



LOVE FIRST

Homeschool Inc.

**Academy
Participant Handbook**

2023 - 2024

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Who We Are

Mission

The mission of Love First Homeschool Inc. is to support and encourage families in the homeschool community to foster academic, emotional, and spiritual growth from a biblical perspective, so children become self-directed learners and servant leaders who understand that, as Christ followers, we must love first.

1 John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.

Statement of Faith and Community

We are a body of homeschoolers from various Christian traditions, believing in one triune God—the Father, His Son and Our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We are comfortable praying together, discussing God, and sharing scripture. As parents, we prayerfully and joyfully accept the responsibility of educating our children. Our instruction reflects a Christian worldview solidly rooted in the Bible. We acknowledge that denominational differences exist. We choose to concentrate on our spiritual unity as believers through our common faith in Jesus Christ and will not allow doctrinal differences to hinder our cooperation as Christian home educators.

Purpose

Love First Homeschool Inc. is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, and educational purposes under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Leadership Team

Melody Gowman, melody.lovefirst@gmail.com
Kara Strouth, kara.lovefirst@gmail.com
Brenda DiEugenio, brenda.lovefirst@gmail.com
Devon Greathouse, devon.lovefirst@gmail.com
Shannon Chilcote, shannon.lovefirst@gmail.com

Anti-Discrimination Policy

Love First Homeschool Inc. is committed to fulfilling its mission without discrimination, including discrimination based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, age, gender, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability or handicap, veteran status, economic status, or religion.

Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy

Love First Homeschool Inc. is committed to providing all members with a safe and supportive environment. Members are expected to treat each other with respect. Teachers and other attending adults are expected to teach and to demonstrate by example that all members of the community are entitled to respect. Harassment or bullying of any member, adult or child, is a violation of this policy. This includes, but is not limited to, harassment or bullying based on political preferences, political beliefs, socioeconomic status, race, color, national origin, ancestry, age, gender, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability or handicap, veteran status, economic status, or religion.

Examples of harassment / bullying by any person, adult or child, may include, but are not limited to:

Verbal Bullying

- Direct Bullying: Taunting, teasing, name calling, put downs, racial remarks, threats
- Indirect Bullying: Spreading rumors, gossiping

Physical Bullying

- Direct Bullying: Hitting, kicking, tripping, punching, using any sort of violence and any unwanted physical contact, theft of property or taking anything that does not belong to you without permission
- Indirect Bullying: Enlisting a friend to assault someone

Nonverbal/Non-physical Bullying

- Direct Bullying: Threatening or obscene gestures
- Indirect Bullying: Being deliberately unkind, excluding others from a group, manipulation of friendships, threatening email, setting someone up to be humiliated

Cyberbullying

- Direct Bullying: Cyberbullying occurs through the use of technology. This can include the use of any electronic devices using social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites, e-mail or other electronic means. A person participates in direct cyberbullying if he or she directly carries out the behavior.
- Indirect Bullying: Indirect cyberbullying is carried out by those who assist, encourage, or fail to report the bullying behavior in any way. It is often the virtual bystanders who are responsible for the repeated humiliation felt by victims.

Any person who believes he or she has been subject to harassment, bullying (including verbal, physical, nonverbal/nonphysical, and cyber) or a hostile environment, or has observed this conduct based on one or more of the characteristics noted above— whether such harassment, bullying or hostile environment is created by a fellow student, teacher, or parent/guardian—is encouraged to report the conduct to the leadership team. If a person is found to have engaged in acts of bullying, harassment or other acts that create a hostile environment, the person may be subject to discipline, including but not limited to removal from the organization without refund or, in extreme cases, legal action may be taken.

Membership Availability

Membership will be available to families who are current in the payment of all required fees and who have satisfied such other duties and responsibilities as have been set by the Participant Handbook. Membership is valid July 1 - June 30; grade advancements in the organization occur at this time.

Membership may be revoked at the discretion of the leadership team when the duties and responsibilities as outlined in the Participant Handbook are deemed not compliant.

When membership capacity has been reached, applicants will be placed on a waiting list for consideration by the leadership team.

