



Education & Autism Centers Handbook for Parents & Students

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PURPOSE

Putting our heart and soul into exceptional care.

VISION

To be a nationally recognized provider of the highest quality health and human services.

CORE VALUES



WELCOME

This handbook is a resource for students and families attending the Merakey Education and Autism Centers. Our teams are invested in creating a quality learning environment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Emotional Support needs and the special challenges of living in a world not always able to accommodate their unique abilities. The list of challenges presented to these students should never include the availability of exceptional school services.

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers believe in helping students to realize their own definitions of achievement and success, and not defining these for them. These accomplishments may include the student gaining the ability to communicate his or her needs or ideas with others, participating in community and school-based activities, learning skills to initiate and maintaining friendships or other relationships, acquiring independence, accessing activities of daily living and/or socially appropriate methods of modulating behaviors and responding to emotional situations throughout daily life activities. Merakey staff members are trained in various educational methods, including Evidence Based Practices, to assist students with learning replacement strategies for behaviors impeding their learning potential.

Our goal is to provide students with a pleasant and rewarding experience throughout their educational journey. By building a relationship with the student, their parents, guardians, family members and other supports, Merakey believes that together, we can help our students reach their fullest potential.

If you have any questions regarding the services provided by the Merakey Education and Autism Centers, please feel free to contact your School Director.

Sincerely,

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers' Leadership Team

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PHILOSOPHY

For over 50 years, Merakey has provided quality behavioral health services to children and families who are affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders and Social Emotional needs. As the rate of prevalence and demand for services have increased, Merakey has been dedicated to improving its expertise and expanding the range of services provided.

At the foundation of the Merakey Education and Autism Centers are seven core principles that guide the mission, vision and operational strategies in providing individualized educational and developmental programming for all students. These seven core principles include a coordinated system of care, structured teaching and reinforcement systems, effective systems of communication and data driven decision making. These core components are driven by training, supervision and fidelity and imbedded within the individual program models for both Autism and Emotional Support students.

Merakey also believes that the success of each child's development is dependent upon the collaborative relationship with the comprehensive team led by the parents. Therefore, parents and teachers maintain regular communication to synchronize efforts, jointly facilitate the transfer of skills to the home and community, continually assess strengths and needs, and build plans for achievable goals. Merakey recognizes the tremendous variability among children's needs and individual's learning characteristics must be identified. In an environment of mutual respect and their understanding, the Merakey classroom will maintain a skilled and dedicated staff, providing exceptional services to achieve each child's goals with compassion and skill.

The primary goal of the Merakey classrooms is for students to receive exceptional educational services. Using the Individual Education Plan (IEP), Merakey views success as helping a student achieve their educational and behavioral goals as demonstrated by personal growth, independence, development of peer relationships and participation in activities in their community.

CLASSROOM MODELS

The Merakey ASD classrooms follow three specific models and within each model are centers to support learning. In these models, the students may or may not be supported by a staff. The Intensive Learning and Instruction Model is designed to support learners needing intensive one-on-one instruction to enhance functional communication, social skills and education. In this model students will build the foundational skills needed for long term success.

The Small Group Instruction Model is designed to support learners able to learn in a small group for independent and academic skills. In this model students will focus on age appropriate pro-social and emotional interactions.

The Hybrid Model is designed to support learners demonstrating the ability to work in a small group setting but may also need one-on-one support through intensive teaching. This model is successful for students who exhibit low rates of skill acquisition but have strong communication skills.

The models follow specific floor plans and learning centers such as:

- Individual intensive teaching
- Maintenance/generalization/flexibility
- Expressive/receptive skill building
- Natural environment teaching
- Independent skill building
- Daily living skill development
- Play skills training/social emotion skill building
- Academic centers
- Social emotional skill building
- Vocational skill building centers
- Compass Learning Odyssey

The IEP goals and placement in the appropriate classroom model for the student are driven by evidenced-based assessments such as the VB-MAPP and Brigance.

