



mcum

Monroe County

United Ministries

Compass Early Learning Center: Downtown
Volunteer Handbook

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Welcome to MCUM!

Welcome to Monroe County United Ministries, and thanks for volunteering to be a part of our team! Here at MCUM, we provide two major services to residents in Monroe County:

- 1) **An acclaimed, accredited and affordable professional childcare center designed to serve working, low-income families *and*;**
- 2) **Self-sufficiency assistance and stabilizing services for families experiencing hardship.**

Our **Compass Early Learning Center (CELC)** is MCUM's oldest and most recognized program; our childcare program dates back to our founding in 1939 and is usually what comes to mind first when people think of us in the broader community.

MCUM's CELC is uniquely designed to serve working, low-income families and their children. We operate year-round with extended hours to accommodate early morning drop offs and evening pick up times. Most importantly, a combination of block grants, community support, and government funding enables us to utilize a sliding-scale fee for parents and cap our prices at no more than 10 percent of household income. This allows MCUM to provide high-quality care to as many as 125 children between the ages of 6 weeks and 6 years old at prices their families can afford.

Furthermore, the CELC is licensed by the state of Indiana and accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – a nationally-recognized standard of excellence in early childhood education. This makes MCUM's program the only licensed and accredited center in Monroe County that specifically caters to low-income families.

MCUM's Mission:

At MCUM, our mission is to “create lasting solutions to economic, educational and social injustice in our community through quality services, collaboration and innovation.” In plain English, our goal is to **assist people through the hardships of life and empower them to achieve stability**. Typical preschool childcare costs – often \$250-\$285 *per child per week* – can devastate low-income families, forcing parents to choose between employment and decent care for their children. MCUM removes this choice by slashing those costs to an affordable percentage of parents' income – typically \$30-\$70 per week.

Additionally, MCUM's Self-Sufficiency Program offers emergency assistance to families experiencing a crisis. Things like sudden injury, illness, loss of employment, divorce, or even the loss of a vehicle can drastically impact a family's financial situation. MCUM's Coaches meet with clients facing situations like these one-on-one to discuss their needs and circumstances and provide assistance any way we can. This includes providing direct services from our on-site, volunteer-run food pantry or cleaning and hygiene closet and indirect service through referrals to other agencies or government programs.

The Need for Affordable Childcare

For those who don't have children, it's easy to overlook the importance of childcare in a community: Its importance is hard to overstate it for both parents and children, alike.

For Parents

Access to affordable childcare can mean the difference between securing or retaining employment, staying in school, or even being able to afford rent and groceries. At the going market rate, enrolling a child in a licensed childcare facility costs **\$250-\$285 per child per week** – that's **\$1,000 or more per month** in childcare costs alone! This means that, on average, it costs parents more to send a child to daycare each year than an in-state student pays to attend Indiana University!

Realistically-speaking, this means many parents are simply priced out of the childcare market. Parents working full-time at minimum wage (\$7.25) earn just \$290 per week before taxes – barely enough to cover childcare costs at all. Even a full-time worker at \$10 per hour only makes \$400 per week before taxes, leaving less than \$115-\$150 weekly after childcare costs for groceries, rent, transportation, insurance, medical costs, and the rest of the child's needs (diapers, personal care products, toys, etc.). Families who can barely afford rent each month surely can't afford to pay \$250 each week for childcare, but also can't afford to lose their employment to provide the care themselves. This is one reason why currently, 64% of Monroe County children do not have a spot in a licensed childcare center, and that number is climbing (up 9% from 2013). MCUM's waitlist for our program is typically 25 families or more in length.

For Children

Lacking access to key developmental opportunities predisposes children to a lifelong achievement gap. The greatest immediate risk is starting school behind their peers, and avoidable early pitfalls in academic achievement (including **lack of nutrition and of a high-quality early childhood education**) "impose a lifetime of heavy and often tragic consequences," (NEA.org). Consequences include requiring additional resources from the public school system such as special education and grade repetition, and result in lower earnings and poorer health outcomes as adults. Because children of low-income families are the most likely to suffer from poor nutrition and lack of quality childcare options, this **supports a cycle of poverty** and reinforces generational poverty in Bloomington and across the United States.

MCUM's Compass Early Learning Center (CELC) intervenes to foster school readiness in children who are most susceptible to the achievement gap. In 2015, 73% of MCUM's 5-year-old students were deemed "school ready" according to the Indiana Standards Tool for Alternate Reporting of Kindergarten Readiness, compared to only 33% of entering kindergarteners in Monroe County. By providing 75 percent of each child's nutritional needs each day within the program, we ensure that we are nourishing the body, mind, and spirit of every child whose care is entrusted to us.

How MCUM's Childcare Center Works

In many respects, MCUM's childcare program is indistinguishable from successful for-profit childcare facilities you might have experience with. Children are dropped off in the morning and picked up in the evenings. During the day, they participate in indoor and outdoor play-based curriculum, as well as other classroom activities led by our teachers or volunteers. Compass operates on **extended hours** (7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) **year-round** to better accommodate our working parents.

