

Vista Coop Policies and Procedures

1. Introduction

We would like to thank you for choosing Vista Coop for your childcare needs. We look forward to providing your children with a safe, warm and caring environment that will nurture them and help them grow into healthy, happy and well-adjusted children, full of wonder for the world around them. The following policies and procedures will ensure a safe, creative, stimulating and caring environment which promotes self-esteem, sound character, responsibility and respect.

Your child will be under the care of qualified and experienced educators who will ensure that these policies are implemented for the benefit of all children and their families.

2. Requirements on admission

2.1 Babies (0-12 months approx)

- Milk bottle feeds that are already made up and brought to the Centre on a daily basis, should be labelled with the child's name and date of preparation. Same goes for expressed milk. Alternatively, you can provide us with a thermos with hot water and a container with the needed milk powder.
- Our policy includes a very flexible meal times procedure that is tailor-made to meet individual child requirements. Furthermore, our educators are trained to offer assistance whilst encouraging child independence at meals.

2.2 Toddlers (approx 13-36 months) and Kindergarten children

- Drink containers should be labelled with the child's name. Alternatively, you can provide us with a thermos with hot water and a container with the needed milk powder. A separate bottle of water should always be brought in, apart from the milk.
- Please put name labels also on lunch boxes and bags and make sure that the labels are replaced when they are washed away as names become illegible.
- Only plain birthday cakes are allowed.
- All children will be helped to have their respective food for breakfast according to the designated cluster. All children sit down for a snack (time depends on the group cluster). Ideal foods for our snack are sandwiches, fruit (diced or sliced), dry cereal, dried fruit, chopped vegetables, yogurt etc. Children who leave in the early afternoon should ideally have their lunchtime meal at home. Those who stay later should also have enough food for lunch which we will willingly warm, if necessary.

2.3 All children

- Special dietary requirements. We are full geared up for individual special dietary needs. In these cases, the designated educator for your child will document and comply with such requirements in a clear standard operating procedure.

- Food Preparation. Our educators are all qualified in food handling and thus are ready to prepare and heat up food and drink to the appropriate temperatures.
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- Food storage and refrigeration. Our centre avails itself of appropriate storage and refrigeration of food as required.
- Families are asked to supply us with a bottle of water, apart from the milk. Thus, we can ensure that a sufficient supply of drinking water is available to all children at all times.
- Please send enough nappies for daily use. Also include a supply of wipes and cream used during nappy changing. Alternatively, you may provide a full pack of nappies and supplies to be left at the Centre, labelled with the child's name and our educators will notify you when the supply gets short.
- Kindly send in an old t-shirt (an old one of yours or of an older sibling would be ideal) or an apron to be used during messy activities like cooking and art.
- A timed schedule of feeding, sleeping and changing times for your baby are posted on our online web-based App on a daily basis. You will be asked to download this App free of charge. Through this App our educators will note down significant events of the day such that you may have a better picture of what your baby was up to whilst in our care.
- Please provide a bedding sheet (and blanket) required by your baby. This will be kept at the centre and returned to you to wash and replace when required.
- Please make sure that your child always has a spare set of clothing available. This will be kept at the centre. We will send these back for laundering when required.
- Kindly ensure that all footwear used by your child is comfortable and of the right size. Footwear must either be fastened with Velcro or else is of the slip-on kind. Lace-up footwear is not practical for such young children and is to be avoided.
- If your child uses a soother, we suggest you send a spare one of the same type s/he uses to be kept at the centre, just in case you forget it at home.
- We emphasize that all items including comforters (in Maltese, qlejba) should be clearly labelled with your child's name.
- A child's sleeping pattern is different from one another and we observe these needs in consultation with the family. Please note that within their group, sleeping patterns may vary due to the various activities and distractions. Please note that at no time will we force a child to sleep and at no time will we stop children from sleeping or force them to stay awake.

3. Healthy Eating Policy

Please ensure that all food sent in for your child is nutritious and as fresh as possible. An excessive intake of sugar and salt is harmful. Required amounts of these are normally found naturally in the food we eat as part of a healthy, balanced diet and therefore foods high in sugar like biscuits and cookies (not to mention sweets) and snacks with excessive amounts of salt, such as crisps and similar snacks, are not welcome at our Childcare Centres. Please also refrain from sending nuts as these are the frequent causes of allergies apart from being a choking hazard in most cases. Drinks should ideally be milk or water. A fridge is available and therefore food and drink like milk and yoghurt are welcome.

