



**American  
Village Academy**

**Parent**

**Handbook**

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# Dear Parent

Welcome to AVA

We're delighted you have taken time to find out more about American Village Academy and what it can offer you and your family. We are committed to making sure that AVA is the right place for your child - and for you. We recognize the great trust you place in us when you leave your child at AVA and we work hard to ensure that we live up to that responsibility.

This handbook contains important information about our policies and our day-to-day approach in providing quality care and education. It has been designed to answer many of the questions we are often asked and to put to rest any concerns that may be lingering in the back of your mind. However, if you have any additional queries, please do not hesitate to contact one of our management team who will be pleased to answer any further questions you may have.

We believe that open, ongoing communication with parents is vitally important to enable us to give your child the best individual care, education and attention possible, things which every child needs and is entitled to.

At AVA we work hard everyday to create the warm and nurturing environment that is necessary for learning, growth and development. We want every aspect of our service to not only meet, but to exceed your needs and those of your child.

We look forward to meeting you in the very near future and hope you find this handbook informative and reassuring.

Jo & Dave Mickelsen

IPK Inc, DBA, American Village Academy

# Welcome to AVA where every day is filled with laughter and learning

## Our Approach

Parents can take comfort in the knowledge that every child is cared for by experienced, highly qualified professionals who are committed to providing the highest quality childcare and education for children aged from birth to 5 years. We are a family owned, international childcare provider with a similar facility in Ipswich, England, (see [www.ipk901.co.uk](http://www.ipk901.co.uk)). AVA is licensed for 157 children at any one time on a full or part time basis, 51 weeks per year. We are open from 7am to 6.30pm Monday through Friday and are closed for one week at Christmas and on acknowledged Public Holidays.

We begin by respecting the needs and requirements of every child as an individual and as part of a family and we work closely with parents to ensure that every child's individual needs are met. We are dedicated to working in partnership with you and your child in an open, nurturing, learning-based environment. We believe the best way to meet your needs is by working closely with you to provide a warm, secure atmosphere and caring professional services for your child.

Children are grouped according to age and ability and we have many spacious classrooms fully equipped with age appropriate toys and resources. We come under the new state regulations of 35 sq. ft. per child, so your child will have spacious classrooms and amenities in which to play and learn. We also boast superb, over-sized outside play areas and gardens that include climbing apparatus, swings, see-saw, mini basketball practice court, large sand-box and water play facilities.

## Staff

We recognize it is of great importance that we should employ well qualified, experienced staff in order to maintain a high standard of care and education and we always have more staff than the minimum requirements as set by the State. This enables the staff to spend more time with children individually. We also have extra staff attending at lunch times to help with the feeding of our younger children.

All our staff have been checked both by FDLE and by Department of Children and Families and references are thoroughly investigated to ensure that each member of staff is the right person for the job.

Our qualified, dedicated staff are strongly committed to your child's development and education. To maintain our high standards, every member of staff is encouraged to take on further training in specialized subjects thus improving their knowledge in how to care for every child in every situation. Many of our staff are CPR & first aid trained, and the owner of AVA is a qualified nurse, so you can be sure your child is in safe hands should there ever be an emergency situation. During your child's stay in each classroom at AVA he or she will be allocated a teacher. Each member of staff is responsible for a group of children to whom he or she will be their principal carer. This ensures that each child is treated as an individual and the consistency of staff gives your child a sense of security throughout the day. Your child's teacher is also your first point of contact should you wish to discuss any aspect of their care, progress or development.

## Your child's day

### Security

A secure, safe environment is vitally important when caring for children and this is exactly what we offer.

To protect your child we have keypads on each entrance ensuring that only authorized persons are permitted entry into the facility. We also have CCTV throughout the preschool inside the classrooms and outside in the playgrounds that is recorded 24/7 for added security. An attendance register is placed in the foyer at the beginning of every day that must be signed by the parent when the child enters and leaves the building. There are also individual class registers placed in each classroom for teachers to sign. This is not only required as part of our licensing but also gives the staff up-to-the-minute attendance lists.

If anyone other than the usual person is collecting your child, the appropriate form must be completed beforehand and identification (such as a driving license) and a password will be requested from the person collecting. If we are in **any** doubt we will not permit your child to leave until we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

It is AVA policy that no one under sixteen years of age (unless they are the child's parent), is permitted to collect a child.