Currently, more than **30 children** are divided into **4 classrooms** based loosely on age, but also on their individual development. The age ranges for the classrooms below are therefore approximate:

- **Giraffes [Birth – 12 months]** – “Giraffes” are our youngest and smallest children. They are very delicate and require specialized care, right down to changing diapers. Because of our licensing standards, working with our babies is restricted to trained MCUM staff and long-term volunteers.
- **Hippos [12 - 24 months]** – Our “Hippos” are our infants and require great care and attention. They're not quite independent at this age, but are learning and growing quickly. Many are developing social skills for the first time. Because of licensing ratios, we tend to have relatively few Hippos (~10) enrolled at MCUM.
- **Zebras [2-year-olds]** – “Zebras” toe the line between infants and toddlers. Rambunctious and curious, they can move with confidence and play with less assistance. Our 2-year-olds can make their wishes known more easily and understand more than they can say. They're a fun group with a lot of personality, and we also have around 10 Zebras in their classroom.
- **Elephants [3-5-year-olds]** – “Elephants” are in our mixed-aged classroom for our oldest children. During these ages, children learn to become self-sufficient, how to relate and interact with peers, and much more. In virtually every aspect of development, their knowledge base and competencies are exploding, including social and emotional skills. This is why it's good for these children to be blended by age. At capacity, our Elephant classroom hosts about 20 children.

We do our best to accommodate volunteer preferences for age ranges, but can't guarantee that we'll have availability in the classroom of your choice. Still, be sure to inform the Volunteer Coordinator if there's a specific classroom or age range you think you'd like to gain experience in.

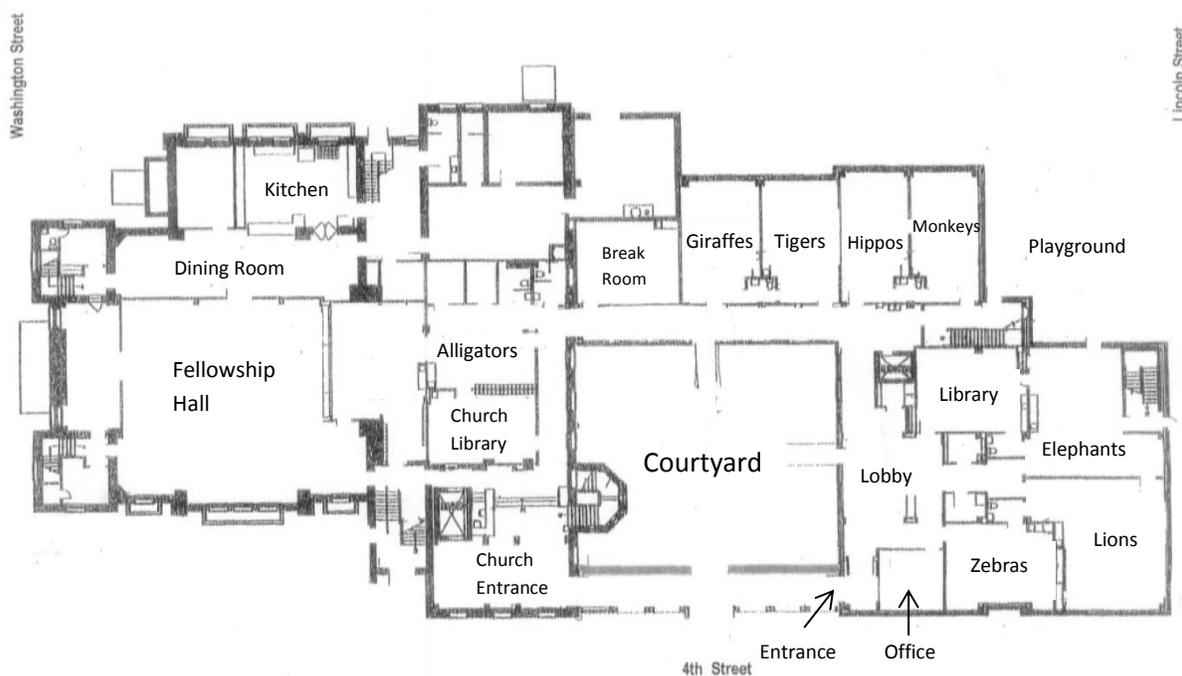
There is at least **one MCUM staff member in each classroom at all times**. Full-time teachers are often accompanied by part-time teacher's aides, who may rotate between classrooms or with other aides throughout the day. MCUM's staff members are highly-trained childcare professionals who develop strong bonds with the children and their families. **We expect all volunteers to defer to their expertise in the classrooms and treat teachers and aides as supervisors at all times.**

Each day, the children in MCUM's care receive at least **75 percent of their nutritional needs for the day**. Our kitchen staff and volunteers prepare a morning snack, well-balanced breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack at set times throughout the day. Meals and snacks are all served in the cafeteria and are slightly staggered to allow classrooms to rotate in and out.