4. Jewellery and toys

Your child does not need to bring jewellery, toys or expensive items to the Centre. Jewellery, including bracelets, necklaces, studs and earrings (of any type) cannot enter our centre. There is a risk that the item gets dismantled, loose, broken or lost – which thereafter might be harmful to our children. So please do not send your child with any jewellery, toys or expensive items whatsoever.

5. Transition

5.1 Home to Centre

The transition from home to the childcare centre is tailored according to the child's needs. It is recommended that families should visit the childcare centre together with the child once before the child starts attending. It is also recommended that, if possible, you start leaving your child for a short period of time and then gradually increase it to the full care you might need.

For some children (and families) this may be the first experience of childcare away from home. We understand that this may be distressing and it is normal for most families to feel apprehensive when they are to give up their precious little ones to strangers for the first time. It is also normal for children to cry and clutch at their parent/guardian as they are leaving. Children usually adjust very rapidly in the environment that we have set up in our Centre. If, in the rare occasion, the child continues to cry incessantly, we will contact the family to inform of the issue.

5.2 Centre to Kindergarten

The transition from childcare centre to Kindergarten might be overwhelming. For this reason, our educators support all children, according to their needs, in order to prepare them for school. We encourage independence, help during potty-training, and mentally prepare the children under our care for their next step in education. We are willing to meet educators from the child's prospective school in order to discuss progress of development, and also prepare a development report for the school's reference.

6. Partnership with families

Families are always welcome in our Childcare centre and we operate on an 'open door' policy. All that we offer children at our childcare centres is only meaningful in the context of a healthy relationship between families and us. We encourage open and frequent dialogue (via emails, calls and appointments) and ensure that we address concerns as quickly and effectively as possible. We appreciate that parents are entrusting us with their precious children and promise to treat them as our own. To emphasize, we believe that our childcare centre must be in partnership with families for a richer learning experience. Furthermore, from time to time, we organize activities, such as parents' days, Christmas activities and graduation ceremonies, in which parents are invited to participate.

It is helpful to us for families to give feedback on how their child is faring. This information helps us respond most effectively to the child's individual needs and also improve our service. We always respond in the strictest of confidence over any personal information given by the family or child.

Children's information compiled is confidential and will only be seen by us, the child's family and relevant professionals. Information about the child's day is shared daily with the child's family by verbal reporting and any work that the child has done is presented to the parents. We also track the child's progress using our specific online App which is also linked to the Learning Outcome Framework, developed specifically for your child at the appropriate age. Parents have access to this App free of charge.

We are more than happy to collaborate with other professionals such as speech therapists, CDAU assessors, amongst others, should this be required in the interest of the child.

Significant moments of your child's activities are recorded and posted on our online App.

7. Safety and Security of Children

7.1 Indoors

The setting and furnishings are informal, spacious and bright. Age-appropriate sanitary facilities are available. Toilet cubicles provide the required privacy and are non-locking for safety reasons. All glass on the premises is safe for children and will not shatter on impact. We have safety covers on power sockets and gates to prevent children leaving safe areas as well as door protectors at each useable door. Outside doors are kept locked at all times.

7.2 The garden/outdoor area

Our outside area has been designed to offer diverse opportunities to the children. The outdoor area is equipped with outdoor play equipment and serves as a paddling pool area in summer.

8. Health and Safety Policy

We are required to consider the health and safety of all the children attending our Centre and therefore we must insist that parents/guardians do not bring their children when sick. If you are doubtful whether the symptoms of your child are that of requiring your child to stay at home, please phone Administration as early as possible so we can assess whether it is fine to bring your child or not.

If your child shows any sign of illness when she/he is at the Centre then you will be contacted to arrange the pick-up of your child. If you cannot leave your place of work it may be sensible to arrange a back-up plan for somebody who would be able to collect the child should this occur. If we feel your child needs urgent medical attention/treatment, we will, of course, seek this on your behalf. It is of vital importance that you keep contact telephone numbers up to date so that we can contact you. If no one can be reached the responsibility of your child's health will be assumed by the doctor.