If a fire or other such emergency occurs it is crucial that children react in a safe and orderly way, therefore children participate in monthly fire/severe weather drills and practices so that they will know what to do in the case of an actual emergency. Emergency procedures are posted in every classroom and corridor.

### Education and curriculum

An extensive range of toys, equipment and resources is available for every child at AVA enabling them to develop at their own pace and encouraging them to work towards our early learning goals. Comprehensive assessments are carried out on every child at regular intervals and the results of these assessments allow us to plan appropriate activities for the individual to ensure that they receive tailor-made care.

The development of knowledge includes looking at the environment, studying through themes and interest tables as well as exchanging news during daily circle times. We actively encourage children and parents to participate by bringing in articles for discussion as well as providing any topics of interest. This exchange of ideas develops active minds. We proudly teach the children basic sign language and a number of our teachers are bi-lingual therefore giving the children the opportunity to learn basic Spanish and German.

Our children work to monthly topics that are planned to cover all aspects of development and involve a wide range of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. We follow the outstanding curriculum of Beyond Cribs and Rattles for infants and toddlers and Beyond Centers and Circle Time for Preschoolers. This proves to be helpful in the smooth transition from Pre-Kindergarten to full time school and ensures continuity and progression.

In general, we aim to ensure that all our children are prepared to start school with confidence, an eagerness to learn and age appropriate social skills.

Naturally, we cater for children with a wide range of specific educational needs and we are well equipped and trained to work alongside the many specialists that are involved when a child has such specific needs. We have experienced staff on site who will work in partnership with the child's

parents and any involved agencies to develop an individual action plan that will aid in the development and progression of the child.

### Health

Parents will naturally have an interest in an infection-free environment for their children, we therefore ask for co-operation in achieving this. While we are able to accept children with minor ailments such as coughs and colds, we cannot accept children who show signs of more serious illnesses like tummy upsets and childhood diseases such as mumps, measles, chickenpox, etc. It is important that the Pre-school Director/Manager is told of any communicable illness so that other parents can be alerted of possible problems. The ill child should be kept away from Pre-school during the infectious period in accordance with our guidelines and should not return until he or she is obviously well enough to do so or until a physician has declared the child fit to do so.

If a child becomes ill while attending AVA we shall certainly look after the child in a quiet area but we would contact the parent or emergency carer so that arrangements can be made to collect the child immediately.

If your child requires medication while attending AVA we will be happy to carry out your written instructions. Written authorization must be given by completing the appropriate form that can be found in the entrance hall.

If you need to send medication to AVA, we require that prescription medicine be in the original, pharmacy-labelled container with the child's name, type of medication, date, frequency and dosage to be taken. For the safety of other children at AVA, medication must be handed directly to the child's teacher and must not be left in bags or pockets.

If your child has any allergy issues please ensure that his or her teacher is aware so that the correct precautions can be taken to prevent allergic reactions.

### Injuries and accidents

We take every precaution to prevent childhood accidents. However, accidents are a normal part of growth and development as children begin testing their movements and discovering their limitations. In the event your child suffers an injury, other than minor bumps and scrapes, we will contact you immediately. For this reason it is essential that we have up-to-date telephone numbers. All accidents are logged on our accident sheets, which you will be asked to sign in the event of any mishap.

In the event of an accident that requires hospital treatment, while every attempt will be made to contact you and the emergency carer, if we are unsuccessful we require your consent to take appropriate action. In the event of such an occurrence, while taking appropriate action, we will continue to make every attempt to contact you until we are successful. If this is unacceptable to you please ensure a manager is fully aware before registering your child at AVA.

### Nutrition

We have a qualified chef who prepares a wide variety of interesting and healthy meals and snacks. We believe that good eating habits are more easily established when a child is young so we have seasonal, rotating menus that incorporate a wide range of tastes and textures. Fruit & vegetables are used daily and special diets can be catered for on request.

A copy of the menu can be found posted in the main foyer on the Parent notice board.

We provide a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack with juice, and milk is served at lunchtimes.

### Fees and correspondence

For a full price list please see the enclosed sheet.

Like every other home and business AVA operates on a budget. We rely on receiving payments on time so that we can make purchases and pay salaries that ensure our Pre-school runs smoothly and meets you and your child's expectations. For that reason we have an established policy concerning payment of fees.

