



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# **BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION**

**PARENT HANDBOOK  
GASTON COUNTY FAMILY YMCA**

# WELCOME!

Welcome to the Gaston County Family YMCA! We work hard to strengthen the foundation of the community through Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility. We offer numerous programs throughout Gaston County that are built to serve children from birth through teens. Whether it's character development in Afterschool Care, fostering relationships and a sense of belonging in Day Camp, confidence development and leadership training through teen programming, facilitating a sense of achievement through hard work in Youth Sports, or teaching the life saving skill of swimming and confidence in the water through swim lessons, we take our responsibility to the youth in our community seriously. We will serve your children with compassion, patience, skill and respect, and we strive to be partners with you in your child's development. We encourage feedback from you and always want to hear any ideas, thoughts or concerns that you may have regarding Y programs. The YMCA is a place for families and we want to do everything possible to strengthen and support your family.

## **All our programs are designed to meet the following goals.**

- Learn to appreciate oneself, gain confidence and build self esteem
- Develop character through the values of Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Caring and Faith
- Develop skills in leadership and group work
- Foster relationships and strengthen friendships
- Have fun!

We encourage all parents to visit us online at [www.gastonymca.org](http://www.gastonymca.org) for a comprehensive list of all our program offerings and to find additional information about their YMCA.

In Service,

Gaston County Family YMCA Program Team

<b>Cherryville YMCA</b>	215 North Mountain St Cherryville, NC 28021 704-445-9622
<b>Pharr Family YMCA</b>	208 Main St McAdenville, NC 28101 704-824-1131
<b>Stowe Family YMCA</b>	196 YMCA Dr. Belmont, NC 28012 704-822-9622
<b>Warlick Family YMCA</b>	2221 Robinwood Rd. Gastonia, NC 28056 704.830.9622

**YMCA Mission:** To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

# PROGRAM REGISTRATION

## Registration Process -

- The majority of our programs require registration. This is available online at GASTONYMCA.ORG or at the Membership Desk of any facility – whichever is convenient for you.

## Required Information

- When you register for any program, please be aware that email is our primary form of communication. Therefore, correct and current contact information is vital at the time of registration. A regularly checked email address is a requirement for program participation. In order to be fully registered in any program, ALL the fields on any paper or online form must be filled out completely. If a field is not applicable to you or your child, please indicate this with an N/A.

## Membership Benefits

- Membership is not necessarily a requirement to participate in most program offerings, though members do take advantage of a reduced fee on program prices.
- Members are eligible for need based Financial Assistance.

## Waitlist

- We work hard to serve anyone who is interested in participating in a program. Occasionally, a program will fill to capacity and we will start a waitlist. If a program is full at the time of your registration and you are placed on a waitlist, a director from that program area will be in touch with you regarding specific next steps. Things change for families, and being placed on the waitlist does not necessarily count you out.

## Payment Information

- Payment is always required prior to participation in any program that has a fee structure. Some of our programs require payment in full up front like sports or swim lessons - and some programs are set up to take multiple payments across a session - like afterschool or dance.
- If a payment is declined, our business office representatives will be in touch to collect payment prior to the start of the program. A late payment fee of \$20 may be assessed to all payments received after the due date. If payment is not received prior to the start of the program we reserve the right to cancel the registration and remove the participant. Any unpaid balance not collected in-house will be sent to an outside agency.

## Financial Assistance Information

- As a 501c3 non-profit charity, we provide financial assistance to members who would otherwise not be able to participate in programs. Eligibility is determined by the member's income and is administered on a sliding scale. An online application is available on the GASTONYMCA.ORG website. All applications and supporting documentation is reviewed by our Financial Assistance team, and one of them will contact you to let you know the qualifying level of assistance you can receive.