Daily Childcare Schedule

7:00 a.m.	Drop-off Time Begins
7:20 a.m. - 7:30 a.m.	Morning Snack [<i>Cafeteria</i>]
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.	Free Play and In-Class Learning Centers
9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Breakfast [<i>Cafeteria</i>]
9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Indoor/Outdoor Free Play, Group "Circle Time" [AM Volunteers]
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Lunch [<i>Cafeteria</i>]
12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Rest Time
2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.	Afternoon Snack [<i>Cafeteria</i>]
2:15 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Indoor/Outdoor Free Play, Group "Circle Time" [PM Volunteers (3-5)]
5:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.	Pick-up Time

Compass ELC - Downtown Map



Childcare Volunteer Roles

We encourage volunteers to be as involved in our childcare center as they want to be. There's a lot of flexibility within and between roles, but we have five main roles for childcare volunteers:

Classroom Assistant:

Our most basic position, Classroom Assistants help teachers and children during and between activities throughout the day. Assistants help teachers in any way that is needed, including providing supervision and promoting playground safety; encouraging children to try new and different activities; working with children who require focused connections; inviting children to help clean up play spaces; and actively participating in structured and unstructured play. Classroom Assistants are responsible to MCUM's teachers and aides, but should assert themselves in the classrooms and actively seek ways to be helpful.

What this looks like: Push a child on a swing on our playground before joining in on a miniature game of soccer. Then help your teacher line the children up and return to the classroom to play with trucks or read a story as a class. Finally, ensure the children wash their hands before they line up to go to lunch.

Activity Leader:

Activity Leaders supplement our curriculum with special projects or activities in subjects like science, math, reading, or language arts. Leaders collaborate with teachers to select and plan age-appropriate activities, then prepare, execute, and clean-up these events. Activity Leaders can design their own opportunities to share with children and build skills week-after-week, enriching the children's academic experience. Even simple interactive activities can make a child's day, providing a memorable moment that assists in each child's cognitive development.

What this looks like: Move from classroom to classroom introducing American Sign Language to the children each week. Plan your own ASL lessons with input from our teachers and help the children develop new cognitive/motor skills. Or find age-appropriate nutrition ideas online that include hands-on learning activities. Talk to your teacher, and they'll explain how to set up and schedule your activities.

Skill Sharer:

Skill Sharers enrich children's lives with the humanities, including music, dance, arts, storytelling, and crafts. Sharers also work with teachers to select and plan age-appropriate activities or simply perform for the children each week. Design your own projects or facilitate activities you find from other resources, then prepare, lead, and clean-up activities as needed. Don't be shy! Share your talent with our teachers and they'll tell you how best to share it with the children.

What this looks like: Bring your passion for dance to our children by teaching them ways to move their bodies and express themselves. Or bring your guitar for music lessons, and have the children make their own from tissue boxes, paper towel rolls, and rubber bands. Anyone can perform a dramatic reading of a book from our library – or bring your favorite! Just ask your teachers about getting more involved!

One-on-One Companion:

One-on-One Companions partner with children who may require more a more focused connection in order to excel in MCUM's program. MCUM is proud to offer services to families with children who have unique needs, including children with autism or other developmental and behavioral disorders. With or without disorders, people's brains develop in response to their environments. As such, Companions can also help us accommodate children who come from challenging environments and may have developed difficult behaviors. **NOTE:** Companions must be specially-qualified and prepared to foster long-term relationships with teachers and children, as well as committed to engaging in Conscious Discipline.

What this looks like: The experiences of One-on-One Companions will vary greatly by day and on a per-child basis. Check-in with your teacher as you arrive to receive an update on how your child is managing his or her emotions that day. Follow any recommendations teachers make about how best to be helpful, and model Conscious Discipline with the child. Foster a connection, promote choices, and operate patiently in an executive state, where conflict is understood as the underdevelopment of important skills and a teaching opportunity.

Kitchen Crew:

Kitchen Crew members assist in daily meal preparation for all 85 children in MCUM's childcare center. Together with our staff cook and kitchen assistant, they help provide more than 75 percent of each child's nutritional needs every day, year-round. Crew members learn new recipes and practice culinary skills while preparing healthy meals and snacks for the children. Come prepared to help with clean-up to ensure all students get the meals they need in a timely fashion, and bring the energy needed to keep up with the rigors of a busy kitchen.

What this looks like: Greet your staff-mates in the morning as you scrub in before slicing some apples to include in the children's breakfasts. Help clear tables, then wash a round of dishes while the kitchen turns over for lunch prep. Jump in where needed on today's lunch: homemade vegetable and noodle soup with cornbread and diced peaches. Set places with the staff again before the children arrive, and build camaraderie as part of a high-functioning team that makes each child's learning possible!

Volunteer Code of Conduct

By volunteering with MCUM, you are becoming an essential part of our programs, our community service efforts, and our organization. You will also undoubtedly be interacting with our clients and our community as a representative of our agency, and as such, we ask that you represent us in a manner that is consistent with our values.

To protect our relationships in the community and our organizational integrity, and to provide the best possible volunteer experience to all of our volunteers, we expect our volunteers to follow rules of conduct that will protect the comfort and safety of all volunteers, employees, and clients (children):

- Treat all clients and fellow volunteers with courtesy and respect at all times.
- Maintain a positive attitude, an open mind and an open heart.
- Keep clients' personal information (including their names and pictures) confidential.
- Establish and maintain boundaries. It is MCUM's policy that volunteers are not to provide additional resources or services to clients (such as food, money, or transportation) in excess of what is provided by the agency, especially while serving as representatives of MCUM.
- Do not lead or participate in faith-based activities (including prayer or proselytizing) with clients unless expressly invited to do so.
- Follow all posted rules (including those in your handbook), as well as all directions and instructions given by MCUM staff.
- Communicate with our volunteer manager or other MCUM staff if you are dissatisfied with your volunteer experience or wish to discontinue your service with us; we strive to resolve any issues that may be negatively affecting our volunteers' experiences, but must be informed to do so.
- When sick, please excuse yourself temporarily from your volunteerism. When possible, please let our volunteer manager know at least 24 hours prior if you cannot work a shift.
- If you observe conflict between clients and/or volunteers, please report it to MCUM staff. Do not try to resolve or diffuse the situation yourself.
- Any volunteers receiving any of MCUM's services must follow standard client protocol.
- Adults bringing children under the age of 16 are responsible for supervising their children. If children are disruptive or disrespectful, volunteers may be asked to excuse them from service.

Childcare Attendance Policy

When you join our Childcare Team at MCUM, you become an essential part of our operations. Our childcare staff will be expecting you, and the relationship you build with them and the children is contingent on your dependability. Our volunteer program is purposefully designed to offer you a meaningful experience, and we trust you to value that experience and honor your commitment to our children and community.

The most important thing you can do to help our children is be here when you say you will be. As you work in the classroom, you'll be building trust with the teaching staff and the children, alike. As those relationships develop, our teachers will place even greater value on your skills, abilities, and impact on the children. Bonds will form between you and the children, and they will ask after you. Our staff is counting on you, and so are our children; please don't let them down.

Please arrive 5 minutes before your shift begins to ensure you are in the classroom when expected.

Expected Absences or Expected Late Arrivals:

That being said, we know that schedule conflicts may happen. We understand that things come up, schedules might change, and you may not be able to make every shift every week on time.

If you know you have a schedule conflict for a particular date, e-mail the Volunteer Coordinator or Service Learning Coordinator as soon as possible, preferably at least one week in advance of the absence. Please copy Education Coordinator Tina Burress (tburress@mcum.org) and your MCUM classroom teacher on these e-mails.

Unexpected Absences or Late Arrivals:

If you're ill or need to cancel your same-day shift (or will be late), call Compass: Downtown at (812) 727-3737. **When you call, you *must* speak with a person, not an answering machine.**

If you receive no answer, wait 5 minutes and repeat this order until you speak with a staff member. Last-minute absences may impact lesson planning, so please let us know that you will be absent as soon as you know there is a conflict.

No-Call-No-Shows:

For the children's sake, no-call-no-shows or repeated tardiness cannot be tolerated. The first no-call-no-show will result in a conversation with either the Volunteer Manager or Service Learner Coordinator. The second no-call-no-show may result in dismissal from your position.

Childcare Rules

Childcare Rules are in place for the safety and well-being of all children, staff, and volunteers. Please read them carefully, as all MCUM representatives are expected to abide by them:

- 1) Children are expected to follow a few basic rules: No running, fighting, or shouting; always use “indoor voices” while inside; respect each other; and do not disrupt others who are engaged in activities. Know and follow these and other posted rules to model good behavior for the children.
- 2) Children are encouraged to clean up after themselves and to work independently to accomplish routine tasks (e.g. putting on coats, lining up to go outside, putting away materials, etc.). Please only assist them with these activities when asked (by teachers) or if the children appear to be having considerable difficulty.
- 3) Never handle the children roughly (i.e. “rough-housing,” wrestling, picking them up to swing them around, etc.), even if they request it. **It is ok to say “no” to the children.**
- 4) Never yell at the children; if you allow yourself to become distressed, the children will also become distressed. Breathe, remain calm, and work hard to maintain your executive state at all times. Use the acronym **STAR** to help yourself: **Smile, Take a breath, And Relax.**
- 5) There is to be **no cell phone use** whatsoever inside the classrooms or on the playground. This includes calls, texts, pictures, or access to social media. We expect that our children receive your full attention while you are here; please ensure you are available to the children at all times.
- 6) Stay alert and actively engaged with the children, especially on the playground, where most accidents occur. Space yourself around the playground when supervising; do not congregate.
- 7) Staff and volunteers are not permitted to use the children’s restrooms inside the classrooms. Staff and volunteer restrooms are located in the hallways of the main building.
- 8) **No volunteer is ever to be alone with a child or children.** Remain vigilant to ensure you do not find yourself in this situation. If you do, seek out another adult to correct it immediately.
- 9) In the interest of confidentiality, all information you receive (directly or indirectly) must be maintained in confidence. This includes the children’s names and likenesses; **taking photos of the children is strictly prohibited.**
- 10) Please dress casually, but appropriately for work. Closed-toed shoes are required. Pants or shorts, a t-shirt, and sneakers offer a safe and sensible choice.
- 11) To mitigate allergy risks, please do not bring outside food or drink into the classrooms, and refrain from wearing perfumes and colognes during your service.

