intentional guidance provides them with a variety of valuable learning experiences. Play fosters and develops language, problem solving, and motor skills while allowing kids to dive into academic areas in a fun and meaningful way. We provide many age-appropriate resources to enrich their learning through play and exploration. We believe that children learn best through hands on experiences. All activities are child centered. This program encourages self-expression and exploration. The daily activities will consist of circle time, read aloud stories, free choice centers, art, music and small group work. In addition to spending quality time in the classroom, the students also attend several "special" classes throughout the week. The three-year-old, four-year-old and TK classes will experience dance, gymnastics, Kid Fit, music, Outdoor Experience and yoga with experts from our YMCA community (our two-year-old and Toddler classes experience music, yoga and Kid Fit). These are classes that make the Harris Preschool Academy unique.

A daily class schedule will be given to you at the beginning of the year by your child's teacher. This schedule will include times of activities (story time, lunch, outside, etc.)

Toddler Program

The main focus of our toddler program is helping children adjust to a caregiver other than their primary caregivers. The children are given lots of love and playtime. They will participate in age-appropriate crafts. During nice weather, they spend time on the playground practicing their gross motor skills (i.e., walking, running, climbing). In these classes, too, the children are beginning to learn how to relate to peers and teachers.

Two's Program

Our Two-Year-Old program adapts to the changing skill levels and needs of the class. We provide an inviting atmosphere that encourages fun as well as discovery. Our main goals are social interaction, a positive separation from parents, listening skills and potty training. We will also concentrate on the following:

- Following the daily routine
- Beginning to learn to share
- Participating in "circle" time
- Painting, pasting and coloring
- Beginning to recognize colors and simple shapes
- Following a one-step direction
- Assisting with the mastery of "toilet training"
- Recognizing own name and friends' names.

Transitional Three's (T3) Program

This class will have a combination of the two-year-old and three-year-old curriculum but will be heavier in the threes. T3 is a perfect choice for children who are turning three before December, for those two-year-olds who are ready for a class with more structure, or for caregivers who are planning on giving their child an extra year to mature instead of starting kindergarten when he/she first becomes eligible. We will concentrate on the following:

- Participating in circle time
- Manipulating a paintbrush, cutting with scissors and experimenting with other art mediums
- Beginning to recognize colors and simple shapes
- Following a one-step direction
- Assisting with the mastery of toilet training
- Recognizing own name and friends' names.
- Recognizing their first and last name and names of others in their class
- Beginning to recognize some letters of the alphabet
- Recognizing numbers 1-10
- Being self-reliant with their clothing
- Developing large motor skill through games and activities on the playground

Three's Program

Our main goals in the Three's consist of making an easy transition from home to school, developing good listening skills, learning to follow simple directions and beginning to become more self-reliant. This class utilizes a supplemental Scholastic curriculum (My Big World) and provides a time for your children to practice new-found independence as well as introducing them to limits and schedules. Gross and fine motor skills, communication, listening and self-help are emphasized and encouraged. We will also concentrate on:

- Following simple instructions
- Sharing and playing with others
- Manipulating a paintbrush, cutting with scissors and experimenting with other art mediums
- Recognizing their first and last name and names of others in their class
- Beginning to recognize some letters of the alphabet
- Recognizing numbers 1-10
- Knowing primary colors and basic shapes
- Being self-reliant with their clothing
- Developing large motor skill through games and activities on the playground

Transitional Four's (T4) Program

The T4 class will offer a combination of the three-year-old and four-year-old curriculum but will be heavier in the fours. This class utilizes a supplemental Scholastic curriculum (My Big World) and provides a time for your children to practice new-found independence as well as introducing them to limits and schedules.

The teacher will adjust the lessons to the needs of the students. Some of the goals for T4 class are to:

- Further develop fine motor skills
- Recognize primary and secondary colors
- Recognize letters of the alphabet
- Write first name
- Recognize last name
- Participate in the whole language experience (listening to stories, sharing experiences with class, answering questions about stories)
- Master simple math manipulations
- Follow complex instructions and sit and listen
- Recognizing shapes
- Expand attention span
- Recognize rhyming words
- Develop an awareness of the world around them through science
- Develop good health habits and manners

Four's Program

Our goals in the Four's class are to provide a Kindergarten readiness program while encouraging creative free play. Fours utilize Scholastic curriculum (PreK On My Way) and are exposed to the alphabet as well as early math skills. Teachers will stress cooperative play, listening skills, self reliance and self control. We will provide a loving, caring and stimulating environment which will encourage the development of happy, thoughtful, curious, self-confident children ready to enter grade school. We will also concentrate on the following:

- Further development of fine motor skills
- Knowing primary and secondary colors
- Recognize letters and some letter sounds
- Writing first name and recognizing other high frequency words
- Mastering simple math concepts and manipulations
- Writing numbers 1-10
- Participating in the whole language experience
- Following complex instructions and sitting and listening
- Working on their own for a limited time as preparation for school
- Developing an awareness of the world around through science
- Having good health habits and manners

Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Program

Our TK program is to prepare children for a successful kindergarten experience. TK utilizes a Scholastic curriculum (PreK On My Way) and stresses kindergarten readiness skills in the areas of reading and writing, along with continued practice in important school skills like: listening, following directions, sitting for longer periods of time, etc. We will also concentrate on the following:

- Recognize all letters (capital and lower case) and most letter sounds
- Recognize numbers 1-20
- Write numbers 1-10
- Write first and last name
- Establish Phonemic Awareness, including beginning and ending sounds, counting syllables, letter blends and rhyming
- Recognize and create rhyming words pairs
- Write words using "inventive" spelling
- Know the beginning/middle and end of stories.
- Retell simple stories
- Recognize common sight words
- Complete and create simple patterns
- Sort items by one or more attributes
- Interpret data using graphs
- Count objects using one-to-one correspondence
- Develop a knowledge of the world around them in relation to science

Spanish Immersion

In this program, Preschoolers will be immersed in the Spanish language through games, music, dance, and literacy led by native speakers. This class will allow students to explore through diverse activities in the Spanish language. Instruction will be flexible to include everyone. Students in this program do not need to be fluent in Spanish. This class will concentrate on the same academic and developmental goals of the three- and four-year-old classes. See above.

Evaluations

The teachers are continually assessing your child daily. We can learn so much about a child through daily activities. There is no formal assessment for two-year-olds, but there is a checklist for the Threes, T4, Fours and TK classes. Conferences can be called at any time of the year by teachers or caregivers if needed. All families of students in classes Threes and up will have conferences by the end of March to go over your child's progress. At this time, the teacher will be able to make recommendations for the next school year. There will not be school on the day of your conference. We believe that since we are a small and close-knit preschool, that continuous daily communication is essential. Our teachers are dedicated to sharing with you both joys and concerns; if you have any questions or would like advice on how to academically prepare your child more at home, please let your child's teachers know.

Should you have any specific questions about your child's participation or behavior, you may schedule a conference outside of class time. This will ensure that classroom instruction will remain uninterrupted, and your concerns will be thoroughly addressed in a one-on-one setting. You can also leave a message for our teachers at: (704) 716-6851 or kim.rowe@ymcacharlotte.org at any time.

We always appreciate your comments, input and ideas on how to make our preschool program better! Should you have any questions throughout the school year and wish to leave a comment you may contact Kim Rowe at: (704) 716-6851 or kim.rowe@ymcacharlotte.org at any time.

Administrative Topics

Up-to-Date Information

Please make sure you update your family's records through your online YMCA account prior to the start of the program. **Information that needs to be reviewed and updated includes contact information, emergency contacts, and authorized pick ups. You will also need to update medical information for your child, including allergies and medications.** Please notify your child's teacher and the director IMMEDIATELY about any change in the family's address, e-mail or phone number(s).

Operating Procedures

School Hours:

School hours are 9:15 AM and 1:00 PM. Children may be dropped off between 9:15 AM and 9:30 AM. Children will not be allowed into the classrooms prior to 9:15 AM. The teachers use this time before school starts to prepare for their day.

Preschool pickup is between 12:45 PM and 1:00 PM. ALL children must be picked up by 1:00 PM. **The caregivers of children picked up after 1:00 PM will be charged a late fee.** Picking up your child **ON TIME** is very important. Your child will worry if they are left waiting for a caregiver. Late pickup also affects the preschool staff. Our staff members have responsibilities outside of the Y which they must attend to after 1:00 PM. Please make EVERY effort to pick up your child on time. If you think being late will be an issue, please find a "pick up" buddy from your class. This would be a caregiver who is willing to pick up your child and wait for you until you arrive. Make sure your "pick up buddy" is on your approved list.

Carpool Procedures

Carpool runs from 9:15 - 9:30 AM and 12:45 -1:00 PM. Caregivers are not permitted to enter the building to walk their child to class. We have teachers stationed in all areas for children to safely walk in the building to their classroom.