Attendance

No-Shows

A no-show is an absence without any communication. Except in an emergency situation, like a car accident, no-shows are unacceptable, as they create chaos and disruption to the children's activities, and may result in a loss of membership without refund.

Withdrawals

Please let the leadership team know if your plans change and you will no longer be attending. Because fees are paid in order to have a spot in the organization and pay for expenses, like class materials, all fees paid are nonrefundable. Withdrawals that result in failure to uphold commitments may prohibit future participation in the organization for the family.

Academy Membership Attendance

Attendance is an important part of your commitment; the organization cannot function properly without all members present. More than three absences in a school year may result in loss of membership without refund and prohibit future membership. Please communicate extenuating circumstances to the leadership team.

Arrival and Departure

We look forward to seeing the students as they arrive in the morning. The sign in/out table will be located immediately in the foyer of our main entry.

- Every student will have a form completed by a parent or guardian indicating all people permitted to drop off/pick up the student.
- For pick up and drop off, parents/guardians should form a line at the front of the entrance to the building, moving forward one at a time until the assigned staff accepts/releases the student.
- For students transporting themselves by bike/car/public transportation, a transportation form needs signed by the parent. Students can park in the second lot in order to avoid pick up/drop off line traffic.
- Students are expected to both sign in and out upon arrival and departure.
- Students should report directly to class. If a class is still in session, students should report to the Main Assembly room until class is ready to begin.
- Students should move quietly through the building so as not to disrupt classes that are in session.
- Students should arrive promptly five to ten minutes prior to the start of class. Students should be picked up promptly at the end of class. See *Early Arrival and Late Fees* section for more information.
- Doors will be locked at the start of each class period. Late students will need to ring the doorbell for entry.
- Students are not permitted to leave the building until an approved pick-up person is in the parking lot.
- For students who do not show, the parent will be notified via text and/or email. Also, see *No-Shows* section for more information.

Leaving the Premises During Class Hours

Students are not permitted to leave the premises during registered class time. Students will only be dismissed to parents during scheduled dismissals. If students need to leave a class outside of scheduled times, advance written communication to the leadership team is required.

Early Arrival and Late Fees

Students should arrive five to ten minutes prior to the start of class. This ensures adult supervision and timely arrival to class so as not to disrupt a class that has started. Students should be picked up within ten minutes of their final class ending. Students who transport themselves are not permitted to loiter outside the building. Arriving more than ten minutes early or being picked up more than ten minutes late will result in a nonrefundable fee that must be paid before the next class day in order to be eligible to attend and continue to be a member in good standing. Fee schedule is as follows:

First occurrence: \$25

Second occurrence: \$50

Third occurrence and beyond: \$100 and possible loss of membership

Absences

In order to remain an active member, students must consistently attend. An excess of three absences may result in the loss of membership in the group in order to make room for members who are waiting for an opportunity to attend. This does not include extended illnesses, births, deaths, or other extenuating circumstances. In order to remain a member in good standing, please communicate with the leadership team if you have extenuating circumstances.

If you know ahead of time that you will be absent and for emergency absences:

1. Text Kara Strouth, or Email kara.lovefirst@gmail.com with reason for absence.
2. Email your teacher(s) for class work that needs made up as soon as possible.



Member Requirements and Expectations

Cleaning

- Please see attached Rules and Facility Use Checklist for our host location.
- Everyone is expected to clean up after themselves.

Adult Responsibilities

A. Clearances

- Child Abuse History Clearance, PA State Police Criminal History Clearance, and FBI Criminal History Clearance (if you have lived outside of PA in the last 10 years) are required for all adults participating in the organization.
- There is no cost for volunteers to get these clearances and all parents/guardians or adults who may attend events with students are expected to have clearances on file.
- Instructions on obtaining required clearances are on the website.

- Submit required clearances to Kara Strouth, at kara.lovefirst@gmail.com, provide a hard copy in person, or place them in her mailbox.
- B. Attendance at Meetings:
- There will be a minimum of one meeting per year. This will be in preparation for the school year and take place prior to the start of classes.
 - A parent/guardian is expected to be present at scheduled meeting(s) with the student(s).
- C. