



# Early Connections Learning Centers

## Volunteer Handbook





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## Welcome!

Dear Volunteer:

Welcome to Early Connections Learning Centers! We are pleased and grateful that you have chosen to share your time and talents with our organization and the children and families we serve. We hope that you will find your volunteer experience with us satisfying and worthwhile.

We are very proud of our rich history of providing high quality early care and education to children from limited income and working families in our community. Early Connections is the oldest nonprofit child care organization in Colorado and is recognized statewide as a leader in the field of early childhood education. Since 1897, we have delivered on our promise to provide high quality, comprehensive services for **all** children.

Volunteers play a valued role in a variety of positions throughout Early Connections. We strive to fully engage our volunteers' capacity to supplement and enhance delivery of services to children and families, provide more one-on-one interaction with children, enable the paid staff to be more productive, offer their unique skills and guidance, and increase the overall quality of our programs.

We love making a difference in the lives of children every day at Early Connections, and we know you will, too. We look forward to having you as a part of our team. Please let us know what we can do to help make the time you spend with us enjoyable and productive.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Denson".

Liz Denson  
President and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley C. Groves".

Ashley Groves  
Vice President of Community Engagement

## Our Philosophy & Commitment



**Mission:** Our mission is to provide comprehensive, high quality early care and education for ALL children.

### **Goals**

Early Connections' goals are to:

- Offer a high quality, comprehensive early childhood education program that focuses on school readiness and prepares children for success in school;
- Encourage relationships with families to promote optimal long-term outcomes for children;
- Develop community partnerships that avoid duplication of services and increase efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Early Connections Staff Will:**

- Value and appreciate a volunteer's time, talent, and treasures
- Provide the same respect and dignity that we do to our staff and families
- Maintain a positive work environment
- Effectively communicate
- Provide adequate training and materials for all assigned tasks
- Protect their privacy and not distribute a volunteers' personal information

### **Early Connections Expects our volunteers to:**

- Keep Early Connections families at the Center of their intentions
- Consider their volunteer work as a professional commitment
- Be reliable and prompt through all commitments
- Follow all policies and procedures as laid out in the Volunteer Handbook
- Provide Early Connections staff and fellow volunteers with respect
- Represent Early Connections in a responsible manner at all times
- Maintain the highest quality of confidentiality for Early Connections and our families

## **About Us**

### **History and Background:**

Early Connections Learning Centers is a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization founded in 1897 to care for young children from lower income and working families. We operate four full-day, year-round Centers for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, half-day preschool programs in two of our Centers and one elementary school, and two before/after school and full-day summer programs for school-age children. Fees at all Centers are based on family income. Our network of family child care homes offers families quality choices of child care settings and meets the needs of parents with non-traditional work schedules. We also operate Court Care, a free drop-in Center for the children of individuals who have court-related business.

### **Ages Served at Each Center:**

- **Antlers Place:** Toddler and Preschool



- **Chelton:** Infant, Toddler, and Preschool
- **Day Nursery:** Preschool and School Aged After School Program
- **Court Care:** Infant to 14 years of age

### **Early Childhood Education Program:**

Early Connections' early care and education program focuses on school readiness and helps young children acquire the skills and attributes they need to enter school prepared to learn and succeed. Our developmentally-appropriate, "whole child" approach to early education promotes learning and development in all major domains—language, social-emotional, cognitive, physical, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, and the arts.

## **Guidelines for Volunteers**

### **Introduction:**

This Volunteer Handbook provides information to volunteers about Early Connections. It outlines the role volunteers play so that they will be comfortable and effective in their positions and will find their volunteer experience satisfying and fulfilling.

Early Connections is licensed by the Colorado Department of Human Services and the El Paso County Department of Health and Environment. Both organizations have regulations designed to protect children's health and safety. These regulations cover a variety of topics relating to the operations of Early Connections including staff requirements, staff to child ratios, capacity, health and safety needs, equipment, and records and reporting procedures. Some of the regulations apply to volunteers, and we ask your cooperation in ensuring that we comply with the regulations. (A copy of the Department of Human Services Rules for Regulating Child Care Centers is available upon request.)