Invoices are created during the last day of each week to cover the following week's fees. Unless requested we will not automatically print an invoice for every child as each weeks/months fees are the same. However, if you request an invoice it is then your responsibility to collect it from the Parent Mailbox in the entrance hall of the Pre-school. Invoices and correspondence are placed by the child's last name i.e. a letter for John Smith will be placed in the 'S' slot etc.

Please check your Mailbox regularly. Payments and correspondence for the office should be placed in the black safe box situated in the main entrance hall. You will also find a variety of forms that you may require during your child's stay with us, i.e. holiday notification forms, change of details forms etc.

Fees are payable by 10 am on the first day of each week. Fees may be paid by cash, check or Visa/Debit. If you choose to pay your fees monthly, on or before the first day of the month, you will receive a 2.5% discount. Please ask at the office for details.

AVA reserves the right to charge a penalty for late payments, details of which can be found in our payment policy.

If you have a problem with payment please talk to a manager.

In the event of a returned check we will charge a fee to cover bank charges and administration. If there are repeated instances of returned checks you may be required to pay by cash, money order or by visa/debit on an ongoing basis to prevent further problems.

### Late Pick-ups

Children become upset when parents are late collecting them, additionally when you are late AVA faces staffing problems and insurance issues. As a result we charge a late fee that is specified in our policies.

Licensing allows AVA to operate within certain hours. If you are more than one hour late and AVA has been unable to contact anyone listed on your child's registration form we will automatically contact the appropriate agency who will collect your child for safekeeping.

Depending on the number of children at AVA, we may be able to offer additional care at the end of a morning session. This will be subject to a small charge and must be arranged in advance in order for us to comply with regulations as set down by the State.

## Communication

### It's important to stay in touch

Open communication is essential when the care of a child is shared which is why we use various methods of communicating with parents. Daily contact with your child's teacher ensures that verbal exchanges can take place, concerns can be raised and dealt with and progress can be discussed. All of our children take home written, daily reports, which allow you to see at a glance any important information that you need to know such as food and milk intake, diaper changes, activities and the kind of day the child had. Progress reports covering development and progress are sent home periodically which are based on the results of our comprehensive assessments that are regularly carried out by the teacher.

Knowing what your child is doing during the day helps you reinforce and encourage the same topics and activities at home. This kind of consistency helps your child be an active, enthusiastic learner. If you would like to speak privately with either your child's teacher or a member of the management team please contact the office to arrange a time to meet. Although we love to talk about your child anytime we must ensure that adequate staff are available for remaining children during discussions so please let us know in advance so that we can give you our undivided attention. If you just need a quick update on your child's progress or a chat with the teacher please allow yourself and us enough time before the end of the day.

We have an open door policy for all parents of children that attend AVA and we enjoy having parents stop by to play and spend time in their child's classroom. Your child will appreciate the attention and you'll enjoy seeing what goes on during our busy days. Visiting the classroom helps parents get to know the staff and lets you keep in touch with your child's expanding world.

Volunteering is encouraged at American Village Academy. If parents' are interested in volunteering at the school, we do require a full background screening to take place. A member of management can help in helping you get the information about background screening. Volunteering can be as simple as reading a book to the children.

## What Next?

If you like what you have read so far and would like to see us in action why not come and give us a look. You are welcome to visit us and have a guided tour to see us in action, or why not book in for a free trial session and bring little-one along to play for an hour or so? Get a feel for the place, meet the staff who would be caring for your child and experience some of the many activities that are on offer every day.

If you decide to join us after your visit or trial session, please do not hesitate to request a registration form and simply complete and return it with the registration fee and deposit stating when you would like your child to start. This registration form is vitally important as it gives us the comprehensive information we need to give your child the best possible care.

Once you've booked in we invite you and your child to come along again to personally meet your child's teacher and discuss the needs and requirements of your child. It will also help your child to

settle in if he or she visits before starting 'for real'. Feel free to visit as many times as you feel necessary to help your child settle and for you to feel at ease with the new environment and routine.

### Clothing and personal belongings

Dress for fun! AVA's days are filled with all kinds of hands-on learning so clothing should be simple, washable and comfortable. Please do not dress your child in their best clothes as paint, glue, play dough etc are frequently used and, although protective aprons are provided for these activities, stray splashes could stain clothing.