What to Do When You Arrive

Arrival & Signing-In

1. Park in the lot across from the church off of 4th street, and enter the doors on the right as you face the courtyard.
2. Enter the lobby and greet Education Coordinator Tina Burress if she is present. You may need to remind her who you are and where you are serving, but she'll learn your face and name quickly.
3. Sign in on the appropriate sign-in sheets located in the office. Community volunteers should use the volunteer clipboard, while Service Learners will select their individual sign-in sheet found in the binder. Don't forget to grab your nametag!

NOTE: Service Learners who do not sign in will not receive hours for their shifts! Hours are recorded, verified, and entered to Indiana University directly from this binder. Make sure you sign in and out if you want your shift to be recorded.

Volunteering

1. Make your way to your assigned classroom and use the location wheel on the door to determine where to find your class (inside, outside, in the library or cafeteria, etc.).
2. Follow any guidelines laid out in your classroom's "Welcome Letter" to begin your service.
3. Greet the teacher and aide before starting work with the children. You may need to remind them who you are and why you are there, at first – please don't take it personally; our teachers meet and supervise many volunteers from all walks of life. Teachers and aides may provide further instruction or encourage you to jump in wherever you feel is best.
4. Look to your teacher and aides for guidance, but don't be afraid to insert yourself into the classroom and find your own ways to be helpful (see the next page)!

Signing Out and Departure

1. When your shift is over, let the teacher or aide know you are leaving for the day and remind them of any schedule conflicts you may have for the upcoming week.
2. Return to the office to sign yourself out, including the time and number of hours you worked that day.
3. Say goodbye to Tina and also remind her of any schedule conflicts you may have for the upcoming week.

NOTE: Remember to follow the Childcare Attendance Policy! If you are going to be absent for a shift, please offer as much notice as possible to **both** your teacher and the Education Coordinator. Unexpected absences should be called in, and expected absences should be communicated in-person and via e-mail to your volunteer coordinator (or ACE), teacher, and Tina at tburress@mcum.org.

What to Do in the Classroom

Walking into a classroom full of children in various states of play can be overwhelming, even if they are all on their best behavior. Being confident, assertive, and engaged in the classroom goes a long way, but what does that look like in practice? Each time you enter the classroom, be sure to let your teacher know you've arrived and then jump in on an activity like the ideas listed below:

- Read to a child or children from any available book
- Start play in one of the activity centers and invite children to join you
- Set up painting at an easel
- Set up a board game and help the children play
- Help children build with blocks
- Pretend with the children (hospital, store, fire station, gas station, etc.)
- Have a tea party with the children
- Set up a craft activity, such as pasting, cutting, coloring, etc.
- Set up puzzles or put together toys
- Help the children learn letters, numbers, shapes, or colors (and make a game of it!)
- Rock the children in the rocking chair
- Join and aid a teacher's activity
- Bring an activity of your own planning

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but the best advice may just be: **Don't overthink it.** You're volunteering to play with and support the children, and that's exactly what you should do when you arrive; any activity you choose is a great choice if you're making the children happy and helping them to grow.

Have an idea that's not on this list? Never forget that some of the best activities are activities of your own design. You – like all of our volunteers – have talents and skills that you could share with our children. Challenge yourself to uncover those talents and work with your teacher to design age-appropriate activities to showcase them! Seamlessly shift from Classroom Assistant to Skills Sharer or Activity Leader, inspiring and engaging the children along the way. You might find that this is even more fulfilling, as nobody can do what you can do quite the way you can!

If you're still feeling nervous, lost, or unsure of how best to contribute, don't be afraid to ask your teacher or an aide for guidance on what to do. They can help coach you to be more comfortable and confident in the classroom. We would much rather you ask for help than struggle through your service or have a bad experience!

The Curriculum:

Every school must have a curriculum, and MCUM's preschool is no exception. The curriculum we utilize is called **Conscious Discipline**® – a comprehensive classroom management program that features a social-emotional curriculum. Conscious Discipline is designed to develop the emotional intelligence of children at an early age and is based on current brain research, child development information, and early educational practices. It is an immersive system designed for both school and home environments, and it has been shown to create permanent behavior change **based on nurturing intrinsic motivation, helpfulness, problem-solving, and connection, all through calmness.**

A new and innovative system, Conscious Discipline uses everyday events to teach complex skills like:

- **Self-Control and Impulse Control**
- **Conflict Resolution**
- **Character Development**
- **Social Skills**
- **Attention Span**

Major themes or areas of concentration in Conscious Discipline include:

- Regulating emotions, especially “upset”
- Awareness and understanding of consequences
- Navigating choices and their empowering effects
- Cultivating empathy for others
- Offering encouragement through connection, rather than attention

In practice, Conscious Discipline probably looks quite different from what you may have experienced growing up or be used to from volunteering at other childcare centers. It **replaces traditional reward-and-punishment discipline (fear) with a relationship-based, community model (love)** that relies on developing higher-order thinking skills at an early age. This development allows children to create solutions, make choices, and be accountable for their own behavior. Most importantly, it empowers the children (and adults!) to **respond, rather than react** to life events. These skills – best cultivated between birth and age 5 – have lifelong impacts in how we interact with one another and the world around us.