The handbook is not intended to be all-inclusive, but presents a summary of Early Connections' guidelines and expectations. Volunteers are expected to abide by the policies and procedures outlined in the handbook. Please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about anything in this handbook with the Volunteer Program Specialist.

### **Guidelines for Conduct:**

The safety and well-being of the children entrusted to its care is always the primary concern of Early Connections Learning Centers. Volunteers are to work under the supervision of a staff member and **are not to be left alone with children at any time.** This includes escorting a child to and from the bathroom, dining room, Get Well Center, playground, the classrooms, etc.

Volunteers have the opportunity to be wonderful role models and are expected to set a good example in behavior, language and appearance. Volunteers should expect to be treated with respect, courtesy, kindness and caring and shall treat children, parents, staff, and other volunteers in the same manner.

Volunteers should expect to be given meaningful work and are expected to perform the responsibilities outlined in their position descriptions and communicated by their staff supervisors. Training will be provided by the supervisor(s) as necessary.

## **Policies**

### **Equal Opportunity**



Early Connections supports Equal Opportunity in all of its policies, benefits, and programs. We strive to evaluate all potential and current volunteers on the basis of qualifications and on the basis of the organization's needs and programs – not age, color, national ancestry/origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, or veteran status. Early Connections is committed to making every volunteer feel welcomed and accepted according to his or her contribution to accomplishing its mission.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Early Connections does not condone, nor will it tolerate sexual harassment. It is the policy of Early Connections to provide its employees and volunteers with a work environment free from all forms of sexual harassment. This policy refers to both interaction between supervisors and subordinates and interaction among coworkers and volunteers. Sexual Harassment refers to behavior of a sexual nature which is not welcome, is personally offensive, negatively affects morale, and interferes with the work performance and effectiveness of its victims.

### **Background Check**

Because the safety and well-being of the children entrusted to our care is our primary concern, Early Connections conducts background checks on applicants for volunteer positions that regularly interact with children. Different levels of background checks will be required based on your position. We greatly appreciate your understanding and cooperation in helping us maintain a safe and secure environment for the children we serve. Please see the section on mandatory training and orientation for more information.

### **Volunteer Privacy Protection**

Early Connections is committed to protecting volunteers' personal information. Volunteers may be assured that the information they provide on the application form or that is received as a result of the background check will be treated as strictly confidential and stringently safe-guarded.

### **Confidentiality & Liability**

All volunteers must sign an Early Connections Volunteer Confidentiality & Liability Agreement. Volunteers are likely to hear or otherwise learn of information about Early Connections children, families, and staff and are expected to respect the confidentiality of that information. This policy does not apply when a volunteer suspects that a child has been abused or neglected. In such cases, the volunteer will follow the policy and procedures regarding reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect as seen on page 8 of this handbook.

### **Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco**

Early Connections is committed to maintaining a safe, healthful, and productive environment for its children and families, employees, and volunteers. Using or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is prohibited and is grounds for dismissal. Illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia, marijuana and marijuana infused products, and alcohol must never be present on the premises of the center during operating hours. Smoking is prohibited at all times in all parts of Early Connections premises, including classrooms, offices, hallways, restrooms, and playgrounds and at any location when accompanying children on field trips. Volunteers that do smoke are required to change shirts upon re-entering the building to protect children against second/third hand smoke. For additional information or questions regarding this policy please contact the Volunteer Program Specialist.

### **Celebration Policy**

Early Connections does not celebrate holidays. This allows us to offer a developmentally-appropriate program and to ensure that all children can participate in all activities. Our children learn to respect all cultures and to appreciate the value of diversity within all our families. Early Connections will encourage classroom or Center celebrations such as harvest festival, winter wonderland, friendship week, etc.

### **Nutrition Policy**



Early Connections must adhere to health department regulations; therefore, food items served to the children must be prepackaged and prepared from commercial sources. Home-made foods are not permitted. Early Connections' menus are totally free of peanuts and tree nuts. Staff, volunteers, children, and others may not bring any items into the classrooms that contain peanuts or tree nuts.

#### **Personal Items and Cell Phones**

Licensing regulations require that personal items such as purses, backpacks, packages, medications, etc., must not be within access of children. Lockers are provided for securing such items at each Center. When caring for children, volunteers may not use cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices in classrooms.