Since our classroom extends to the outdoors please dress your child appropriately for the weather and footwear should be sensible to prevent slipping and tripping when using the apparatus.

For the inevitable accidents (especially while toilet learning), AVA hold a limited amount of spare clothing but naturally children would feel much more comfortable wearing their own clothes, so we request that all children bring a spare set of clothing in a named bag which can be left at the Pre-school on their peg. Please make sure all clothing is clearly labelled. If your child uses any of our spare clothing please return them washed as soon as possible ready for the next child.

During the summer months we often use the wading pools. For this we ask you to bring along a pair of underpants and an old t-shirt and we also require a sunhat that can remain at Pre-school for the duration of the summer. If you do not wish your child to use the wading pools please inform your child's key-worker. While our spacious outside play areas are shaded by trees, we still recommend that children wear hats and are treated with sun-screen before they arrive each day during the summer months.

Many children need security items for rest time which is absolutely fine but please make sure personal items are labelled as many children become very distressed if their special blanket or comfort item becomes lost.

We do ask that toys and other items from home are not brought into Pre-school except for 'show and tell' days, as they can cause arguments between the children and broken hearts if they go missing or get damaged.

### Behaviour Management

Discipline at AVA is consistent with the age and needs of each child. Physical punishment and shouting at children is never permitted on AVA premises by anyone. In the Pre-school we seek to be positive by setting clear boundaries and praising good behaviour but we accept that there will be times when sanctions need to be taken. It is important that carers and parents work together at such times in order to have a consistent approach.

Situations can usually be resolved by redirecting children to more appropriate activities, direct or indirect praise, teaching by example and logical consequences. These techniques give children time to think about their actions. Occasionally we may use a quiet private talk with the child or a 'cooling off' period (which must not be confused with 'time out'). If your child is experiencing a change in his or her home environment that may affect his or her behaviour, please let the teacher know. All information given will be confidential and only passed on to other staff on a 'need to know' basis. In these cases communication is important. In turn, AVA will keep you informed of any problems we observe and we will work with you to address the situation. However, should it be

necessary, AVA reserves the right to ask parents to make temporary or permanent alternative arrangements for their child.

## The first day

The first day in any new situation can be an emotional one for everyone concerned. However, there are some things you can do to help make the first day at AVA positive and fun for your child. Make sure you have visited at least once before your child starts and spend time exploring the new environment together.

- Talk with your child about what's coming: new friends, fun activities and a nice teacher.
- Start early so that the day doesn't feel rushed.
- Even if you are feeling worried or concerned don't let your child pick up on your feelings as they might begin to worry too.
- After entering the security doors take your child to the classroom and alert the teacher that you have arrived.

Early morning is a busy time with lots of children arriving at the same time and there is a chance that the staff members you met on trial sessions may not yet be in the classroom. Because the Pre-school is open long hours your child's teacher may not begin their day until a little later. For the benefit of the pre-kindergarten children in particular we recommend that those attending either full-day sessions or morning sessions arrive by 8.30am. This is the time that the main activities of the day begin and it can be difficult for the staff to adequately greet the child if they are already involved in an activity or teaching.

Parents are welcome anytime, especially on the first morning. You can stay as long as necessary for your child to be comfortable. A goodbye kiss and a positive smile are important for children. It's also important to tell them when you will be back to pick them up.

That first day can be a time of high anxiety for parents too. Feel free to call the Pre-school throughout the day to see how your child is doing. Parents are always welcome to drop in or call us at anytime.

New situations affect every child differently. Sometimes a child does wonderfully on the first day because everything is new and exciting, but get anxious on the second day when he or she recognises that this is going to be a new routine.

Most children need two or three weeks to adjust fully to the new environment. The best support you, as a parent, can give is to be enthusiastic and encouraging - and be patient.

If it becomes clear that your child is finding it difficult to settle within a reasonable period of time, a plan will be developed between your child's teacher, yourself and a member of the management team to try to overcome the problem.

Remember, AVA's goal is to work with you to provide your child with a safe, nurturing environment in which to learn and develop.

We're glad you've given us the opportunity to introduce ourselves to you and we look forward to meeting you in the very near future.