If the child cannot attend on any particular day kindly advise us beforehand or at least, before 8:30am on that day. In case of absence of 3 days or more due to sickness kindly bring a medical certificate stating that the child is fit to attend the nursery again. In case of allergies, kindly obtain a doctor's certificate to this effect.

9. Medicinals

Although we do not generally administer any medicines, we understand that some children may suffer from chronic conditions such as asthma or allergies, which in circumstances, may necessitate the administration of medicinal treatment by our educators.

In such cases, parents must provide us with a doctor's prescription which includes dosage and instructions of how to administer. Parents must ensure that proper training is given to our staff on the proper procedures for administration of said medicines.

It is very important that parents do not send/leave any medicines in the child's bag without informing the educator. Without the proper written instructions and training, we will not administer any medicines to the child.

9.1 Immunisation

Parents are to provide us with a copy of the immunisation record of their child and must inform us when new inoculations are given. Should parents require further information, one may consult the National Immunisation Schedule as published by the authorities.

10. Behaviour management

Kids coming to our Centre should feel that they are coming to have fun and learn in a safe and secure environment free from the threat of injury or harassment of any kind. Any actions harmful to any child will be dealt with in a prompt and appropriate manner. Kids are expected to behave properly and to respect the persons and property around them. We believe that children must gradually assume responsibility for their own behaviour and the consequences for their actions.

10.1 Unacceptable behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour is behaviour which:

- Is dangerous, hurtful or offensive to someone else – other children or adults;
- Is dangerous to the child himself/herself;
- Will make another child unwelcome or unacceptable to other people;
- Damages other people's property.

10.2 Positive discipline

- We endorse Positive Discipline as an effective way of setting limits for children:
- Rewarding good behaviour - rewards are constructive and encourage further effort. A kind word of praise is often sufficient reward.
- Setting realistic limits according to age and stage of development - because as children grow and develop, their understanding of the consequences of their behaviour increases and our expectations of them change.
- Setting a good example - because young children take more notice of how we behave and what we say, they also like to copy and repeat.
- Encouragement, not orders and instructions - because "Do as you're told" and "Because I said so" teaches nothing for next time. Positive discipline means explaining why.

- Being consistent - saying no and meaning no - because children need to know where they stand and it helps if they know that we mean what we say.
- Building children's self-esteem - shaming, scolding, hurting and humiliating children can lead to even worse behaviour. Attention, approval and praise can build self-esteem and a child who feels valued is more likely to behave well.
- Children are explained the rules, so that they are familiar with the guidelines. We stress two main patterns of desired behaviour - respect for other people and respect for property.

However, there will be disagreements between children. Young children especially, who are not adept at communication; have a hard time expressing their feelings. Sometimes they hit, throw toys or bite because of their frustration not because of any desire to hurt anyone. When these situations occur the methods we use to manage unwanted behaviour are:

- Challenging it immediately
- Explaining why it is unacceptable in a way suitable to the child's level of understanding
- Distracting the child
- Offering an alternative way of doing things
- Removing the child from the situation
- Using sanctions if necessary e.g., withholding treats or removing a toy for a short period
- Showing the harm they did to the other child
- Asking child to apologise for the harm

10.3 Discipline Procedures

If a discipline problem arises that does not respond to the above mentioned techniques, we will request a meeting with the parents/guardians and together we will try to find a solution. You may be called to remove your child if his/her behaviour prevents us from being able to properly care for the other children. If the problem continues, sadly other arrangements by the parents for the care of the child may have to be made, for the safety and well-being of all.

Methods we do not use to manage unwanted behaviour:

- Physical punishment including slapping, smacking, shaking
- Verbal abuse/name calling
- Frightening or humiliating the child
- Withholding food or drink or sleep.

We recognize the importance of a positive, consistent approach and of giving plenty of praise and encouragement.

11. Biting policy

Biting is a common behaviour among children and can be a concern for parents and staff. Biting can often be painful and frightening for the child who has been bitten and also frightening for the child who bites. This is a part of some children's development and can be triggered when they do not yet have words to communicate their anger, frustration or need. We believe that by understanding the developmental stages of the children under our care and their individual needs, we can proactively prevent many biting behaviours by the environment which is created for them.