Emotional Support

This model is built on the Social Emotional Learning Platform focusing on student core competency development within the domains of Self-Management, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Building and Responsible Decision Making. This evidenced-based programming creates better academic performance, improved attitudes and behaviors and less emotional distress or crisis. Within the classroom, academic and behavioral management operations, the incorporation of the S.T.O.I.C. system (Structure, Teaching, Observation/ Supervision, Interaction, Correction/Redirection) provides the foundation for antecedent strategies for classroom management.

The S.T.O.I.C. approach creates physical and operational structure and expectations, didactic and integrated teaching modalities, observation and supervision strategies and levels of interactive engagement to ensure team building and structure to create safe and effective learning communities. The utilization of Emotional Support Program books provides a roadmap for students, teachers and parents to plan, gauge and monitor student progress towards academic, behavioral and IEP goals. This repository captures integral assessment scores, data outcomes and analysis, communication and detailed programming to ensure students are on track to meet their goals

Within the Emotional Support curriculum, the integration of evidenced-based social devolvement curriculum provides lessons and skill building in target areas of the social learning platform. The curricula developed for these engaging and interactive weekly activities are designed for specific age groups and relevant development skill building. This curriculum includes ARISE, Growing Great Girls, Student Success Skills as well as other internally developed exercises.

Transition

All students enrolled at the Merakey Education and Autism Centers, participate in transition program activities, with structured transition services beginning when a student turns 14 years of age in accordance with Indicator 13 Standards. Transition services are structured to provide age appropriate skill assessments and career interest surveys as a primer in the development of a formal plan in line with student and IEP goals. The multi-track transition programming provides skill building

in independent living, community mapping and employment services. Within each track, students are exposed to activities to build and sustain viable skills for independence and self-sufficiency using evidenced-based curricula and simulated work and skill building environments.

The employment track focuses on soft and hard skill development, job shadowing, volunteering and paid student intern work programs with the goal for the student to attain competitive employment. The students ongoing progress is tracked and documented through student transition workbooks and portfolios, along with the community mapping workbook providing a vehicle for the goals of independent integration into community living upon graduation.

LICENSING

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are Licensed Private Academic Schools for Special Education specializing in Autism and Emotional Support needs. The schools are licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and staffed with experienced teachers who possess a Pennsylvania teaching certification in Special Education.

SCHOOL HOURS OF OPERATION

School Hours

School is in session Monday thru Friday from the hours of 8:45 am to 2:45 pm.

Arrival and Dismissal

Students who are not taking a school bus may be dropped off at school by a parent or guardian at the designated time set forth by the director. If a student is dropped off later than the school's start time, they should report to the office for a late slip. Students must be picked up at the end of the school day. Students who have not been picked up by the designated time will be taken to the office to wait for a ride. If you are going to be late picking up your child, please make other arrangements for your child to be picked up and notify the office. If someone other than a parent or an emergency contact is picking up a student, they must have a photo ID when signing the student out.

Tardiness

A student is considered tardy when he or she arrives after school starts. Students will not be permitted to enter their classroom after school starts without signing in at the office. When students are tardy, they shall follow the same procedure used for an absence (i.e. a written parental excuse). An accumulation of time missed from school due to tardiness that equals an instructional day will be considered one (1) day of truancy. If your child is arriving late and receives Behavior Technician services, please contact the office as soon as possible.

Early Dismissal

Parents are encouraged to make medical and dental appointments for their child at times other than during school hours. If a student needs to be dismissed early from school, for an appointment, the

student is required to bring a written excuse from a parent or guardian.

The excuse should include the following:

- Reason for early dismissal
- Doctor's/dentist's name and phone number
- Time of discharge from the school and return time
- Transportation arrangements
- Phone number where parent or guardian may be contacted

The written excuse must be presented to school personnel upon arrival at school. The student should report to the office before departing and immediately upon returning to school. The early dismissal form signed by the doctor must be returned to the school office. Excessive early dismissals may be investigated.

Transportation

Transportation is provided to and from the Merakey Education and Autism Center by the student's home school district. Coordinators of bus transportation in each district determine schedules and routes for pick-up and drop-off. School staff will assist students getting on and off the bus. If a student is considered unsafe at dismissal time, he or she will not be permitted to ride the bus/van home. The student's parents or designated emergency contact will be called to transport the student home. Parents and guardians wishing to provide their child with transportation to and from school must adhere to the arrival and dismissal policy.

Releasing Students from School

Children shall be released from school only to their parent or guardian, or to persons pre-authorized by a parent or guardian as outlined in the Emergency Contact form. A signed note is required when a student is leaving with a person other than a parent or guardian. Please include the name of the person picking up the student. All individuals picking up students from school will be required to show photo identification.

School Closings and Delays

In the event it is necessary to close school or have a delayed opening due to snow or other emergency, each Merakey Education and Autism Center will follow their home school district in determining a closing or delay. An announcement concerning the closing or delay will be posted on local television stations. Typically, if the student's home school district is different than the school district in which the Merakey Education and Autism Center is located, and that school district has a closure, the district will not provide transportation that day. If the student's home school district has a delay and the Merakey Education and Autism Center does not, the student will be transported according to the delayed schedule.

ATTENDANCE

Entrance Age

Students enrolling in kindergarten must follow the entrance age requirements of their home school district and have an Autism Spectrum Disorder or Emotional Support needs diagnosis.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition is provided by the student's home school district, if deemed an appropriate school placement by the district.

Attendance

Each student is required to attend school on a regular basis. A student may be excused from classes because of student's illness, a death in the immediate family, or an order from the student's physician. For all absences, the parent or guardian must provide a written excuse listing the date of the absence, reason for the absence, and signature of the parent or guardian. The excuse must be received within three (3) days of a student's return to school. Failure to submit an excuse will result in an unexcused absence. For all absences, tardy arrivals or early dismissals for a doctor's appointment, a note from the doctor must be submitted upon returning to school.

If your child will be absent for the entire day, please call the office. If you call before school hours, a voicemail may be left. If no call has been received before 10:00 am, the office will begin calling the home and proceed to the emergency contact list. A maximum of ten (10) days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification may be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten (10) cumulative days requires a written excuse from a physician. Attendance is submitted to the home school district on a regular basis. The student's home school district attendance policy overrides Merakey Education and Autism Center's policy.

EDUCATION

Report cards are completed on a quarterly basis by teachers, therapists and other appropriate staff, and are sent home with students. Summaries are completed on a monthly basis by teachers and are sent home with students. Monthly summaries focus on each IEP goal to track the progress of each IEP benchmark. These records are utilized to help parents, school personnel, and school districts identify the student's achievements and future goals.

NUTRITION AND WELLNESS

Food Service Program

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers educate students about healthy eating habits but are unable to provide breakfast or lunch – Students are required to bring their lunches to school and should eat breakfast prior to arriving. All student lunch and snack foods sent to the school by the parent/guardian must be ready-to-serve, as the Merakey Education and Autism Centers do not provide

food heating/re-heating (e.g. via microwave or toaster ovens) or cold food storage. This assures compliance with state and local health department expectations and falls in-line with public school processes – which better prepares our students for transition back to less-restrictive settings. In the event the parent or guardian is unable to provide lunch foods, they are encouraged to speak to the School Director to inquire about their child's eligibility to receive assistance. Unfortunately, not all students/families will be eligible as this is based upon eligibility review of need for each student.

Immunizations

All students are required to be vaccinated/immunized in a manner consistent with legal requirements. The Pennsylvania Department of Health has mandated that, if a student does not have (within the first 5 days of the start of the new school year) all the required immunization doses or does not have a physician's medical plan in-place to receive these required doses, exclusion from school will occur. This is to assure that all students attending school are adequately protected against diseases that are preventable via vaccine. In order to be eligible for medical exemption a physician must present a written statement that must be presented to the Director prior to the first day of your son/daughter's enrollment. In order to be eligible for exemption due to religious or ethical conviction, a Statement of Exemption to Immunization form must be completed by the parent/guardian. Please contact your local School Director, if you have any questions.