The next page explains what this looks like in MCUM's classrooms, as well as what is expected of you as a volunteer. Here at MCUM, we are passionate about the growth and development of the children who are entrusted to us – and we hope you are, also. If you want to learn more about Conscious Discipline and its impact on the lives of children and families, please visit www.consciousdiscipline.com or reach out to MCUM's Education Coordinator, Tina Burress at tburress@mcum.org.

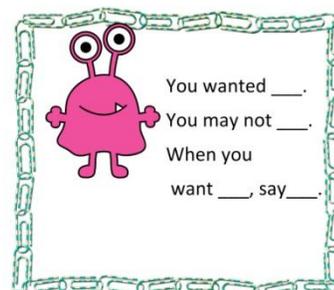
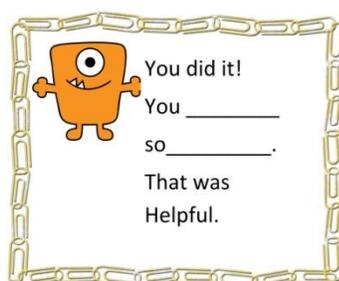
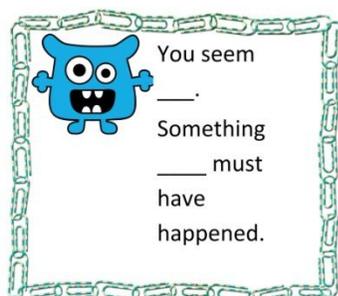
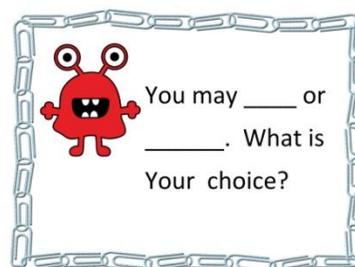
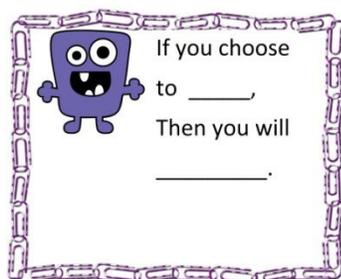
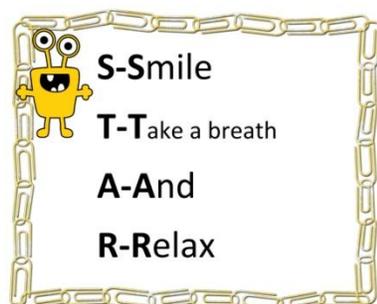
Conscious Discipline® in Action

At MCUM, all teachers and staff are required to utilize Conscious Discipline in all interactions with the children and at all times. We recognize, however, that this commitment is a lot to ask of our volunteers – and too much to ask of most.

Instead, we ask that you merely follow your teacher’s lead at all times and defer to their expertise in challenging situations. If you try your best to emulate the teachers in your classroom, you will be utilizing Conscious Discipline!

Conscious Discipline behaviors you can expect to see and hear in MCUM’s classrooms include:

- Teachers kneeling to better communicate and make eye contact with a child;
- Teachers presenting children with choices frequently;
- “I Love You Rituals” (songs, games, gestures) that encourage touch and build connections and bonds between teachers/children and children/children;
- Teachers coaching children through difficult emotions, like anger or sadness;
- Attempts to understand and channel emotions rather than distracting or dismissing children;
- Attempts to solve minor problems and conflicts immediately and directly, before they evolve into more complex or chronic issues;
- Teachers acknowledging specific actions of individual children as “helpful” or “hurtful”;
- Teachers noticing compliance, kind acts, unique strengths, and encouraging children who have made poor choices;
- Foundational phrases like the ones seen on the cards below;



Common Classroom Scenarios

Every day spent with children is a day where anything can happen. That said, certain things surely happen more often than others, and some behaviors can almost always be counted on. The scenarios below are fairly common occurrences, each followed by some instructions for how best to handle them using Conscious Discipline techniques.

Remember: When in doubt, you can always seek out your teacher or teachers' aide for assistance.

Scenario #1: Conflict Between Children

“Joey” is sitting on the end of a bench on the playground when a second child, “Jack” approaches the bench and pushes Joey with both arms towards the center. When Joey protests, Jack pushes him again before sitting down on the bench. Joey runs to you and is upset, shouting that “He (Jack) pushed me!”

As a new volunteer, you may not feel equipped to handle this kind of scenario; recall that deferring to your teacher is always an acceptable course of action. However, if you feel confident in Conscious Discipline, you should first make yourself aware of your own emotional state. If you begin to “feel” Joey’s frustration, return to your executive state by becoming a **STAR** (Smile, Take a breath, And Relax). Alter your inner thoughts to assure yourself that you are safe, not distressed, and can handle this. Then use this conflict as a teaching moment for both Joey and Jack.