#### **Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting**

Early Connections staff members and volunteers are subject to regulations determined by the Colorado Department of Human Services, including mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting. Before you may begin volunteering in a classroom, and annually thereafter, you must participate in a Department approved training about child abuse prevention, including common symptoms and signs of child abuse. It is very important that you alert your supervisor immediately if you suspect child abuse or neglect. Do not notify the child's parents or relatives. Early Connections and/or the appropriate authorities will handle such communication. Please refer to procedure section page 8 to learn how to properly report abuse and neglect to an Early Connections staff member.

#### **Dress Code**

Volunteers should use good judgement in dressing appropriately for their volunteer positions. All volunteers should wear clothing that is clean and fits appropriately. Clothing should not be torn or faded. No clothing should contain insignia or slogans. Undergarments, midriff and the chest should be covered at all times. Flip flops and hats are not permitted in the building.

**Classroom Attire:** Jeans, khakis, polos, slacks, trousers, blouse, closed-toed shoes, etc.

**Administrative Attire:** slacks, blouse, skirts that are knee length or longer, suits, etc.

**Special Events:** Volunteer Program Specialist will provide guidance prior to event.

#### **Safety**

Volunteers are expected to exercise good judgement and reasonable caution in all that they do while volunteering to protect their own safety as well as that of children, staff, and other volunteers.

Volunteers will receive center specific safety procedures during orientation.

#### **Volunteers Ages 12 - 16**

Volunteers between the ages of twelve (12) and sixteen (16) will only be permitted to volunteer for a group project and must be accompanied by a parent/guardian. Volunteers between the ages of twelve (12) and sixteen (16) are not to volunteer as an individual in the centers and/or classrooms.

## **Procedures**

#### **Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting**

If a volunteer observes one or more of the indications described below or any other indication which may reasonably suggest that a child has been abused or neglected, he/she should immediately report his/her suspicions to his/her supervisor who will follow the proper reporting procedure.

"Child abuse or neglect" includes any act or omission in one of the following categories which threatens the health or welfare of a child:





- Any case in which a child exhibits evidence of skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, failure to thrive, burns, fracture of any bone, soft tissue swelling, or death, and either: such condition or death is not justifiably explained; the history given concerning the child is at variance with the degree or type of such condition or death; or the circumstances indicate that such condition may not be the product of an accidental occurrence;
- Any case in which a child is subjected to sexual assault or molestation, sexual exploitation, or prostitution; and
- Any case in which a child is in need of services because the child's parents, legal guardian, or custodian fails to take the same actions to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision that a prudent person would take.

Note: All volunteers as described in mandatory trainings and orientations must complete the Mandatory Reporting Training through Colorado Office of Children Youth and Families.

### **Hand Washing**

Hand washing is the most effective defense against the spread of infectious disease and is required of all staff, volunteers, and children. Please wash your hands:

- On entering and re-entering the classroom.
- After handling body fluids (blowing or wiping a nose, coughing on a hand, or touching any mucus, blood, or vomit).
- Before and after feeding a child.
- Before meals and snacks, before preparing or serving food, or after handling any raw food that require cooking (meat, eggs, poultry).
- Before and after playing in water.
- After handling pets and other animals or any materials such as sand, dirt, or surfaces that might be contaminated by contact with animals.
- After handling garbage or cleaning.

### **Emergency Procedures**

Each Center has a separate evacuation plan in case of fire, inclement weather, or if a lockdown becomes necessary. These plans are posted in each Center and reviewed on a regular basis. In the event of an emergency, volunteers should remain calm and follow the instructions of their supervisor.

### **Signing In and Out/Log Hours**

It is required by law that volunteers sign in and out each time they volunteer. It is important for us to know who is in our facilities at all times. We also want to be able to track the time that you spend volunteering so we can appropriately recognize your commitment to our organization. Volunteer log books are located at the front desk of each Center.

### **Acceptable and Unacceptable Guidance and Classroom Management Techniques**

Volunteers are not responsible for directing or redirecting children. Staff will handle any necessary direction. This information is being shared as an outline of how our staff works with children in our classroom so you may utilize similar techniques.