Emergency Forms

All students must have a current emergency form on file in the office. The form must be renewed each school year. In the event of an emergency, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, the school will contact an adult whose name and number have been provided on the emergency form. This form is also used to make appropriate contacts if a child becomes ill at school, has an accident and needs to go home, or is not reported absent for the day. Any changes on the emergency forms must be immediately provided to the school by the parent or guardian.

Medication Administration

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers seek to ensure that all procedures are followed when administering prescription and non-prescription medication to students. If a student requires any prescription medication on a regular/daily basis, the parent must inform the school and do the following:

- Obtain a completed "Physician's Certificate for Medication" form from the student's physician.
- Complete a medication permission slip.
- Provide medication in its original container, which must be clearly labeled by the pharmacy or physician. The parent is responsible for dropping the medication off at the school.
- Written, dated prescriptions from the physician must accompany any new medication or change in the medication prescribed.
- If your child must keep emergency medication with him or her, both the child's physician and parent or guardian must indicate this need in writing.
- Over-the-counter medication must be supplied by the parent or guardian in a clearly labeled original container and a doctor's prescription must accompany the over-the-counter medication.
- For all medications (prescription and over the counter), the parent is responsible for dropping off the medication at the school. There shall be no delivery of medications to the school via any

other means than the parent physically delivering these to the School Director or other designated school staff. Medications may not be sent to school with the student or sent to school with the bus/van driver or other transportation staff. This is to assure the safety of all students, as well as to assure the appropriate counting and signing-in of all medications received at the school. Should you have any questions, please contact your local School's Director.

Illness and Accidents

Students showing symptoms of illness should not be sent to school. It is important to keep your child at home if there is evidence of the following or any other outward signs of illness:

- A fever of 100 degrees or more
- Vomiting
- Chickenpox
- Diarrhea
- Ringworm
- Lice
- Pink eye

Students presenting with these symptoms during the school day will be sent home. Parents will be contacted by the school nurse or staff to pick their child up or to make arrangements for their child to be picked up. Students must be free of symptoms for at least 24 hours before returning to school. If the doctor has prescribed an antibiotic, your child must be kept at home for at least 24 hours after starting the medication.

A written doctor's release is required before returning to school, if the participant has been diagnosed with a communicable disease, such as chickenpox, ringworm, lice or pink eye or if the client sustained a physical injury that requires restrictions while in the center. If the student is absent from school due to illness, the policy for absenteeism will be followed. If a student appears to be ill or injured and staff feels hospitalization is needed, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately. If contact cannot be made with a parent or emergency contact, a supervisor will exercise reasonable discretion in sending the student for emergency care.

Allergies

Parents must notify the school if students have allergies to food, drugs, insect bites/stings or other environmental factors. The parent or legal guardian must provide the school with specific written instructions regarding the actions to be taken in case of an allergic reaction during school hours. Please refer to the Medication Administration section in the event medication needs to be administered due to an allergic reaction.

Seizures

If a student has seizures, a parent or guardian, and their physician must submit a written seizure protocol upon enrollment to the school, or if the conditions change, with specific instructions on what the symptoms are, what routine to follow when symptoms occur, and when to notify emergency personnel. Please refer to the Medication Administration section in the event medication needs to be administered due to a seizure.

Physical Education and Recess

Physical education is important to a child's overall well-being and all students are expected to

participate in the school's physical education program. Part of the Merakey Education and Autism Centers' philosophy includes recognizing that when a student is physically well enough to attend school, he or she will benefit from spending a portion of the day in an outdoor physical activity (weather permitting). Exceptions are made only with a written note from home, or if a student needs to complete work for a teacher. Playground and gym facilities are school-specific. If a facility is not available, space will be designated for the students to participate in physical education activities. If a student cannot participate in physical education for a particular reason, a parent or guardian is required to notify the teacher in writing.

VISITORS

Visitation

To ensure the safety of students and staff, all visitors, including parents, must report to the school office upon entering the school. Visitors must read the Visitor Safety Information Document, sign the Visitor Sign-in Sheet, and present child abuse, criminal clearances and a Driver's License. Driver's Licenses will be kept on file until departure.