- In the instance that you need to cancel your registration in any program, we require written notice a minimum of 1 full week prior to the start of the program. Your program fee is 100% refundable as long as you have met these requirements. If your cancellation falls inside a week's notice, or was not provided in writing, we reserve the right to keep partial or full payment depending on staff time and dollars invested in the program based on your registration. PLEASE NOTE: Verbal notification given to any staff member who works outside of the business office does not qualify as a notice of cancellation. While you may share this information in passing to a counselor, a coach, a drop off or pick up staff, or a director, it is imperative that you follow up with written notification to our business office. They are the only staff members in our organization who can process this request.
- If your program participation required a deposit, your program fee - less the deposit - will be refunded to you. Deposits are non-refundable, but may be transferable.

## STAFF

Regardless of the program, our staff work hard to create a welcoming environment focused on group cohesiveness and the inclusion of all children. They are expected to lead by positive example, promote caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, and faith in each environment, and follow the practices in each program that keep children happy and safe.

### Who we are

- We feel confident that we have the best staff in town! Our staff is as diverse as our children and consists of individuals who want to make an impact on their community.

### Training

Prior to their employment, staff members have been drug tested, had a criminal background check, and have completed reference checks. Our staff typically go through a minimum of 20 additional hours of program specific training focused on providing quality services in each program area through a child centered approach. Developmental ages and stages, behavior management techniques, positive reinforcement, and quarterly risk management reviews, are just a few examples of the training our staff teams go through over the course of a year.

### Staff to Participant Ratios

All of our childcare programs (afterschool, day camp, or childwatch) adhere to the following staff to participant ratios:

- 6 weeks to 11 months – 1:3**
- 12 months to 24 months – 1:6**
- 3 years to 5 years – 1:8**
- 6 years and up – 1:15**

Please see the specific program information for group sizes and staff to participant ratios in our other enrichment programs.

### Babysitting Policies

- YMCA staff are not allowed to fraternize with, babysit, or transport your child outside of the YMCA program. We request that you not ask any staff to care for your child outside of the YMCA. If a relationship exists outside the Y which predates the staff employment with the YMCA, staff should notify their supervisor in writing so that it can be noted in the staff's records.

## PROGRAM PRACTICES

Below you can find the expectations and operational practices for all of the youth programs we offer. For additional information relevant to a specific program area, please see the program addendums in the back of this packet.

## Drop Off and Pick Up

### Camp/Afterschool Programs

- Children may not be dropped off before the program begins, and they must be signed in by a parent/caregiver.
- Children may not sign themselves into a program.
- Children must be on the roster in order to be signed in.
- **Code Words/Authorized Pick Up:** When picking up your child(ren), you will be asked to provide the CODE WORD or a photo ID daily. If you are using a code word, it will be selected during the time of registration. Your child will only be released to those who know the Code Word or who's photo ID matches the names provided on the Authorized Pick Up list. This is to ensure the safety of every child. The approved guardian will then initial next to the child's name to sign them out. In order to keep the integrity of the Code Word process intact, children should NOT know their own Code Word. A friend or family member will be permitted to pick up your child provided they know the Code Word, and/or written notification has been delivered to the program director of the pick up arrangements from the parent or guardian. If anyone is ever unable to provide a code word, a photo ID and phone verification will be required. Please know this process can take additional time.
- **Custody Issues:** In cases of separation or divorced parents where visitation rights are denied to one parent, we cannot deny releasing the child to such parent unless a court decree or separation documents are in our file expressly forbidding such parent to pick the child up from our program, or from pick up times not allowed by court decree. The court decree must also be specific to the rights of visitation on the YMCA property during Afterschool, Summer Camp, or other programs. The court document must specify in writing that visitation is permitted by the non-custodial parent. Otherwise, visitation will not be permitted. If there is ever a disagreement between parents on what the custody arrangements are and how it affects our pick up policies, we will call law enforcement to confirm the most recent versions of any court documents. We are not legally allowed to deny a parent access to his or her children without specific documentation, and we can not take a parent's word for it. Please call the Director if you have any specific custody issues.
- **Late Pick Up:** A late fee will be charged for [each child](#) in our care at close of the program. The fee is \$1 per minute per child and must be paid before the child returns to the program. After 10 minutes, the YMCA staff will begin calling parents/emergency contacts. If a child is not picked up within 30 minutes, and we have not been able to make contact with a parent, local authorities will be called.

### Impairment

- If a YMCA staff member believes that a parent is intoxicated or impaired at the time of transport, we will retain the child until an alternate plan can be arranged to get the child safely home. Local authorities can be notified.

### What to Bring

All programs have the following "what to bring" requirements for participation. A more detailed program specific list will be emailed to you upon registration and prior to program start.

- Water bottle
- Appropriate Clothing

- Closed toed shoes
- Positive Attitude!!

## What NOT to Bring

Regardless of the program, the items below are never necessary.

- Phones or Electronics
- Money, Jewelry, Valuables
- Toys from home
- Real or fake Weapons
- Medication or Drugs of any kind

## Behavioral Expectations

Our staff work hard to create a positive environment for children in Y programs. Our behavioral expectations are as follows:

- Safety First
- Listen and follow directions
- Do what is right
- Be respectful to others
- Try everything and do your best

We make every effort to redirect disruptive behavior through positive reinforcement & reflection, and are committed to working with parents to resolve any issues. Any disruptive behaviors can be dealt with in the following ways:

- **Verbal notification via parent phone call, or parent conference**
- **Documentation of behavior(s)**
- **1 Day Suspension**
- **3 Day Suspension**
- **5 Day Suspension**
- **Dismissal warning**
- **Dismissal from program**

Please note: Depending on the severity of an issue the YMCA reserves the right to move straight to dismissal for disruptive or unruly behavior, running away, or behaviors that threaten the safety of another participant or staff member in our program.

**Parent Code of Conduct:** We are invested in your child and want to provide the best experience we can for your family. We welcome feedback and always want to hear your concerns. Our goal is to communicate with you openly, honestly and often. Please know that we will never tolerate foul or offensive language, verbal abuse, or any threatening behaviors aimed at staff members or any other participant in our programs. While these types of issues are rare, they can and do happen. In these instances, membership privileges will be revoked and individuals can be removed from any and all YMCA properties.

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## Visiting a Program

- We welcome parent involvement in our programs and are excited when parents express the desire to come and see their children in action. Because we take seriously the safety and security of the children in our care, anyone wishing to have access to the program or program area – and therefore access to the children in our programs – must fill out a volunteer application and complete a background check. Otherwise, visitors must be accompanied by a

staff member or director at all times and visits must be less than 15 minutes in duration. If you just want to stop in and have lunch with your child, we will follow our normal procedures for checking children in and out of the program so they can enjoy time with you in a setting that does not involve the rest of the children in our care.

## Swim Testing and Aquatics Rules

- When enrolled in a swim lesson program, all children will be accompanied by a YMCA swim instructor and will follow a specific curriculum designed to increase a child's skill and confidence in the water. In any other program that has aquatic access, the following procedures will be utilized.
  - Proper Swim attire must be worn at all times
  - All children ages 15 and younger will be swim tested in order to utilize the aquatic facility. Once tested, they will be given a band.
    - Green Band Swimmer = Can pass all aspects of the swim test including re-surfacing out of water over their heads, floating front and back, and treading water effectively. They have unrestricted access to the aquatics areas which includes lakefront use.
    - Yellow Band Swimmer = Can pass a shallow water swim test, but not a deep water swim test. They are restricted to specific areas of the pool.
    - No Band Swimmer = Non-swimmer who must stay in a designated area.
  - Once a child or participant wants to cross the rope or go down the steps into the deeper areas of the pool, they must swim supervised with a parent or approved staff member IN the water with them. Parents or approved staff members must be within arm's reach of the child wherever they are in the pool.
  - Anyone refusing swim testing automatically gets the non-swimmer designation.
  - Children ages 12-15 who have NOT passed the Green level swim test may not be in the pool area without an adult or approved staff member
  - Non-Swimmers must be accompanied by an adult or approved staff member within arm's reach to go beyond the rope in the recreational pool. This applies even if the swimmer is wearing a PFD.

