



A family ministry of First Methodist Church



Where childhood is a journey not a race.



Parent Handbook

Raimond Christian Center
First United Methodist Church
206 S. 4th St.
Harlingen, TX 78550
www.firstharlingen.org/journey-preschool

Office: (956) 412-0411
Fax: (956) 423-4663
Email: christina@firstharlingen.org
Christina Vasquez, Director

Revised November 2023



Greetings in the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord,

We welcome your family to Journey Preschool where our mission is to provide excellent childcare and education in a nurturing, Christ-centered environment. As a fellow parent of young ones, I understand the feeling of wanting the very best care for your children. At Journey your child will be in a wonderful environment to learn and grow developmentally, receive the caring attention of our staff, make new classroom friendships, and hear the good news of how much Jesus Christ loves them!

If you currently have a church home, we praise God for your involvement in your church. However, if your family is looking for a church home, we would love to have you come and help us worship Jesus at FMC. We have a 9 a.m. traditional and 11 a.m. contemporary service with a nursery and children's program provided during the services.

Please know that your child and your family will be in our prayers throughout the school year. On behalf of our church family at First Methodist, we are so glad that your children are here. Thank you for trusting Journey Preschool with your child's care. They will be loved!

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Pastor Phillip".

Rev. Phillip Hoeflinger

Lead Pastor, FMC Harlingen

phillip@firstharlingen.org

Table of Contents

School Information

Purpose	1
Program Overview	1
License	2
Enrollment Forms	2
Tuition and Fees	2
Holidays	3
Arrival and Release of Children	3

Children’s Instruction

Classroom Information	4
Food Allergies, Meals, and Snacks	5
Communication with Families	6
Guidance and Discipline	6
Clothing	7
Extra Curricular Activities	7
Illness	8

Administration Guidelines

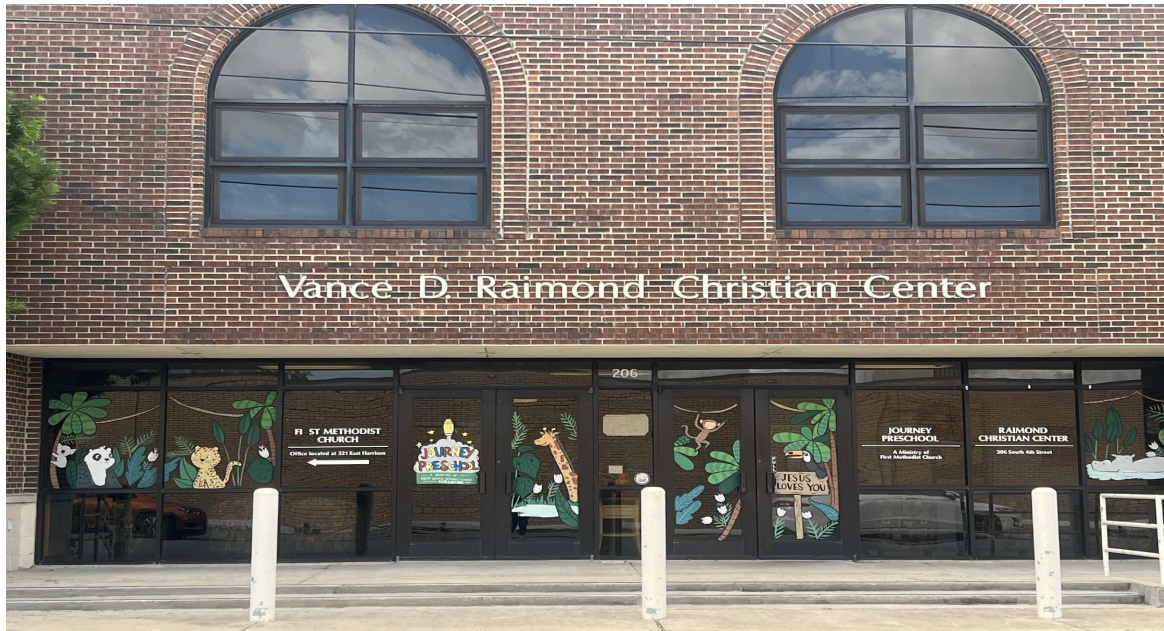
Medical Incidents	8
Safety Procedures	9
Additional Policies	10
Volunteers	11
Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting	11

Resources for Parents and Families

Appendix	13
--------------------	----

Welcome to the Journey!