Visitors will be given a daily visitor badge, which must be worn at all times during the visit. At no time should visitors, parents or volunteers report directly to a classroom. Visitors must use the main entrance during school hours. All entrances will be secured to maintain building safety, with the exception of during large gatherings such as Thanksgiving Feast, Field Day, etc., visitors must be accompanied and in view of Merakey Education and Autism Center personnel at all times.

Classroom Visitation

In order to limit interruptions and reduce student distractions, classroom visitations are only permitted under specific circumstances. A request to visit must be made in writing to the director stating the purpose and scope of the proposed visit.

Volunteering

Volunteers provide our schools with needed resources to operate more efficiently. Volunteers are required to provide current child abuse, criminal background checks and a current TB test.

Volunteer responsibilities include:

- Be familiar with and follow all school and classroom policies including:
- Report to office upon arrival
- Dress appropriately, consistent with the staff dress code
- Children may not accompany the individual while volunteering
- Respect the confidentiality of the school, the staff, fellow volunteers and students
- Be prompt, and fulfill assignments
- Be sincere and caring to all students
- Be flexible
- Be positive and serve as a reliable role model

STUDENT AND STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT

Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Your Best!

The “Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Your Best” platform requires all students and staff to engage safely with responsible decision-making in an effort to succeed in school, home and community.

DISCIPLINARY PHILOSOPHY/CODE

Merakey Education and Autism Centers are committed to maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and staff. School-wide systems of positive reinforcement focus on a team-based approach that is incorporated in school rules and expectations to ensure student educational and behavioral success. The benefits are increased attendance, students and teachers reporting a more positive and calm environment, reduction in the proportion of students who engage in behavioral disruptions and reduction in the number of behavioral disruptions. The components of the school-wide positive reinforcement system include:

- Behavioral expectations are defined.
- Behavioral expectations are explicitly taught; It is not assumed all students have the same understanding of what behaviors are expected and what they look like specific to Merakey Education and Autism Centers.
- Appropriate behaviors are acknowledged on a regular basis.
- Behavioral errors are corrected proactively by assisting the student in identifying which of the rules have been violated and guiding the student in understanding why the behavior is unacceptable.
- Program evaluations and adaptations are made by a team of staff members committed to improving the school as a whole.
- Administrative support and involvement are active and visible.
- Individual student support systems are integrated with school-wide discipline systems. This support is a process for establishing a positive culture in school.

Possible consequences as a result of inappropriate behaviors: Warnings, parental notification, suspended privileges, community service, classroom separation, work on behavior goals and plan with teachers and counselors, or in more serious matters, contact with law enforcement.

DRESS CODE

It is expected that students maintain an appropriate dress and appearance that does not interfere with the educational process.

The following dress code will be adhered to: *

- Clothing must cover a student's torso. While it is not inappropriate to see shoulders, the straps of female undergarments must not be visible. All undergarments must be covered on males and females.

- Shorts, dresses, and skirts must follow the “finger-tip rule”—long enough so that when a student’s arms are dropped naturally to one’s side, the garment must be longer than the point where the tips of one’s fingers fall.
- No clothing or accessories referencing drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, self- or other-harm, violent themes, sexual activity or sexual innuendo are permitted.
- No clothing or accessories that communicate negative racial, cultural, or religious bias are permitted.
No clothing or accessories that communicate negative thoughts or ideas directed toward specific individuals or groups are permitted.
- Shoes must have soles, and feet must be covered and protected.

If the student does not have alternative clothing at school, a parent or guardian will be called to bring in a change of clothing, or students can select something that the school may have available. *This dress code is not all-encompassing, and leadership reserves the right to adapt or modify as necessary throughout the school year.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Duty to Protect Policy

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are required by law to notify state authorities if there is knowledge or suspicion of harm, abuse, or neglect of children or other identified vulnerable populations in or outside of school. The Merakey Education and Autism Centers comply with this law and cooperate with authorities in investigations. Reports of suspected abuse will be reported immediately by telephone or online. All school personnel are MANDATED reporters and will document and report any suspicion of harm, abuse, or neglect.