For Threes and older only: In the mornings, you are welcome to do carpool or walk your child up to the entrance of the Airnasium. All check-ins will be done in the classrooms. In the afternoons, you can walk up to the outside entrance of the Airnasium, but you must wait for the staff member to see you, so we can call your child's name on the microphone to have your child be brought to you by his/her teacher.

- **Arrival (9:15-9:30 AM): Our carpool begins at 9:15am.** A staff member will greet your car and help your child out of the car. Please do not let your child out of the car until a staff member opens the door. The staff member will direct your child to his/her classroom. We ask that **CAREGIVERS PLEASE STAY IN THE CAR.** We need to keep the carpool line moving.
- **Dismissal (12:45-1:00 PM):** You will receive a sign with your child's name to display in your car window during pickup. As you near the Preschool entrance, show your sign and we will bring your child to you. Please **stay in your car.** A staff member will put your child in the car. For liability reasons, staff members CANNOT strap your child in the car seat. **PLEASE PULL FORWARD TO A PARKING SPACE OR FIRE LANE TO BUCKLE YOUR CHILD.** This allows our carpool line run smoother and faster. North Carolina law requires a child safety seat or booster seat for children under 8 years old. Staff will not dismiss a child into a car if a proper car seat is not evident.
- **Please refrain from using your cell phone during carpool times.** We have many students and staff members moving around the parking lot and safety is a top priority!

Late Arrival and Pickup

- If you are late to school (after 9:30 AM), you will need to park and walk your child to the office. You may not enter the classrooms from the outside classroom doors. Please bring your child into the main entrance and check your child in with the coordinator or director.
- Preschool pickup is between 12:45 and 1:00. Please make every effort to be on time. **You will be charged a fee if picking up late. If a child is not picked up after 10 minutes, we will call someone on your emergency list.** Should you have any questions, please contact the director.

Early Sign Out/Late Drop Off

If you wish to pick up or drop off your child prior to regular time (i.e. a doctor's appointment), please inform your child's teacher in advance. You will have to come to the main office of the Cato Education Center to pick up.

Authorized Pick Up

For the safety of your child, participants will only be released to the legal guardian, or a person listed on the **approved pick-up** form. Every adult MUST present a photo ID at carpool pick up. If a child will be picked up by someone NOT on the approved list, a caregiver must send a note including the person's name picking up (as seen on the photo ID). To help speed up our carpool process, please have your ID ready as you arrive in the carpool line.

If there is any change in who may pick-up your child, especially if someone who has been regularly signing your child out is no longer allowed custody, please update your online account and contact the Preschool Academy Director at (704) 716-6851.

Daily Apparel

Clothing for your preschooler should be simple, comfortable, washable and easy for your child to manage. **Rubber soled shoes are a must (no sandals, flip flops, or slick bottom shoes please)**, especially for **daily** outdoor activities. Please send appropriate outerwear for the morning's weather conditions. Make sure your child's name is on sweaters, coats, hats, mittens, etc.

Please be mindful that while at school we play and discover many new things and although our staff takes great care in preventing paint spills, messes, etc., we ask that you **not** dress your child in their best clothes for school. If an accident occurs, your child will be dressed in the extra set of clothes you send to school at the beginning of the year (the soiled clothing will be returned home to you on that very day.)

Please don't forget to send an extra set of clothing back if this happens!

Things to Bring to School Each Day

- **A backpack** to carry a lunch box, water bottle, extra clothes/diapers/wipes and communication folder.

- **A lunch box labeled with your child's name.** Please send a nutritious lunch that is easy for your child to manage. We strive to teach healthy eating habits and appreciate your help from home. We ask that your child's lunch contains the four basic food groups. Teachers will sit with the children during lunch time in order to provide them a positive role model. You are welcome to join your child during lunch. Please notify your child's teacher of any lunch date. Here are some other lunch reminders:
 - Do not send candy! Chewy and hard candy are choking hazards.
 - Please do not send soda.
 - Please do not send any nut products in your child's lunch or snack.
 - Students are asked to finish all healthy food before eating any treats.
 - If your child is in the Toddler, Twos or T3 program, please cut grapes, carrots or any food that is a potential choking hazard.
 - Please label all reusable food containers and ice packs, so they do not get put in the wrong lunch box.

- **Labeled water bottle.**

Since toys from home can be lost or cause friction among children, please do not let your child bring them to school. There may be a day set aside for Show and Tell. This is a perfect time for your child to share a special toy. We also ask that children do not wear distracting jewelry.