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed . . . Proverbs 16:3



Purpose

The mission of Journey Preschool is to provide excellent childcare and education in a nurturing, Christ-centered environment.

Program Overview

For over 30 years, Journey Preschool has existed as a family ministry of the First Methodist Church in Harlingen. Journey is a non-profit organization and aims to be self-supporting while providing excellent childcare and an excellent education. A governing board consisting of church staff and members oversees and supports the operations of Journey Preschool.

Children of all backgrounds are welcomed. Journey offers services without regard to race, national origin, or religion. Our desire is to encourage children to grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in a safe, loving Christian environment. We encourage educational attainment through play and fun activities. However, we place a child's feelings of self-worth and their regard for others, above achievement.

License

Journey Preschool is licensed by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. JPS meets or exceeds the regulations and standards established by the State of Texas for early childhood settings. All staff receive CPR and First Aid certification and complete 24 hours of Early Child training every year.

Parents may view the Minimum Standard Rules in the JPS office. JPS's most recent inspections may be found at www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care. If parents have questions or concerns about our program, they may contact the State of Texas Child Care Licensing office at 800 862-5252.

Enrollment Forms

The following forms must be completed, signed, and submitted along with the registration & tuition fees prior to enrollment:

- Admission Form (notification of any change is required)
- Up to date Immunization Record
- Physicians' Statement
- Acknowledgement of Parent Handbook and Guide to Daycare Form
- Emergency Medical Release Form
- Discipline and Guidance Policy
- Tuition Contract

All immunizations required for the child's age must be completed by the date of admission. Children that do not receive immunizations will be required to provide a written physician's statement and/or legal document. The Vision and Hearing Screening Program of the Health and Safety Code requires 4 and 5-year-old children enrolled in any private, public, parochial, or denominational school to have a professional examination for possible vision and hearing problems.

Tuition and Fees

A \$100 fee for processing registration is due each year. Tuition is due on the 5th of every month. A \$10.00 fine is charged after the due date and \$1.00 is added for each additional day that payment is late. If your child is absent due to illness, vacation, or holidays, you will still be responsible to pay the tuition fee. No make-up days are offered.

Payments may be made in check or money order payable to FMC-Journey Preschool (No Cash). Post-dated checks will not be accepted. There will be a \$20.00 charge for the first returned check. After the 2nd returned check, we will only accept money order payments towards the account balance. Childcare services may be suspended due to unpaid balances.

Monthly Tuition Rates

		5 days	4 days	3 days	2 days
Full (7:15 to 5:30)	\$575	\$480	\$385	\$290	
(8:00 to 1:00)	\$325	\$275	\$225	\$175	

Please note that schedules for children must remain the same each week.

Siblings receive a 10% discount. Drop-in care is available (space permitting) to enrolled children. Arrangements must be made through the Journey office. Fees for drop-in care are \$10 for early morning, \$20 for a half day, and \$40 for a full day.

Tuition and fees are not refundable. Journey requests a minimum of one-month advance notice when a change of schedule is necessary. If it becomes necessary to withdraw your child, the Director must be notified in writing at least one month in advance. Otherwise, a tuition refund will not be granted.

To continue to be self-sustaining, our registration contract is a commitment to continuously pay tuition no matter the duration of a closure due to unforeseen events for the school year enrolled. Journey reserves the right to change any and all tuition rates when circumstances make such a change necessary.

Holidays

Our school calendar follows that of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD). We close any days that the school district closes due to bad weather conditions. We are closed for Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, Spring Break, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Memorial Day, and Fourth of July. Please plan for alternate childcare for these dates.

Arrival and Release of Children

We encourage every parent to plan to drop-off and pick-up your children at the same time each day. In addition, we encourage parents to make their goodbye routine the same each day so that your child knows what to expect. In our experience, keeping to a daily routine helps to quickly and successfully transition your child into the classroom. Please let us know if we can help with the transition.

Parents must accompany children into the building and sign them in or out in the presence of a staff member. Journey will not release a child to anyone other than the parent unless prior arrangements have been made. Pre-approved adults must be over the age of 18 and are required to provide a Texas ID before the child will be released; this includes siblings. Under no circumstance is a staff member permitted to take a child home.

Arrival time is NO EARLIER than 8 a.m. for care and NO EARLIER than 7:15 a.m. for full time care. Teachers utilize these critical few minutes before children arrive to prepare the classrooms for the day. Pick-up will be at 1:00 p.m. for care and 5:0 p.m. for full care.