Mandated reporters are professionals who, in the ordinary course of their work and because they have regular contact with children or other identified vulnerable populations, are required to report whenever harm, abuse, or neglect may have been observed or is suspected. These professionals can be held liable by both the civil and criminal legal systems for intentionally failing to make a report. The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are committed to the safety and security of all individuals we serve and thus fully embrace our collective/individual responsibility under the law.

Confidentiality

Student records are maintained by the Merakey Education and Autism Centers so that each student is provided with the appropriate services. These records are kept confidential and are not released to unauthorized persons.

Emergency Safety Physical Interventions

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are committed to maintaining the safety of our staff and students. If a student is a risk to themselves or others, an emergency safety physical intervention may be used as a last resort to protect the safety of the student, other students and staff.

Emergency safety physical interventions will not be used for disciplinary action and will only be used to the extent that a risk of harm is present. All emergency safety physical interventions will only be deployed per the specific nature of the identified risk.

All staff engaging in an emergency safety physical intervention of a student must be certified through Safety Care training and must be re-certified annually. If a staff member has to utilize an emergency safety physical intervention to support a student, a waiver form will be sent home to the parent or guardian to determine if they would like to call an emergency IEP meeting, or if they would like to decline the emergency IEP meeting. An emergency IEP meeting needs to be held within ten (10) school days, unless the parent waives the meeting.

Search and Seize

To maintain a safe and secure school environment, all students are subject to the search and seizure policy, if there is reasonable suspicion for a search. The search and seizure procedures will be conducted according to established protocols.

Staff will conduct a fully clothed pat down using a security wand or small baton on all areas of the clothed body. If contraband is found during the search, the school will seize and secure the item(s). The parent, student's home school district and other appropriate team members will be notified. The results of a search may be provided to the police.

Consideration will be given to the student's history (victim of child abuse or neglect) when conducting a search, to prevent trauma and/or further trauma while maintaining the student's dignity. The search may consist of personal items as well as pat downs. Students who are subjected to a search under reasonable suspicion will be given the opportunity to hand over any contraband. If it has been determined necessary to search a student, two staff must be present during that search.

Contraband

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are committed to ensuring a safe and secure environment for all students and staff. The following items are strictly prohibited on Merakey property:

- Tobacco or illegal drugs
- Alcohol
- Firearms or other weapons including knives, cutting instruments, explosives, and objects capable of causing injury
- All electronic tracking, GPS, listening devices in accordance with all Merakey Privacy Rights policies

The unauthorized use or possession of contraband will result in the immediate removal of the student. Parents or guardians, the school district and authorities will be notified.

- For students, all electronic communication devices will be turned in at the start of the day and returned at the end of the school day. These include cell phones, iPods/MP3 players, iPads/tablets, iPhones, etc.
- In the event the electronic device is used for academic programming, it will be secured and monitored by teachers/staff.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency, Merakey Education and Autism Centers will follow established protocols to ensure the safety and security of all students and staff. Emergency scenario drills are held throughout the school year to increase our preparedness in the event of emergencies. Merakey Education and Autism Centers will work with local police and emergency services as part of our emergency procedure preparedness.

If the emergency is life-threatening, staff and students will evacuate to a meeting zone that is a safe distance from the premises or threat. The Merakey Education and Autism Centers will notify the police, parent or guardian and school districts of any emergencies on our property.

Emergency drills include:

- Fire drills
- Intruder/active shooter/lockdown drills
- Tornado/emergency weather drills

Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers are committed to providing an emotionally and physically safe learning environment for all students, employees, and volunteers free from harassment, intimidation and bullying. Bullying entails an intentional electronic (cyber bullying), written, verbal or physical act or series of acts directed at another student or students, that is severe, persistent or pervasive and has the effect of doing any of the following:

- Significantly interfering with a student's education
- Creating a threatening environment
- Disrupting the orderly operation of the school

School setting includes: in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop or at any activity sponsored, supervised, or sanctioned by the school on or off the campus. A student who violates this policy is subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

Abuse of School Property

Vandalism is defined as destroying and defacing school property either intentionally or unintentionally. A parent or guardian will be immediately notified if a child destroys or defaces school property and to determine how the damage will be repaired. Restoration or restitution will come in the form of cleaning the school building, community service and possible student repair of damages if applicable. Any student who engages in vandalism will be held responsible for the replacement of the damaged item(s).