If you have specific questions regarding aquatics and how they interface with your child's program, please contact the aquatic director at your Y.

## Children with Special Needs

- We are committed to making whatever reasonable accommodation we can to be inclusive of children with special needs. Parents or guardians should reach out to the program director, prior to a child's registration or acceptance into a YMCA program, to discuss any special circumstances which may affect the child's ability to participate and within the guidelines of acceptable behavior, including but not limited to any serious behavioral problems or special circumstances regarding psychological, medical and/or physical conditions. The Director and parents will work together to determine a plan for the child's involvement and/or if involvement is possible depending on the circumstances.

## HEPA Standards

- All of our youth programs incorporate the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards of the YMCA of the USA. Through these standards and intentionally designed components of each program, we aim to educate kids about healthy lifestyles, model healthy behaviors and cultivate environments that make it easier for kids to make healthier choices. Be on the lookout for HEPA tips from your child's program via emails or monthly newsletters to learn more about our goal to improve health for youth in every community the Y serves.

## Inclement Weather



- When inclement weather strikes, safety is our top priority. Therefore, our Y programs are subject to change and/or to cancellation in these situations. We monitor conditions closely – including travel conditions to and from the Y - and will make an appropriate call as soon as we are able.
- We follow the Gaston County Schools weather policies for delays or cancellations as it pertains to our childcare programs. If school is canceled during the school day the Afterschool program will also be canceled. If school is canceled for subsequent days and conditions are safe for travel the Y will make an effort to provide care.
- Please check [www.gastonymca.org](http://www.gastonymca.org) and our Facebook page for updates. (\*\*Inclement weather cancellations are not subject to refunds.)

## Illness or Injury

### Illness:

- We will notify you if your child becomes ill while in our care, and you should arrange to have your child picked up as soon as possible. They will not be readmitted to the program until they have been fever and symptom-free for 24 hours OR you have a note from the child's physician showing they are free of symptoms.
- For contagious illnesses, such as COVID, the Y works side by side with the health department to stop the spread of illness and communicate appropriately with parents.

### Injuries:

While safety is top priority for us, scrapes, cuts, bumps and bruises do happen in our programs.

When an injury occurs, our staff are trained to provide appropriate care.

- In the case of a non-emergency/minor injury, we will treat your child and notify you at pick up. However, we will notify you immediately by phone call for a non-emergency injury if the injury resulted in significant bleeding, or if the injury was to the head or face.
- We will always notify you by phone call if we feel that a non-emergency injury should be followed up with more advanced medical care.
- In the case of an emergency, we will always notify EMS or 911 first, and then immediately notify the parent(s). The emergency contact will be notified if a parent cannot be reached.

## Lost and Found

- Label your child's belongings when sending them to a program. This helps with the process of reuniting children and families with missing items.
- Because of the volume of lost and found, we cannot hold items beyond a week from the time they are found. Any item not claimed within a 7 day window is disposed of or donated to charity. If you have questions about where lost and found items can be located, please ask at the membership desk.





# PROGRAM PROCEDURES

## Afterschool

### **Weekly Schedule –**

Your child's afterschool day runs from the time the bell rings until 6:00pm and will regularly be composed of 4 major components: snack, homework time, physical play, and enrichment activities.

### **Contacting Afterschool –**

At the start of your session, you will be provided with the contact information you will need to get in touch with someone at your afterschool site. The Afterschool Director often at the site rather than at their desk during the program hours. However, we take communication seriously and work very hard to make sure your phone calls and emails are returned. You should expect to have your call/email returned within 24-48 hours.