For the safety of our children, please avoid lengthy conversations with staff during the busy drop-off and pick-up times. If you need to discuss issues of concern, you are encouraged to call Journey to set up a parent/teacher conference.

In inclement weather, the alley may be used for drop-off and pick-up. Please do not leave your car unattended (unlocked) with the motor on. Journey is not responsible for stolen vehicles or valuables. Please DO NOT leave children in an unattended vehicle while dropping off or picking up other children.

Classroom Information

Children will be grouped according to their attained age during the year. Journey will also take into consideration the developmental or emotional age of the child. Additionally, from time to time, combined classes may be used for some activities or to keep child and caregiver ratios within required guidelines.

Classes are offered for children ages 6 weeks to 4 years of age. Journey strives to provide small classroom sizes in a cozy, nurturing, and secure school setting. Pre-kinder classes follow curriculums that use an active participatory approach to learning, which allows children to learn through actions and experiences.

Classrooms are set up with materials and activities that encourage children to explore and learn through play. Teachers provide a variety of activities that work on physical, social, spiritual, emotional, and cognitive skills. Children also work on reading, language development, math, Bible stories, and arts and crafts to prepare them for kindergarten.

Rest Time

Journey provides a supervised sleep or rest period after the noon meal for all children. Parents are to provide a small mat and blanket to be used for rest time if your child is present for afternoon care. Your child's mat and blanket must be labeled with their name. Blankets will be sent home every Friday so that they can be washed and should be returned to school on Monday.

Chapel

Pre-Kinder 3 and 4 classes attend chapel on Thursdays at 10 a.m. at the First Methodist Church Sanctuary. The Pastor or a pastoral team member leads chapel with stories and songs.

Outdoor Play

Children will be given an opportunity to play outdoors (weather conditions permitting). When outdoor play is not an option, the Raimond Christian Center Gymnasium will be used.

Water Activities

During the summer months, water activities are held involving wading pools, sand, water tables, and sprinklers. Pools will be drained, sanitized, and stored out of reach of children.

Parents must fill out the portion of the enrollment form (#3 Water Activities) to give permission to participate.

Birthdays

Birthdays are special and important days. Parents are welcome to share their child's birthday with classmates. Please speak with your child's teacher if you plan to bring a treat to share at snack or mealtime. A strict, one-week advance notice for posting of all snack(s) or meal items is required to best accommodate all families and their child's special needs. Food items may be store-bought or homemade and must follow TDHS Food Rules and Regulations. Also, if you prefer that your child not be recognized on a birthday, please notify your teacher.

When parents are planning a home birthday party for their child, party invitations may be placed in the children's cubbies if the whole class is being invited. If only a few Preschool friends are to be invited, please do not distribute invitations at school. You may call the Director who will share a child's contact information, if permission has been given by the parent(s).

Food Allergies, Meals and Snacks

Parents should inform Journey of any allergic conditions their child has so that parents can receive a Food Allergy Action Plan Form to be filled out by the child's health care provider. This action plan must be filled out and returned to Journey before the child begins the program. See the section on Medical Incidents for information on staff response to allergic reactions when parents submit an Allergy Action Plan.

Parents may bring breakfast for their children before 8:30 a.m. Food must be simple and self-serving. The parent is responsible to set out the child's breakfast before leaving. The teachers are not responsible for preparing breakfast.

Parents are responsible for providing their child with a well-balanced lunch. Food should meet the child's nutritional requirements and be in a well-insulated bag, clearly labeled with the child's name. Insulation is very important because staff will not provide microwave or refrigeration for lunches. Please do not send food and drinks that are high in sugar, caffeinated drinks, Kool-Aid, puddings, sweets or desserts. Soups, casseroles, sandwiches, juices, water, raw vegetables, and raw fruits are good choices for lunches.

To prevent food-borne illnesses, all foods must be packed safely as per *Texas Department of Health Services Food Rules and Regulations. We aim to attain a maximum level of compliance to ensure each child's health and safety.

Journey serves a mid-morning and a mid afternoon snack. The snack helps keep small bodies energized between meals; we do not want to interfere with their appetite for a healthy lunch or dinner at home with you. A weekly snack schedule will be posted in each classroom. **If your child is allergic to snacks we serve, we ask you to bring an alternate snack from home.**

In keeping with state regulations and Journey Preschool Policy for Wellness, we have strict guidelines that determine the snacks that we serve. These policies have been put into place to encourage our children to adopt a healthy eating lifestyle.