As you talk to Joey, drop to his level and make eye contact. Ask him to explain what happened, and immediately ask: “Did you like it when Jack pushed you?” He will, of course, say that he did not. Explain to Joey that he must tell this to Jack, and approach Jack together, again dropping to their level.

Joey should say to Jack that he did not like it when he pushed him and tell him not to do it again. You could invite him to do this with an “I/You” statement such as “When you _____, I felt _____.” You should turn to Jack and say, “You wanted Joey to move down so that you could sit, but pushing him was hurtful. When you want someone to move, say ‘Could you please move down so that I can sit, too?’ That way they can be helpful.”

This approach interprets conflict as a lack of important skills and a teaching opportunity; it must be solved with new skills, which you can help teach to both Joey and Jack during your time at MCUM.

Scenario #2: Messes and Clean-Up

“Jenny” has finished playing with you (and a set of wooden blocks inside the classroom). Her friend “Jane” invites her to build a puzzle together, and Jenny abruptly stands up to join her friend across the room. Jenny leaves you behind with the blocks scattered all over the floor in the shared play space.

It's not the 'leaving-you-behind' that is the trouble here – each child's interest in you and attention span will vary. BUT, children are always strongly encouraged (if not eventually required) to help clean up after themselves at all times. The easiest course of action would be to clean the blocks yourself, but avoid this temptation! Jenny must learn to take responsibility for herself and her actions, including cleaning up her own messes.

Approach Jenny, dip to her level and explain that you need her help to clean up the blocks from earlier. Then offer her a choice: "Jenny, you walked away from the blocks over here. We are both responsible for cleaning them up, so let's choose to be helpful to our School Family. You can start with the rectangle blocks or the triangle blocks: What is your choice?" After Jenny chooses, ask Jane if she would like to help her friend clean up, also. When they are finished, offer a high five to each and thank them individually for their specific behaviors: "Jenny, you picked up all of the blocks and put them back where they belong so everyone else can find them. That was helpful! Jane, you helped Jenny and me clean up where we were playing, even though it wasn't your mess. What a great friend you are! Thank you!"

Not only are children at MCUM familiar with this kind of language and these kinds of choices, but it helps them understand that they are in control of their actions and which specific actions help to form connections with others. This language also helps to reinforce good behaviors and model interactions for other students. **Remember: What we focus on, we get more of!**

Scenario #3: Disobedience or Ignoring Behaviors

It's time for the children to line up to go inside and wash their hands for lunch. Two children, "Becca" and "Brandon," continue to play on the swings, even as the others have lined up at the door. The teacher is calling to them to join the class, but Becca and Brandon continue to swing as if they do not hear her.

Oftentimes, approaching the children and encouraging them to listen to the teacher is enough to alter their behavior. If they continue to swing, even as you approach, tell them that their School Family needs them to line up so everyone can go inside to eat together. If this still does not work, you may try to make a game out of lining up, like racing them to the line. If none of these approaches are effective, the teacher may wish to intervene to provide more discipline, leaving you to interact with the children who are lined up already. Be sure to "notice" their good behavior, and perhaps give some high fives or fist bumps while directly addressing what they did to earn your praise!

Scenario #4: "Noticing" Behavior, Good or Bad

As "Natasha" finishes playing with some Legos, she begins to clean up after her activity. "Noah," who had been playing elsewhere, joins her at the table and asks if he can help her clean up, and she nods "yes." The two of them clean up the Legos together.

This is a great example of a helpful behavior that we must notice in order to reinforce. Although Conscience Discipline doesn't offer traditional "rewards" like candy or prizes, noticing and connecting is its own reward for the children. Be sure to address both Natasha and Noah individually and specifically repeat the helpful behavior they were displaying in this scenario. An example might be: "You did it, Natasha – you chose to clean the Legos up so the next person can play with them. That was helpful! And Noah, you chose to help Natasha be successful so you both can play a new game. Good for you!"

Scenario #5: Temper Tantrums

"Aiden" isn't having a good day. He has been unusually quiet and has spent the morning alone, arms folded and scowling, occasionally stomping to a new station in the room. He hasn't lashed out at anyone or anything (yet), but you can tell that something is definitely wrong and Aiden is struggling with his feelings.

If you notice early signs of a child on the brink of an emotional outburst, be sure to inform your teacher right away and ask if you can be helpful. If you and your teacher both feel confident and comfortable, take a deep breath and approach Aiden with a smile. As you drop to his level, make eye contact (if possible) and calmly use Conscious Discipline language to try to connect with him: "Good morning, Aiden. You seem angry today. Something terrible must have happened."

If Aiden shares his circumstances, respond with empathy: "Oh, Aiden. That is so frustrating. [Repeat back what has happened and why]. It seems like you are having a difficult time with all those feelings. You can handle this; it's hard, but you can do it. Breathe with me." Depending on his emotional state, Aiden may or may not engage in the breathing activity, but it is helpful to offer a path to control. After his next dialogue, express empathy again: "You must feel very upset. It's hard when things seem out of your control. You seem so angry. You don't know what to do with all of those feelings. You can handle this; breathe with me."