Early Connections is often the last stop for children with social/emotional challenges. There are two Behavioral Health Specialists and a Family Advocate on staff to support children, families, and staff. Early Connections does not suspend or exclude children unless the behavior is extreme and all other measures have been exhausted.

In accordance with the Pyramid Plus Approach, a social/emotional set of strategies for use in guiding children, appropriate guidance strategies acceptable in the classrooms are:

- Promoting pro-social behavior by being closely present and supervising children; by modeling and demonstrating acceptable behavior; by leading the child by the hand to give direction,





reassurance, or assistance; by removing the child from the scene to help the child relax and regain composure; and by facilitating conflict resolution between children.

- Anticipating and redirecting problems by stepping in before problems occur and by finding an alternative activity for an unacceptable one. For example, if a child is throwing blocks, redirect the child by providing foam balls which can be safely thrown in a bucket.
- Providing logical consequences that are closely related to the behavior you wish to discourage. For example, if children are riding tricycles in a reckless manner, "traffic tickets" can be issued with the rule that after receiving 3 tickets a child will not be able to ride for the rest of the day.
- Using verbal guidance which means using words to influence a child's behavior by communicating your expectations, explaining the reasons for rules and actions, listening carefully to children, and using reflective listening by putting into words the feelings the child seems to be experiencing.
- Clearly stating guidelines and using consistency when setting limits and in following through on them. Guidelines set the standards for classroom behavior in a positive way. They tell children what they can do. Saying, "we use words to solve our problems" is more explicit than asking children not to hit one another.

Teachers **NEVER** use physical punishment, psychological abuse, or coercion with children.

- Examples of physical punishment include: shaking, hitting, jerking, squeezing, grabbing or pulling of arms.
- Examples of psychological abuse include: shaming, name calling, sarcasm, humiliation, threats, derogatory remarks, or use food, rest, or toileting.
- Examples of coercion include: rough handling (shoving, pulling, pushing, grasping any body part), forcing a child to sit or lie down.

Volunteers cannot: be left alone with children, change diapers or clothes, pick up children (exception with infants), assist in cleaning any bodily fluids, provide consequences or punishments, feed bottles to infants, take photos, develop lesson plans, count towards ratio, hold a sleeping infant.

Restraint – Early Connections **does not** restrain children in any way.

## Volunteer Requirements and Opportunities

Orientations and trainings are required for all volunteers that plan to support Early Connections Learning Centers on a regular basis. Along with a historical tour and 30 minute presentation about our organization, volunteers will also be subject to a background check and child neglect training based on their job category. Please see below for the requirements based on job categories.

Ongoing trainings and workshops may be offered occasionally. We ask that you regularly check your e-mail to find invitations to such events.

Please note that those who will be working outside of the Day Nursey will be asked to attend an additional orientation at their specified site prior to their first volunteer engagement.

### Classroom Support Assistant (CSA):

- A CSA is described as someone who applies with the intention of volunteering in the classroom or directly interacting with children. All volunteers that apply as a CSA will be subject to a background check.
- Duties of a CSA may include, but are not limited to, reading to children, homework support, help children who need remedial support, play board games, listen to children read, etc.



### **Background Check Guidelines & Training Guidelines for CSA**

- All those wishing to complete more than **8 hours** of time or provide volunteer service weekly for more than **2 weeks** will be subject to a comprehensive (CIB, TRAILS, FBI, Colorado Courts) background check.
- Those who are considered a “short-term” commitment and do not fall in the above category may still be subject to a **Level 1** (Colorado Courts) background check with the ability and potential to run a comprehensive check if volunteer wishes to extend commitment or early connections staff feel it necessary.
- Background check must be renewed on a yearly basis.
- Early Connections asks that volunteers contribute to the cost of the background check.
- **Child/Neglect Training mandatory** for ALL CSA's regardless of their time commitment

### **Classroom Enrichment Assistant (CEA):**

- A CEA is defined as someone who wishes to indirectly support the overall well-being of a classroom. He or she on occasion may enter a classroom but does not prefer spending a regular amount of time in the classroom directly interacting with children.
- Duties may include but are not limited to changing bulletin boards, making photo copies, sorting & organizing, conduct research on upcoming lessons, cleaning toys, etc.