Communication with Families

Our open-door policy ensures parents have the opportunity to visit the preschool anytime during our hours of operation to observe their child, the preschool operation, and program activities without having to secure prior approval. These visits allow for limited observation of their child's stay as needed. Please keep this visit to a minimum duration so as not to disturb class time or other children.

Parents may request a meeting by appointment only with Journey's Director or your child's teacher or both to discuss matters concerning your child's development and participation at Journey. Mutual sharing of information and insight about the child's needs and development helps provide consistency and support in promoting the child's growth and development.

Parent bulletin boards are located outside of every classroom and we encourage parents to carefully look over the information. The boards help communicate important information to our parents as well as provide parents an opportunity to monitor the care of their child. Boards contain our weekly morning and afternoon snacks, daily schedules, lesson plans, and more. A notice will be placed in the child's cubby of any school policy changes, special events, calendar updates, and other significant messages.

Guidance and Discipline

Discipline is a positive force directed toward what the child is allowed to do, rather than what the child is forbidden to do. It is based on mutual love and respect, and must be reinforced with teaching, firmness, and consistent reminders.

Consistency in discipline is essential. Appropriate techniques for discipline with younger children involve distraction, substitution of an alternative activity (redirection), and a change of focus. The goal of disciplinary training is to enable a child to regulate and control their OWN behavior-self control.

Journey Preschool firmly believes in the use of positive discipline, positively stated language in redirection, and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing on the unacceptable behaviors. Firm limits will be confined to the BIG 3:

- 1) A child may not hurt themself**
- 2) A child may not hurt someone else**
- 3) A child may not damage material or equipment.**

When inappropriate behaviors become frequent, severe, result in injury, reflect a change in the child's self esteem, or form an unfavorable pattern, the school will contact the parents for a conference. We will work closely with the parents to create a plan and find a solution to help the child function appropriately in the classroom setting. It is our goal to help children become successful in their interaction with peers and staff.

If the director determines that the child's behavior makes the classroom unsafe or puts the child or classmates at risk, the school will intervene and take the necessary steps to bring about safety, including the right to request withdrawal of the child.

Clothing

Since accidents or spills may happen, parents are required to bring a bag with an extra set of clean clothes to the daycare. All these clothes should be clearly labeled and should include underwear and socks.

Children should dress comfortably, in washable clothing that they can manage easily and appropriately according to the weather. Open toe shoes must have a strap; flip flops, jelly shoes, and boots are not allowed because they do not provide enough traction or support on steps, ladders, and other playground equipment. Tennis shoes are more appropriate.

Children are encouraged to participate in activities that involve sand, water, paints, glue, and other art products. Please be aware that some activities may become messy and that clothing could become stained. All removable clothing should be labeled with the child's name. JPS will not be responsible for any lost personal belongings.

Extra Curricular Activities

We love to celebrate special occasions and have fun events throughout the year such as:

Spring "End of Year" Program, Christmas Program, RGV Jaycees Christmas Parade, Journey float, Easter, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Birthdays, Mother, Father and Grandparent's Day celebrations, themed days and more!

Journey Preschool is pleased to offer extracurricular activities during the school day for interested parents. These activities are hosted at Journey and coordinated by each visiting instructor. Sign-up forms are available by the main office. We currently have Dance with My First Dance, Tumble Tots, and Soccer.

Due to the pandemic, some of these events and activities may be postponed until conditions improve. We are looking forward to the day when it is safe to resume as normal.

Illness

Children who have had a fever must be fever-free for 24 hours prior to returning to JPS. If the child was treated with an antibiotic, the child must wait 24 hours before returning to school. The Journey's Director and/or staff will make the decision as to whether a child should be

excluded from the school, or whether a health professional determines that the child may be in childcare.

If children have any of the following symptoms, they may be excluded from activities and a parent will be contacted to pick-up the child that is ill.

- The illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in child-care center activities.
- The illness results in a greater need for care than caregivers can provide
- Oral temperature of 100.4-degrees/ armpit temperature of 99.4 or greater accompanied by signs of illness.
- Lethargy, abnormal breathing uncontrolled diarrhea, (stool runs out of the diaper or the child can't get to the toilet in time), two or more vomiting episodes, rash, mouth sores with drooling, behavior changes, or other signs that the child may be severely ill.
- Green discharge from the mouth, nose, or eyes
- Pink eye with white or yellow discharge
- Scabies, head lice, or other infestation

Decisions to dismiss an ill child from school will be based on the observations of the child and the best interest of the other children in the class. If the parent or legal guardian of the child cannot be reached, the first person listed on the emergency contact list will be notified to pick up the child. Please do not send your child back to school unless the child has been symptom-free without medications for 24 hours.