Meal Times

- Teachers do not have access to a microwave. Please do not send any food that needs to be heated. If your child enjoys a hot lunch, there are several styles of insulated containers that will keep food warm.
- Another highly suggested item for lunch is reusable lunch containers. By using these, your child can independently open his/her own lunch and does not rely on the teacher to open several bags, containers etc.
- Please pack a healthy snack for your child. Please place the snack in a bag separate from his/her lunchbox. This way the teachers can access the snacks in an easier fashion.
- **Lunch** – Please send lunch daily. The Harris YMCA Preschool does not provide lunch. We ask preschoolers to eat their "growing food" before sweets.

Screen Time

We believe that screen time should not be a part of the preschool day. Occasionally, our teachers will use technology (iPads or laptops) to show a quick video about a subject being studied. We provide

opportunities for light, moderate and vigorous activities throughout the day. We do not allow any technology (iPads, phones, DS devices, etc.) from home to be brought to school.

Labeling

We can not emphasize enough the importance of labeling **all** your child's personal belongings. Very often if an item is not labeled, teachers are unable to determine its owner. Therefore, if your child brings it to school, make sure that their name is clearly written on it. Again, please remember to label EVERYTHING!

Here's a list of items to label: shoes, clothes, coats/jackets, hats, gloves, umbrellas, lunch boxes, drink cups, food containers, ice packs, etc.

Potty Training

It is recommended that three-year-olds be potty trained by the first day of school. Our Threes classrooms are not equipped with changing tables to change diapers. We know that accidents can occur occasionally. The teachers will assist your child in changing into clean clothes if there is an accident. Please be sure to send a change of clothes, in case this happens. If a three-year-old continues to have accidents, we will work with you to remedy the accidents.

It is recommended that children in the Transitional Threes class be potty trained by January 1.

The two-year old teachers will work with the caregivers when potty training. If you are potty training your two-year-old, please make your child's teachers aware. Be sure to let them know what techniques you are using at home, so that the teachers can reinforce them at school. Potty Training is a HUGE developmental milestone. We want to help make it as smooth of a process as possible.

Volunteer Opportunities

Caregivers are always welcome at the Harris Preschool Academy. To volunteer for the Harris YMCA Preschool, you will need a Volunteer Matters profile. The process to register and set up your profile should take less than 5 minutes. We encourage you to help or visit your child's classroom at any time. We do have an open-door policy: however please make sure that your child's teacher is aware of your intention to help or to visit to maximize your involvement with the class. Caregivers are strongly encouraged to sign up with their child's teacher so that they can participate in regularly scheduled volunteer opportunities ("Mystery Reader," crafts, cooking etc). If you would like to become an on-going volunteer, please contact your child's teacher or the coordinator.

Newsletters and Messages from School

Your child's backpack will be used to transport papers, newsletters, messages, crafts, lunch boxes and clothes. Please check your child's backpack after school **each day** to ensure that you don't miss any important news. If you need to communicate with your child's teacher or the director, please put any notes in your child's backpack OR you can email us at kim.rowe@ymcacharlotte.org.

A newsletter will be emailed each week from the preschool director. This will include information about exciting upcoming events and fun happenings at the preschool. This newsletter will keep caregivers abreast of all the wonderful happenings at our preschool. All teachers will also send home a weekly newsletter with class information and a monthly calendar with scheduled activities and themes for each week of that month.

Wellness Guidelines

For the safety and well-being of all children and staff, the following health and wellness guidelines will be strictly enforced in all youth programs. Please be considerate and do not send your child to programs when they are sick. If a child develops symptoms of illness while in our care, the family will be notified and the child will need to be picked up immediately.

Children who have the following symptoms should remain at home until they are symptom free for a full 24 hours without the use of medication or unless a written note from the child's physician is provided, stating that the symptoms are not contagious and the child can attend programming:

- Fever (temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
- Vomiting

- Diarrhea
- Sore throat
- Undiagnosed rash, sore, or other skin condition
- Head lice
- Continuous and/or colored drainage from nose or eyes
- Persistent cough
- Any other contagious disease or symptoms

Staff will notify the family or guardian to pick up children when any of the following conditions exist:

1. The child displays any of the symptoms above.
2. The illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in program activities.
3. The illness results in a greater need than the YMCA staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children in the program.

Absences

Should your child be out sick, due to illness, vacation or emergency, your child's teacher would like to know in advance. While this of course is not required, our teachers do get concerned when a child is out, especially for an extended amount of time. You can reach them at the office: (704) 716-6851 or kim.rowe@ymcacharlotte.org.

Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather or other event that requires closing or delaying preschool, we will notify caregivers as quickly as possible.

Behavior Guidelines

Philosophy

The YMCA believes the foundation of our work in youth development is safety and character development. We respect each child's unique needs and recognize that behavior is a form of communication. Our team understands that not all children will come in with the same social-emotional skills, which is why our approach is geared toward individual development. We aim to create a positive, nurturing, and supportive environment where each child can thrive.

Behavior Expectations

Our staff work with youth to help them learn and meet the following expectations in alignment with our core values:

1. Caring- Show a sincere concern for others.
2. Respect- Treat others how they would like to be treated.
3. Responsibility- Be accountable for your promises and actions.
4. Honesty- Be truthful in what you say and do.
5. Faith- Center yourself around your own spiritual well-being.

How We Support Youth

There are several steps we take to help youth be successful and make positive behavior choices:

- We build intentional relationships with youth.
- We create consistent schedules and routines to provide a sense of security and predictability.
- We encourage children to recognize and express their emotions in a healthy manner.
- We use encouragement, praise, and rewards for positive behavior.
- We set age-appropriate expectations but also adjust expectations for individual children based on maturity, ability, culture, language, and learning styles.
- We work with families to align how we can help youth experience success in our programs.
- We remain calm while engaging with children in heightened situations.

The following behaviors jeopardize safety and/or quality of our program experience and will result in a consequence:

- Behaviors that physically harm themselves, other youth in the program, or staff
- Behaviors that threaten the emotional safety of youth or staff

- Behaviors that damage property
- Behaviors that prevent participants from learning and/or experiencing program activities
- Behaviors that violate personal boundaries or are of a sexual nature

When youth demonstrate unsafe or inappropriate behavior, we have an opportunity to teach and help youth learn from their mistakes. Our staff may use the following approaches to guide the youth unless the nature of the behavior warrants dismissal from the program:

- Staff may redirect youth to an alternate choice or activity.
- Staff may review expectations with the youth to ensure they understand what is expected of them.
- Staff may provide a verbal warning and explain that continuing the behavior will result in a consequence.
- Staff may give a logical consequence for the behavior such as being moved to a different seat or not being able to play with a certain toy.
- Rather than putting youth in "time-out," we provide "time-in" (co-regulation) with a staff member. We sit with a youth to talk about what happened, why it happened, and how they can respond in a healthy way the next time.
- Staff may contact the parent or guardian.
- Staff may work with the parent or guardian to create an individual behavior plan.

Special Class Programs

Based on your child's age, they will periodically participate in an activity outside the regular preschool curriculum. Dates and details will be shared in advance through preschool/class newsletters.

Birthday Celebrations

You may celebrate your child's birthday in class by making **advance** arrangements with your child's teachers. We believe that children deserve to celebrate their birthdays. Teachers will provide options to celebrate your child's special day at school. If you choose to bring a treat, please keep in mind our commitment to healthy habits and children with dietary restrictions or limitations. Store bought mini cupcakes, or 2 bite brownies are great options. Other great **healthy** birthday treats are fruit kabobs, banana muffins, fruit salad, yogurt cups/tubes and fruit juice popsicles.

Class Parties

The classes will celebrate various holidays and special events throughout the year. The classroom volunteer will contact caregivers when food or supplies are necessary. When purchasing or making party treats, please remember that we are teaching healthy eating habits at preschool.

Room Volunteers

Room volunteers are invaluable part of the class and preschool. Room volunteers are responsible for building a strong relationship with the classroom teachers and other families in the class. Duties include coordinating class parties in conjunction with the teacher, assisting in planning preschool-wide events, soliciting supplies and volunteers for events, and coordinating celebrations for teacher birthdays, holidays and teacher appreciation events.

Contacts Directory

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the Academy or other YMCA programs, you can reach the following staff/departments:

- Teachers (Absences, Policies, Student/Parent Needs, etc): 704 716 6851
- Academy Enrollment, Comments, Questions: Kim Rowe, Director of Early Childhood Development: 704 716 6851
- Preschool e-mail: kim.rowe@ymcacharlotte.org
- Monthly Payments/Tax Information: Emily Keziah: 704 716 6813 emily.keziah@ymcacharlotte.org
- Harris YMCA Front Desk: 704 716 6800
- Harris YMCA Fax: 704 716 6801
- Mailing Address: Harris YMCA, 5900 Quail Hollow Road, Charlotte, NC 28210

- Website: www.ymcacharlotte.org/harris
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/harrismca>