

UCA Bears for CARE Volunteer Handbook

Thank you so much for volunteering to help families of children with special healthcare needs by providing caregivers the gift of time! This handbook includes materials that will be covered in the volunteer training prior to the event.

We ask all volunteers to arrive **1 hour and 30 minutes** prior to the event start time to participate in training. While the volunteers from the UCA department and course(s) that are hosting the event will have information about the children registered for the respite care program in advance to prepare for those children's individual needs, the focus of the volunteer training is on general program operations. **We encourage all volunteers to speak with their assigned child's parents** when they are dropped off, since parents are the experts on their children's needs.

Preparing to Volunteer

Here are some reminders for the day of the event:

- It's play time! Dress in casual attire that can handle minor messes.
- Unfortunately, late or day-of volunteer registrations are not allowed, as all volunteers must apply and submit to a background check.
- **Bring photo identification--** you will not be able to participate without these!
- Leave purses and valuables in your car, as there may not be space to store them.
- For the privacy of participating families, please **do not take photographs or post on social media during the event**. An official photographer will take photos of the event for promotional purposes and obtain all necessary legal releases.
- A medical staff member will be on hand to handle any medical concerns. Please do not attempt to handle a medical concern yourself.
- Feel free to ask for help in *any* situation where you need it!
- **All volunteers must be free of symptoms of illness for 36 hours prior to the event.** If you are not feeling well the night before the event, please stay home! Some of the children attending the event will be medically fragile or susceptible to infections, and we must protect their health.
- If you are unable to attend the event for *any reason*, please contact coordinator Jeannine Hamilton at 501-837-9167 so that we can fill your volunteer position.

Thank you for volunteering!

Program Background

What is Respite Care and Why is it Needed?

Respite care is a period of temporary relief for caregivers of children with special needs or older adults. Bears for CARE respite events are focused on providing care for children with special healthcare needs and their siblings so that parents can have a few hours to complete needed errands or just relax!

The National Alliance for Caregiving reports that caregiving takes a toll on the physical, mental/emotional, and overall health of parents, as well as limiting the time that they spend with their support network of family and friends. Caregiving responsibilities also lead to individuals being more likely to reduce hours at work, lose benefits, or request a leave of absence from work, all of which contribute to financial hardships for caregivers.

Respite care gives caregivers the gift of time, which can have a ripple effect on their overall health and wellbeing, as well as their ability to continue to provide care.

The Bears for CARE Program

Our Mission

Bears for CARE program is dedicated to providing central Arkansas families who care for children with special healthcare needs free and safe respite care opportunities that provide an environment that is fun and interactive.

Our Philosophy

Bears for CARE program believes that UCA's most valuable resources, their students and their community, can provide a truly unique respite care program that not only enhances the quality of life for families of children with special healthcare needs but also provides invaluable professional and personal development for UCA students.

Our Objectives

The program will

- Give children with special healthcare needs and their siblings fun, interactive activities
- Give caregivers of children with special healthcare needs essential leisure time
- Provide UCA students, especially students whose major program of study involves working with children with special healthcare needs, an opportunity to gain experience with children with special healthcare needs, their families, and future professional peers in related fields
- Provide UCA students an opportunity to experience the rewards and challenges caring for children with special healthcare needs

- Provide UCA students with an appreciation for the overlapping roles that parents experience as family members, caregivers, and experts on their children's needs
- Potentially provide, with IRB approval and informed consent of families, research opportunities that will help improve understanding and increase services for families of children with special healthcare needs
- Provide a model program for partnerships between academic institutions and nonprofits in providing respite care for families of children with special healthcare needs and important skill-building experiences for students

Safety and Emergency Precautions

Building Security

A volunteer will be in charge of security at the event to ensure that children stay in designated areas and are picked up by the appropriate adult. If you have any questions about where you are allowed to go with your child during the event, just ask this volunteer.

Building Emergency Plan

Please familiarize yourself with the emergency plan for the building where this respite care event is located, included in an appendix to this handbook.

Health and Safety

General Safety

Never leave your child unattended! Several volunteers will be designated as floaters to assist any individual volunteer as needed. If you are the only volunteer assigned to a child, find a floater if you need to take a break or need help for any reason!

Hygiene

Wash your hands and assist your child in washing hands before and after eating, after a diaper change or using the bathroom, after coughing or sneezing, and anytime hands are dirty or messy.

Choking

At snack time, pay extra close attention to your child and encourage eating slowly and alternating bites of food and sips of drink. Watch out for foods that present a higher risk of choking, such as grapes, peanut butter, hard fruits and vegetables, and nuts.

Seizures

Do not attempt to restrain a child who is having a seizure or place anything in his or her mouth. Find an area where the child can lie down away from people and objects until the seizure has passed.

Medical Concerns

Please see the medical staff member for help with any medical concerns or injuries. Do not attempt to address medical needs yourself, even if they seem minor. The medical staff member may need to review the child's medical history.

Interacting with Children with Special Healthcare Needs

Valuing Differences

Children with special healthcare needs have very diverse experiences in terms of their interests and abilities. Don't assume that a child has delays or needs help in *all* areas just because he or she has a special healthcare need.

Communication

The words you use matter when you are talking about or to children with special healthcare needs! No person wants to be defined by his or her disability. Using people-first language and describe what children *can do* and what they *need help with* affirms each child's abilities and clearly communicates to others who may not be familiar with the characteristics of certain diagnoses. Here are a few additional tips for communicating with children:

- Give the child your full attention-- put your phone away!
- Talk to the child about what you are doing, what choices he or she can make, and what's going on around you. A child may like to observe what others are doing before or instead of participating, and that's okay!
- Explain transitions to the child to help him or her switch from one activity to another.
- Let the child decide how he or she wants to do an activity, and don't automatically give help if the child doesn't ask for it.
- Behavior is often a form of communication. If a child is making loud noises, rocking, etc., he or she may be asking for your attention or for a change in environment.
- Pay attention to other forms of nonverbal communication, and look for alternative ways to communicate with the child if you have trouble understanding his or her verbal communication.

Creating a Positive Environment

- There's no wrong way to play! If a child doesn't want to do an activity or wants to do an activity differently from others, that's okay!
- Allow the child to take the lead on activities and show you what he or she likes and doesn't like.
- Avoid overstimulating a child. If a child seems overstimulated, take a break or a walk.
- Provide lots of attention, praise for specific positive behaviors, and do NOT punish a child.

Reviewing Individual Participant Information

You will now have some time to review the information about the individual child you've been paired with for this event. Consider the following, and please ask questions about anything that you're not sure how to deal with:

- What does the child like/dislike?
- What does the child need assistance with?
- What are the child's toileting needs?
- What are the child's medical concerns (allergies, seizures, etc.)?
- What are the child's behavioral concerns (overstimulation, etc.)?
- Did the child bring a snack today? If so, what will the child be eating and drinking?