Parents or guardians should notify the managing director if the child has been diagnosed with a communicable disease. All parents will be notified in the event of a possible exposure to a communicable disease and advised on the appropriate measure to take if their child should become infected.

Medical Incidents

It is extremely important that parents keep their child's records up to date at Journey. Teachers need immediate access to emergency information on each child. Written authorization for emergency transportation will be obtained before the child enters the Journey's program.

Based on the child's Food Allergy Action Plan, caregivers will receive training and put into practice:

- Recognizing symptoms of an allergic reaction
- Treating allergic reactions

Parents and staff shall arrange to have appropriate medication (if necessary) on site, proper storage of medication, and equipment to use while the child is in our care.

- Journey will promptly take proper steps outlined in the child's Action Plan if a reaction occurs in childcare.
- Journey will notify emergency medical personnel if epinephrine has been given.
- Journey will notify parents of any allergic reaction or possible contact with food that may have caused an allergic reaction.

Each individual child's food allergies will be posted prominently in the classroom and wherever food is prepared. Staff will receive a written copy of this policy in their orientation packets before beginning work at Journey.

In the event of an accident or injury, the child will be given first aid immediately. Journey will contact one or both parents. If they cannot be reached, the staff will call the next person on the list of authorized persons.

If emergency care is needed, 911 will be contacted and the child will be transported to a hospital. A staff person will accompany the child and the parents will be contacted to meet them at the hospital.

Documentation will be maintained on injuries/medical emergencies. Parents will be notified of any minor or serious injuries and be given a written incident/accident report by the child's caregiver. A parent's signature will be required, and a copy of the report will be issued to the parent. Medical Emergency Release Forms are required to be filled out at the time of enrollment. Medical emergencies will be reported to Child Protective Services as required by Minimum Standards (Code: 746.35).

Biting is a natural part of the developmental process for young children but must be properly addressed. We are concerned for the safety of all our students; thus the center's policy is as follows:

1. The parent of the child bitten will be contacted by phone or email if the skin is broken.
2. The parent of the biter will be notified via Incident Report; and the parent's signature will be required.
3. Information regarding the name of the biter will not be disclosed.
4. Every precaution to prevent biting will be taken to channel the energy of the child into an appropriate activity.

Safety Procedures

Our building is secured with multiple security features for the safety of your children and your peace of mind. An emergency evacuation and relocation plan is posted on every classroom door. This plan is designed to ensure the safe removal of children during a fire, weather, or other emergency.

Journey has an annual fire inspection conducted by a fire marshal. A copy of the most recent fire-inspection report is available at the school office.

Practice drills occur monthly during the year. These drills familiarize the children and staff with emergency procedures so that they can respond quickly and calmly during an actual event.

In all emergency situations, the Director and staff's first priority will be to move children to our designated safe location as quickly as possible. Children will be directed and escorted by staff members to calmly and orderly walk to the designated safe area. The staff will escort toddlers using a "walking rope". Children with limited mobility will be taken one on one by a staff member. Teachers take their classroom clipboard with them, which contains parent and emergency contact information for each student, authorization for emergency care, and

attendance records. Once the children are safely relocated, the staff will commence taking attendance to account for every child. The Journey Director will be the last one to leave the building after making a round through all classrooms and bathrooms to ensure all children and staff have exited the building.

In the event of severe weather, children will be taken to the Raimond Christian Center Gymnasium used by Journey. Children can be picked up one at a time using the back-alley entrance of the Raimond Christian Center.

In the event of a fire, children will be relocated either to the fenced lawn facing Harrison Street or curbside on South 4th Street, depending on the location of the fire. If shelter is needed at the time of evacuation, children will be taken to the church sanctuary at 321 E. Harrison Street. Parents may call the First Methodist Church line at (956) 423-0540 for the location of the children following evacuation. The Director will additionally call the fire department and the local licensing department to leave word on any alternate location of the children.

In the event of an Intruder to the building, staff members have been advised to remain in the classroom with the doors closed and locked. Parents will be called using the emergency contact forms once the perimeters are safe.

The goal of a gang-free zone is to deter certain types of criminal activity in areas where children gather by enforcing tougher penalties. Criminal activity within 1000 feet of our preschool is a violation of this law and is therefore subject to increased penalty.