All anti-social behaviour is addressed at our centres, with special emphasis on biting incidents. Our educators provide an excellent standard of supervision, however, unfortunately, some incidents of pinching, scratching, pushing, biting etc do sometimes happen.

We treat each case individually. Great care is taken of both the child who bites and the victim. In these cases, we document such incidents (which are countersigned by parents) and discuss at length with both parents and professionals as the case may require.

12. Child protection

Our Centre follows the child protection policies and procedures as established by the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities and each member of our staff is bound to comply with these standards. Our staff who are trained to recognize signs of suspected abuse are bound to report any suspicions to the Administration, who in turn, is obliged to report said suspicions to the appropriate authorities after the investigation is undertaken in a confidential manner. Should staff feel that Administration has not taken heed of their reports in a correct manner they are duty bound to take any suitable measure to inform the competent authority directly (Agencija Appogg Tel 2295 9000 or Freephone 179). Moreover, we have strict controls on who has access to the childcare centre and whom we will allow a child to be collected by.

During nappy changing, educators are accompanied by a colleague and/or supervised by the Centre Manager. Each activity room has a nappy changing facility which is visible and not hidden behind closed doors.

13. Registration

A non-refundable registration fee is applicable to all new applications. Applications for fee-paying children must also be accompanied by the first month's fee. Thereafter fees are payable monthly in advance, immediately upon receipt of the bill. Public Holidays are not replaceable.

Missed booked hours can be replaced within the same month. We also give the opportunity for families to replace up to 3 days of missed booked hours from one month to the next.

14. Free childcare scheme

All our centre are approved and participate to the Free Childcare Scheme. Please refer to the terms and conditions of the Free Childcare Scheme as laid out by the Education Department.

15. Child's personal records

All childcare staff respect the confidentiality of parents and children. Only staff who work with the child will have access to the file with information about the child. When information regarding their child is shared with parents, it is done in a sensitive manner. Discussions about a child are not held in front of the child.

16. Collecting your child

16.1 Authorised persons

Details of persons authorised to collect your child are requested during registration. It is emphasized that such persons must be in possession of their ID card when collecting children. Under no circumstance will children be handed over to minors or to anyone who is not listed in the registration form and without an ID card. When in doubt we will call the parents who will be asked to verify any change in norm.

We are sure you will appreciate that these systems are in place for the safety of your child and we therefore kindly ask for your full cooperation in this matter. Although our staff will get used to you as time goes by, there may be circumstances when a different educator who might be new to you is here when you collect your child. This may happen if we have a reliever such as in case of sickness of our regular staff.

16.2 Uncollected child

Obviously, things can happen at the last minute which can cause delays; whenever possible please contact us to let us know when you expect to arrive. If your child is not collected at the agreed time, we will of course continue to care for your child, however late fees may be applied.

17. Our human resources

Background checks and screening as required by law are done on all staff members for the safety of our kids. Moreover, staff are monitored and surveilled for increase of safety. All staff are trained and qualified. Students are supervised constantly and not left alone with children.

17.1 Staff recruitment

Vista Coop is an Equal Opportunity employer and always endeavors to find the best staff for the job of an educator. Vista Coop does not discriminate against any applicant on the basis of gender, race, colour, nationality, marital status, sexual orientation, parental status, religious or political beliefs. All employment policies, procedures and practices are developed and monitored with the equal opportunity concept in mind.

17.2 Staff development

On-going training is given to our staff as staff development and keeping staff up-to-date. Training will cover personal characteristics, motivation process, expertise and motivation level. Training involves reviewing the role of the educators while identifying and discussing any difficulties or obstacles encountered by the educators. During training we plan for the future, agree specific objectives to achieve those plans, and plan the topics to be covered with the children in the following weeks through brainstorming sessions.

17.3 Staff supervision

We strongly believe that our staff members should be given full support by management. Vista Coop's core value is to continuously enhance staff performance thereby improving the quality of service offered to our children, providing a higher standard of safe care and education.

Vista Coop organises frequent individual and staff meetings. 'Being there' helps us observe each other, analyse issues, guide and explain methods of work. Also, we communicate significant instructions and policies in writing via email.