Abandonment

Abandonment is considered to withdraw protection, support, or help from others. It is very important to maintain the safety of your child and the other children at the school. In the event a student is engaging in behaviors resulting in immediate danger to his or her safety or the safety of others and is unable to be placed on a vehicle operated by the respective school transportation company, the parent or guardian will be notified as soon as the behavior has escalated to the extent the student's

safety or the safety of others is at risk. The parent or guardian will need to pick up the student at the school within one (1) hour after the school's normal dismissal time. Merakey staff will make every effort to secure primary and secondary contact names and phone numbers and assure they are on file at the school.

It will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to arrange transportation. If transportation cannot be arranged to pick up a student within the one (1) hour time frame, the school director will notify the police and will report this incident to Childline. Once this has occurred, the parent or guardian will need to collaborate with the local police department to arrange pickup of the student.

Elopement

Elopement is defined as leaving school property without receiving permission from a Merakey staff member. It is very important to the Merakey team to maintain the safety of our students at all times. In the event a student elopes from Merakey property, one of the following two protocols will be followed:

- For students who are cognitively able to engage in a behavior contract with the school, expectations shall be set forth upon enrollment with regard to remaining at school and/or with school staff at all times, and a related behavior contract will be developed with the student and parent; When a student decides to leave the school without permission, school staff will do everything possible to encourage the student to remain at school, but will only do so up to the point that the student steps off of school property; Once a student leaves school property, the local police department will be contacted in order to assure the safety of the student; Basic identifying information and physical description will be provided to police to assist in their location of the student; Merakey staff will also call the student's parent to provide notification of what has occurred.
- For students whose developmental and/or cognitive level(s) do not permit them the ability to establish a behavior contract with the school, all reasonable measures will be taken to assure that the student remains safely on school grounds and/or with school staff; When a student leaves the school building or school staff despite these efforts, school staff will follow the student (even if he/she leaves school grounds) and will continue to encourage the student to return to school; Should this prove unsuccessful, the local police department will be contacted as an additional means of assuring student safety; In addition to the identifying information and physical description referenced above, police will also be provided with a physical location and general direction of movement in order to aid them in providing assistance; Merakey staff will also call the student's parent to provide notification of what has occurred.

Merakey staff will always work with the local police department to ensure they are aware of the above protocols and understand the needs of the students in our program. If elopement continues to be a safety risk, the Merakey Education and Autism Centers reserve the right to call a meeting with the student's educational and behavioral team members to create a safety plan for the student.

Electronics

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers have implemented a policy and procedure to collect all cell phones and media devices as students enter the school building in the morning. This policy

ensures full student attention and limits distractions during instructional time. Cell phones and media devices will be held in a secure lockbox and will be returned to students prior to dismissal. Students will have access to Merakey computers and tablets during the school day. In the event a parent or guardian needs to contact the student during school hours, they must contact the school and school staff will arrange communication with the student.

It is critical that parents support us regarding the inappropriate and unauthorized use of electronic devices during school hours. We respect the parents' need and desire to contact their children in emergency situations. School phones are available for incoming and outgoing calls and the office staff will remain very conscientious about delivering messages to students.

STUDENT SERVICES

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers support and encourage the collaboration of parents in school activities and events. The Merakey Education and Autism Centers' Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) are comprised of parents, guardians, teachers, and other school professionals. PTO meetings will be scheduled and posted for anyone to attend. The mission of the PTO is about cooperation, communication, education, and community support for the school and all of its programs and special events.

School Supplies

The school provides all necessary supplies for students, except a backpack or school bag. If other supplies are needed, these will be requested by the teacher in writing.