In the case of a true emergency, please contact the main YMCA line for immediate assistance.

## The Afterschool Day

### **What to wear**

Afterschool participants should plan to come to the program dressed appropriately for the weather. We make it a priority to go outside – even if it's cold – for their physical activity, and children should be dressed to do so. Hats and coats in the colder months are necessary. Children should always wear close-toed shoes.

### **Design of Day – Physical Activity, Enrichment and Play**

The afterschool experience is designed to foster relationships, build confidence, nurture social skills, facilitate teamwork and encourage personal growth. And for kids – all of those things happen through play and hands-on activities.

The physical activity guidelines we follow are relevant to all children, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, or the socio-economic status of the family. Through the HEPA focus of our afterschool program children and youth are encouraged to live an active lifestyle and participate in physical activities that support their healthy development. In our program, we will limit sedentary behaviors (especially screen time), and regularly schedule a range of physical activities for children to participate in. Following these guidelines is associated with better body composition, cardiorespiratory and musculoskeletal fitness, academic achievement and cognition, emotional regulation, pro-social behaviors, cardiovascular and metabolic health, and overall quality of life.

We design our activities knowing that kids learn best when it's disguised as interactive, hands-on fun.



## Transportation

Students are transported to Afterschool each day. If your child will be a car rider for the day, or is out of school for any reason, please notify your afterschool director. Children who are on the bus roster, but not accounted for at the end of the day, result in longer wait times while our staff verify the child's status prior to leaving the school. This slows down our transportation process and can result in late pick ups from other sites. All children are expected to follow these rules:

- Children will remain in their seats with their backs and bottoms touching the seats at all times.
- Children will keep their voices at an appropriate level.
- Children may not put anything (including body parts) outside the bus windows.
- Children will behave respectfully and use appropriate language.
- No eating or drinking on the bus.
- Children will show respect to the bus by leaving it clean and not defacing seats/walls.
- Children will wear seatbelts where applicable.
- All riders must follow the directions of the driver and Y staff at all times.

Failure to follow bus rules could result in suspension or termination from the program.

## Health Information

Completing the medical and behavioral information section of the registration process is one of the most important parts of your child's registration. This is the only information the YMCA has regarding any medical or behavioral needs of your child. If you have specific strategies to help your child be successful and make good choices, and/or if your child has allergies, asthma, seizures, ADHD or any other medical condition that we need to know about, please describe it in detail during the registration process. Our goal is to work alongside you as parents to help and support your child.

## Medications at Afterschool

We prefer that all medications are given at home when possible. If it is necessary to administer medication to your child in our program, you must fill out a medication consent form and deliver it, along with the medication, to the afterschool site coordinator at your child's site. Medications must be in their original prescription bottles with clear directions for administration. We cannot accept medications in a plastic baggie or any other temporary container.

## Payment Schedule

Once you register for afterschool, your registration is on-going and you will be drafted accordingly until written notification of cancellation. Upon registration, you can choose to have your payment drafted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>, or every Friday.

- Payments can be drafted from your checking account, your savings account, or from a credit card on file.
- All payments are due prior to care provided.
- Returned or declined payments are subject to a \$25 late fee and must be paid in full to avoid removal from the program.

# Day Camp

## Daily/Weekly Schedule –

- Your Day Camp Director will email you a Welcome Letter via email or PlayerSpace prior to the start of each session that will provide you the specific information for the upcoming week of camp. This will

include a daily or weekly schedule and pertinent information such as swim days. Each week of camp is a little different from the last, so it will be important to read the letters from the director each and every week-- even if you are a repeat camper.

### **Contacting Camp –**

- At the start of your session, you will be provided with the contact information you will need to get in touch with someone IN camp. Due to the nature of a Camp Director's Job, they are often at camp with the campers and are not often at a desk. However, we take communication seriously and work very hard to make sure your phone calls and emails are returned. You should expect to have your call/email returned within 24-48 hours.