### **Background Check Guidelines & Training Guidelines for CEA remain the same as above.**

### **Administrative Support Assistant (ASA):**

- An ASA is defined as someone who will support the overall well-being of Early Connections Learning Centers. He or she will support at the Corporate Offices (Day Nurse Location) to advance the capacity in which our corporate team operates.
- Duties may include but are not limited to filing paperwork, answering phones, data entry, assembling enrollment kits, stuffing envelopes, etc.

### **Background Check / Child Neglect Training NOT necessary for these individuals**

## **Public Relations**

As a Volunteer with Early Connections Learning Centers, you are one of our strongest advocates. We recognize that word of mouth is the best way to recruit new volunteers and potential donors. We encourage you to be a champion of our organization. We ask when doing this you abide by the below policies and procedures as it relates to Early Connections Learning Centers and the families we serve. If at any time the below policies and procedures as it relates to social media, news outlets, or press are breached, disciplinary action will be taken with potential of termination of volunteer position.

*Nothing in these guidelines is meant to interfere with a volunteers' right under federal law to engage in protected and concerted activity, including the ability to discuss terms and conditions of their volunteer duties.*

### **Social Media & Networking Sites**



This policy includes, but is not limited to: personal blogs, Facebook, Twitter, personal websites, Pinterest, Flickr, YouTube, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Instagram, Digg, Reddit, etc.

- Any material published online in reference to Early Connections by a volunteer is the responsibility of the volunteer.
- At no time should anything be published (comments OR photos) on a volunteer's personal social networking site in reference to our children or families.
- At no time should any photographs or other materials be published that identify a present location (example: "Checking In" on Foursquare or Facebook at the Pioneers Museum with your classroom, giving a realistic location of where you and the children in your classroom are).
- At no time should any materials be published that would breach confidentiality or are deemed to be of a detrimental nature to our organization or our families

### **Useful Recommendations**

Early Connections' volunteers are encouraged to use the following guidelines regarding their personal online presence:

- Remember that no information sent over the web is totally secure.
- Even though you may think you are anonymous or using an alias, you may still be recognized.
- Do not share information or photographs of Early Connections' children or families.
- If you identify yourself on your personal social networking site as a volunteer of Early Connections, remember, you are representing Early Connections. Please maintain professionalism, honesty, and respect.

**Media Relations** Early Connections Learning Centers practices a one voice model which allows the agency to disseminate information accurately and timely while maintaining confidentiality of staff and families. External communications such as interviews, news releases or media inquiries will always be directed to the President/CEO.

## **Holiday & Weather Closures**

### **Calendar**

Early Connections closes in observance of the following holidays:

- New Year's Eve and New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Veterans' Day
- Thanksgiving and the day after
- Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

### **Weather Closures/Delays**



We recommend downloading this app onto your smartphone to receive notifications about closures from Early Connections: <https://www.flashalert.net/id/ECLC>. If Early Connections is closed, this app will notify you. You can register your e-mail and then download the FlashAlert Messenger app onto your smartphone.

In the event of bad weather, volunteers may check Early Connections website or Facebook page and all local major news outlets for closure information. In the case of a delayed start, please call the Center to make sure it is open. Volunteers should always decide whether or not they feel comfortable and safe driving in poor weather conditions. If volunteers are unable to be present on their regularly scheduled day, they should call their supervisor or the Volunteer Program Specialist.

## Contact Information & Useful Links

Our Centers are open Monday – Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

- **Antlers Place:** 108 Antlers Place - (719) 632-1754 x1200
- **Court Care:** 270 S. Tejon Street, Room S140 – (719) 448-7747
- **Historic Day Nursery:** 104 E. Rio Grande Street – (719) 632-1754 x1100
- **Sand Creek:** 550 Sand Creek Drive – (719) 632-1754 x1400
- **South Chelton:** 1465 South Chelton – (719) 632-1754 x1300

**Community Engagement Specialist:** Tracie Woods - [twoods@earlyconnections.org](mailto:twoods@earlyconnections.org) / (719) 223-9954

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/EarlyConnectionsLearningCenters>

**Website:** [www.earlyconnections.org](http://www.earlyconnections.org)

**Flash Alert for Closures:** <https://www.flashalert.net/id/ECLC>

**Mandatory Reporter Training:** <https://coloradocwts.com/mandated-reporter-training>