During Hurricane Watch, Journey will continue to meet as scheduled. However, if you live or work in an area that is prone to flooding, please use your best judgment in transporting yourself and your children.

If a Hurricane Warning is issued by the weather service, Journey will close. Classes will resume once weather permits.

During inclement weather, parents should listen to local TV and/or radio stations for school closings. In the event of inclement weather, Journey will follow the decision made by HCISD regarding school closings. If possible, Journey will contact parents by email and phone.

Additional Policies

School pictures and snapshots are taken randomly for classroom projects, website use, or power point presentations during school gatherings. Pictures will not be used without the consent of the child's parent(s).

Breastfeeding Journey parents have the right to either provide breast milk for their child while in our care, or they may work with the teacher and Director to find a comfortable place within the center to breastfeed.

Medications will be administered if we have the written permission of a parent. Parents must use the Medication Dispersion form provided in the front office to describe in specific detail

how the medication is to be administered. The medication must provide full instructions along with a way to properly dispense the medication.

Diaper rash ointments may be administered only with the parent's written permission. The diaper ointment should be in its original container and labeled with the child's name and written instructions.

Animals are prohibited from the grounds of Journey Preschool.

Currently Journey does not offer transportation or field trips.

Journey discourages parents from hiring staff for babysitting purposes. Journey is not responsible for children cared for by an employee after operational hours.

Volunteers

Parent volunteers are needed and encouraged to participate with Journey. We welcome all interested persons wishing to serve in our school. Interested people may get more information on joining the Journey Leadership Team or the Journey Governing Board by contacting the Director.

According to Texas State Minimum Standards, any person who will be frequently visiting or working in the childcare center must have a name-based criminal history background check and a DFPS central registry check that is clear. Journey Preschool welcomes any parents and family members who would like to volunteer with the understanding that this name-based background check must be performed prior to their attendance. Please contact the JPS office for further information on how you may volunteer.

Parents of enrolled children are required to participate in our annual Pumpkin Patch Fundraiser. Parents are asked to sign-up for at least a two-hour shift to sell our pumpkins to the public. If parents cannot attend, then they are responsible to find a suitable replacement or else pay \$40 to have youth team members hired for their shift.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

By law, staff is required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services child abuse hotline at 1-800-252-5400. Each staff member will receive annual training in the area of child abuse and neglect, including training on spotting the warning signs.

WARNING SIGNS OF ABUSE according to www.helpandhope.org may include:

- Nervous around adults or afraid of certain adults
- Reluctant to go home (coming to school early or staying late, for example)

- Very passive and withdrawn or aggressive and disruptive
- Tired a lot, or they might complain of nightmares or not sleeping well.
- Fearful and anxious

More information can be found online at www.helpandhope.org, which includes strategies for parents in preventing abuse. If you suspect abuse or neglect, please call:

Texas Department of Protective And Regulatory Services
601 W. Sesame Drive – Harlingen, Texas (956) 423-0123
Child Abuse hotline at 1-800-252-5400

Resources for Parents and Families

Easter Seals Rio Grande Valley, Texas

PO Box 489, McAllen, TX (956) 631-9171

Early Childhood Intervention services help young children with delays or disabilities in cognitive, social/emotional, communicative, adaptive, and physical development.

Region One ESC

1900 W. Schunior, Edinburg, TX (956) 984-6000

Early Childhood Intervention program serves children from birth to 3 years of age who have physical disabilities and developmental delays in language, speech, self-help skills, social or emotional skills, gross or fine motor skills, cognitive skills, walking, talking, eating, and playing.

Autism United-RGV

(956) 590-5127

Tropical Texas Behavioral Health

103 N. Loop 499, Harlingen, TX (956) 364-6600

For children with mental, intellectual and developmental disabilities

Moody Clinic

1901 E. 22nd St., Brownsville, TX (956) 542-8504

Provides the highest quality of rehabilitative services to maximize the potential of children with special needs.

Culture of Life Ministries

402 E. Van Buren, Harlingen, TX (956) 970-9327

Provides free health services to all.

Family Crisis Center

616 W. Taylor, Harlingen, TX (956) 423-9305 www.familycrisisctr.org

Family Crisis is a domestic violence and rape crisis center that provides families with emergency shelter, crisis intervention, hospital accompaniment, and advocacy.

Cameron County Children's Advocacy Center/Monica's and Maggie's House

1390 W. Expressway 83, San Benito, TX (956) 361-3313 www.cameroncountycac.com

Serves as an advocate for child victims of abuse through prevention, intervention, and treatment.