Our meetings cover reviews of individual work and issues, discussions of personal development, training and support needs, and discussions of any other matter relating to the work situation that might have an impact on the quality of work.

Vista Coop recognises that staff supervision is a reflective process that encourages employees who are focused and efficient.

Above all, supervision is particularly pertinent to newly-qualified or newly-hired staff who maybe inexperienced and whose performance may need more frequent monitoring.

17.4 Staff Record Keeping

Vista Coop keeps the necessary staff details including contract of employment, appointed position and an established salary structure. All documents pertaining to individual staff members, their qualifications, time and attendance are kept by the organisation in strict confidence.

18. Whistle blowing

Vista Coop gives utmost importance to the issue of safeguarding our children from any kind of abuse in our Centres. All reports by whistle-blowers are treated confidentially to the greatest extent possible. Any staff member who notices any form of abuse taking place, the staff member has the rightful duty to report such instances of any inappropriate behaviour to Child Safety Services on 2598 3440 or 2598 3473-9. Reports may be forwarded to the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE) and to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) on 2598 2311 or 2598 2505.

19. Complaints about the service

We intend to provide the highest quality of care and education for your child. Any parent/guardian who feels uncomfortable about any aspect of the childcare centre should talk these anxieties over with the Administration of the Centre. We believe any complaint can be made constructively and resolved at a very early stage. Issues underlying the complaint are identified, investigated and discussed, and eventually, action will be taken as required by the situation. The person making the complaint will be informed of what can or cannot be done. One can also forward their comments and issues to the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE) and to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) on 2598 2311 or 2598 2505.

20. Data protection

Vista Coop realizes the importance of ensuring that personal information held is treated confidentially and is committed to ensuring that all personal information is only collected, disclosed, used and stored in accordance and conform with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other supplementary laws and regulations. Your and your child's privacy

is critically important to us. At Vista Coop we have a few fundamental principles: a) We don't ask you for personal information unless we truly need it; b) We don't share your personal information with anyone except to comply with the law, develop our services, or protect our or your child's rights and/or their safety; and c) we don't store personal information on our servers unless required for the on-going operation of one of our services. If you have questions about deleting or correcting your or your kid's personal data please contact us.

Use and disclosure of personal information: Any personal information that we collect will only be used and disclosed for the purpose for which it has been provided to us. Personal information may need to be disclosed to external service providers in order for those service providers to fulfil their service obligations to the organisation. Where personal information is disclosed to an external party, Vista Coop will take steps to ensure that the external party treats such information confidentially and in accordance with the GDPR.

Email communications: If you have listed your email address in the application form, you may receive email communications from us, and we may use your contact details to perform our services.

Accessing and correcting personal Information: You may request us to provide you with access to personal information we hold about you. If any personal information we hold about you is not accurate, complete or up to date, please let us know and in most cases, we will use all reasonable efforts to update the information.

Personal information security: Vista Coop is committed to keeping secure the data you provide to us and we will take all reasonable precautions to protect your personally identifiable information from loss, misuse or alteration. From time to time it may be necessary for us to revise our privacy policy. We reserve the right to change our privacy policy at any time. We will notify you of this by sending you an email.

21. Equal opportunities policy

Vista Coop is committed to promoting equal opportunities throughout the operations and activities at our Childcare Centres, which include promotional material, employment of our staff, their training, as well as the planning and implementation of all educational activities and care to the children entrusted in our care. When considering applicants for employment at our Centres the criteria for employment will be the ability to fulfil the work role effectively within practical placements. All our clients who include children, their families, as well as our staff and trainees, are respected as individuals and will not experience any disadvantages or receive less favourable treatment than others because of gender, family responsibilities, age, colour, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, race, ethnicity, nationality, beliefs, religion or class.

22. Notes

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, some policies and procedures have been amended in order to reflect the guidelines for child care centres issued by the Ministry for Health.

- Clean bedding should be provided from home and will be returned daily.
- Parents are not allowed to stay at the Centre with their child. All parents have to drop-off their child in front of our main door.
- Activities for parents (such as parents' day, Christmas activity, graduation ceremony) cannot be organized.

August 2021

Vista Coop

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