If the situation stays the same or worsens – if Aiden begins shouting or loses control – the teacher will step in to try to help Aiden. The teacher may elect to engage the rest of the class as Aiden's "School Family" and invite them to be helpful by wishing Aiden well. Or, the teacher may use his or her deeper personal connection to encourage Aiden to breathe with them or participate in an "I Love You Ritual" to help him control his feelings. Do not feel badly if you are unable to de-escalate a situation or help a child at his or her most challenging moments; these moments may simply require a deeper level of trust or a level of emotional development the child has not yet reached.

Childcare Reminders and Tips

- **This Training Guide is Your Friend:** First and foremost, this training guide will help you to remember key elements of your childcare training, and can help answer your questions if you forget things or start to feel overwhelmed. Copies of this handbook can always be found at the Sign-In station in the childcare office. If you have a question, please ask your teachers or consult this handbook; we want to help you find the answer.
- **Please Follow the Rules (including the Code of Conduct and Attendance Policy):** The childcare rules, code of conduct, and attendance policies are essential to ensuring a good experience. They also ensure everyone's safety and reduce liability. Each of these documents can be found in the opening section of this guide; please read them carefully and follow them diligently and at all times.
- **Remember to Sign-In and Out for your Shifts:** Not only does this help us track your hours individually, but it helps us track all volunteer hours over time, which can help secure grants and other funds for our programming.
- **Follow the teacher's lead:** Once a teacher calls for children to do something, immediately encourage them to do it. Don't continue playing with a child who is reluctant to follow a teacher's instructions, even if it's what the child wants. It's hard, but it's important to be able to say "no" to the children, especially if what they're doing is contrary to what is best for others. On that note:
- **It's ok to say "no" to the children:** Just because a child wants something (or wants you to do something for them) doesn't mean you have to do it. Don't feel obligated to push a child on a swing for your full two hours! It's also ok to need a breather – just ask your teachers for how best to disengage from the children when you need a minute.
- **Respect your own personal space:** By virtue of their age, many of our children are clingers and climbers; you may wish to establish boundaries with them. Try to avoid habitually picking the children up, and don't let them hang all over you if you don't want them to. Again, ask your teacher for advice if you need it.
- **Model your teacher's behavior:** Our teachers are well-trained in Conscious Discipline and model it constantly. From the things they do to the phrases they use, they specialize in child development. You can learn a great deal by watching them and doing as they do.
- **Maintain your executive state, even when things seem chaotic:** When you're outnumbered by the children, it's easy to feel flustered or overwhelmed. Don't let the apparent chaos – especially during transition times – fool you: things are (almost) always under control. Do your best to be helpful, and above all, maintain your composure. Never forget that you are in control of you at all times.
- **Don't be shy!** Our most engaged volunteers are our best volunteers. Yes, there are things we ask you not to do, but don't let that inhibit you or make you apprehensive about engaging with the children. We love "go-getters," as these folks bring the most to our program. Upgrade your role from Classroom Assistant to Activity Leader/Skills Sharer; share your true self with our children.

What Have I Gotten Myself Into?

Week 1

It's ok to be nervous; starting a new job is stressful! Kids, wonderful as they are, can also be stressful. The sights, sounds, and energy of a classroom are challenging for many volunteers, especially if you're not used to working with children: Rest assured that it gets easier with practice, and try to stay relaxed. Even on hard days, don't be discouraged!

Especially on your first day, remember your training and that you are now a part of a team. Your teacher and aides can help if you have questions or are unsure of what to do. Make sure you introduce yourself to them and start building those relationships alongside your friendships with the children. Also know that boundaries are ok and the teachers have your back; it's ok to tell the children "no," even (or especially) as you get your bearings.

That said, don't be afraid to jump right in! Our kids and our staff love having volunteers join our program, especially if volunteers are actively engaged. You're here to play with children, and it's hard to do that "wrong." We trust you'll have fun, and you should, too!

Week 4

You'll be pleasantly surprised how quickly you get your feet under you, especially if you're giving it your all. After your second or third visit, you'll have some seasoning! By then, you'll know your teacher and they'll know you. The children will remember you, too, and they'll start asking after you on the days you aren't here; bonds form quickly between the children and our most engaged volunteers.

You might find that you're ready to share your talents with the children sooner than you would have thought. Their curiosity and wonderment might inspire you to talk to your teacher about how to go beyond the typical classroom duties and share more of yourself while you're here. We encourage that type of thing, as it will help you get more out of your experience here.

Each day will still present its challenges, but they'll be less intimidating and more familiar to you. Your nerves will have settled down, and it will be easier to keep calm and volunteer on. After your first month, you'll feel the "warm glow" that comes from service to others – especially children.

Week 8 and Beyond

After several months of service, you and your teacher will have found a routine that works for you. Your attachments to the children, your teacher, and your classroom will have grown more meaningful, and everyone will be looking forward to your visits – including you!

You may have found a niche in the classrooms by now, leading a particular activity each week or showcasing your own skills. Or you may have become a dependable right hand to your teacher and aide – someone they can count on with certain responsibilities every week.

Most importantly, our children will have become a part of your life, and you will have become a part of theirs: You'll each be better for it. You'll be a fully-integrated part of our team and program, and MCUM will be better for having you.