In the case of a true emergency, please contact the main YMCA line for immediate assistance.

## **The Camp Day**

### **Outdoor Environment**

- Camp is primarily an outdoor environment.
- Outdoor time is a vital part of a child's healthy development. Studies show that playing outdoors builds physically healthier children, contributes to better cognitive and social/emotional development, improves sensory skills, increases attention spans, boosts immunity and results in better overall happiness. In short, outdoor experiences are important to the work of youth development and healthy living.
- We make every effort to rotate between outdoor, shade, and indoor activities.

### **What to Wear**

- Play is serious business and your campers may be messy when they climb into the car at the end of the day.
- Campers need to wear play clothes that can get dirty or messy without issue.
- Shoes should be sneakers that can be worn inside & outside and that are allowed to get muddy from time to time.
- Clothing should be light colored and light fabrics that are comfortable in summertime temperatures.
- A hat or a visor is also recommended.

### **Design of Day – Learning through Play**

- The camp experience is designed to foster relationships, build confidence, nurture social skills, facilitate teamwork and encourage personal growth. And for kids – all of those things happen through play. We design our daily schedule knowing that kids learn best when it's fun. We know that mastering a skill, working together with other campers in their group, problem solving through an activity, or just feeling comfortable being silly with other campers builds the foundations of kids who can lead others, show empathy, navigate difficult and challenging dynamics, value the differences in others, and give their best. To a kid, a camp day just looks like fun. And it is! But we know that it's also so much more.

### Managing the Heat – How to be cool when it's hot.

- We know first-hand how hot summer can get. But when weather reports include heat warnings, we're prepared – adjusting our camp day to safeguard campers from dehydration and overexposure to sun and heat. We provide cool, shaded places for camp activities, provide frequent water breaks, keep water available at all times, and monitor sun exposure.

When it's extra hot, here's our plan:

HEAT INDEX	RISK LEVEL	ACTION
Below 80° F	None	It's warm but we'll do everything as planned, with plenty of water breaks, as usual.
80° - 89° F	Low	It's steamy out but we're still OK to play as planned! Water is available at all times every day. Today we'll add more shady time, take plenty of breaks, and maybe even add some water fun!
90° - 104° F	Moderate	It's a bit hotter than normal. Today, camp leaders will monitor daily activities, with more outdoor activity in the cooler hours of the day, and rotations inside in the heat of the day. We'll take lots of breaks to chill out, make sure kids stay hydrated with plenty of water, and play games that keep us comfortable.
Greater than 105° F	High	WOW! Now that's a hot day! A day this hot is certainly no joke. We'll significantly adjust our day to minimize heat and sun exposure.

### Sunscreen

- Protecting skin from the sun's damaging rays is important. Always apply sunscreen to your child at home before arriving at camp — we can assist in reapplying as needed throughout the day. Send your preferred sunscreen labeled with your child's name on it in his or her backpack every day. Spray sunscreen is required if your child needs counselor assistance to reapply.
- If you have specific questions about sunscreen application or if you have a child with a sunscreen allergy, please contact your branch camp director.

### What to Bring

- Campers will always need a re-usable, reusable/refillable water bottle, 2 snacks, and a backpack.
- A specific "what to bring list" will be emailed to you prior to your child's week and will clearly lay out what days require a swimsuit, a towel, and any other item specific to the activities of the week.

### Meals and Snacks

- For many of our camp programs, the Summer Feeding Program through Gaston County Schools Nutrition provides breakfast and lunch for our campers. You will be notified as a part of your Welcome to Camp email if your child's specific camp program participates in this service, or if you will be required to pack your child's lunch daily.
- If you are planning to participate in breakfast, your child must be on campus no later than 8:00am. Breakfast is not served past 8:30am.
- You should plan to pack a morning snack and an afternoon snack daily for your child.

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**Strengthening the foundations of community.**

**GASTONYMCA.ORG**