Special Events and Field Trips

Special events and field trips are held throughout the school year to enhance students' learning and integrate them into community-based activities. Permission from a parent or guardian is required for students to participate in special events and field trips. Any costs associated with the event or trip are the responsibility of the parent or guardian, unless otherwise specified. The teacher will send a permission slip home to be signed by the parent or guardian before taking the class on an outing outside of school. A parent or guardian may be asked to chaperone school outings or class trips. Teachers are required to take emergency forms and first aid kits with them on class outings.

Birthdays

For class celebrations, the child having a birthday is permitted to bring a treat for his or her classmates. The parent or guardian must plan these occasions with the teacher in advance. At the end of the school year or during extended school year we will celebrate the birthdays of the children whose birthdays fall in the months of June, July and August.

Ancillary Services (Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy)

Services provided at the Merakey Education and Autism Centers are designed to meet the individual needs of each student. Occupational, Speech and/or Physical Therapies must be

specifically included in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and be delivered by a licensed therapist.

Occupational Therapy targets both gross and fine motor skills, covering the expanse from vestibular and core work to dexterity and handwriting skill support.

Speech Therapy targets a variety of speech/language related areas covering development in facets ranging from articulation to pragmatics, to receptive and expressive vocabulary and beyond.

Physical Therapy targets a variety of muscle and movement related treatment areas covering development in facets ranging from gait to posture, to balance and beyond.

Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services, Wrap-Around, Case Management Support Services

The Merakey Education and Autism Centers understand the need for students to receive services such as Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS), Case Management and other supportive services during the school day. The Merakey Education and Autism Centers encourage and collaborate with these services. Therefore, if the student is prescribed school supports deemed necessary by the appropriate professionals, the IEP team will outline the identified needs and supports in the student's IEP.

Refer to the guidelines below for support professionals providing services within Merakey Education and Autism Centers:

- Will need to schedule observations a week in advance
- Abide by the Merakey Education and Autism Centers Visitor Policy
- Are required to show proof of clearances: Act 33/34, child abuse, and criminal background checks
- Have an updated TB Test
- Sign in at the office and turn off cell phones prior to entering the classroom
- Follow the Merakey Education and Autism Centers Dress Code Policy
- Support staff assigned to Merakey Education and Autism Center students will remain with his or her assigned student at all times
- Support staff will have encounter/voucher forms signed off on a daily basis, if appropriate/ required
- Support staff will call the school prior to lateness or absence

Compliment or Complaint

All Merakey Centers have an organizational structure where each program leader and Director is supported by a Regional Director and Executive Director; therefore, if a parent or guardian has a concern that has not been addressed by the Center Director, he/she can request the contact information of the Regional or Executive Director.

If an individual served, caregiver or guardian has a Compliment or Complaint, that he/she would like to share, they can complete a Feedback, Compliment or Complaint Form and submit following the instructions outlined within the document. These forms are mailed annually and were also provided in the intake packet. Additional forms can be obtained by contacting the Site Director or Merakey's

Quality and Compliance Organization listed below.

Merakey is committed to providing exceptional and compliant services to individuals in our care, where they feel safe and empowered to thrive as contributing members of their communities. Parents and guardians are encouraged to reach out to Merakey team members if there are any questions or concerns with service delivery. Families may also reach out to the Merakey Quality and Compliance Organization if their concerns are not being met by the above-mentioned resources. The Merakey Quality and Compliance Organization (QCO) Hotline is available to all staff and family members, Monday through Friday during normal business hours, to easily report any concerns with non-compliance and unethical behavior. The caller may speak to an Intake Specialist or leave a confidential voicemail. If the person does not wish to call, they may choose from any options listed below:

- Quality and Compliance Organization Hotline: 888-439-0100
- Email: QCO@merakey.org
- Fax: 215-273-5974
- Mailing Address: 620 Germantown Pike Lafayette Hill, PA 19444

The entire Merakey Education and Autism Centers' leadership team wishes everyone a safe and productive school year!



Handbook for Parents and Students
www.merakey.org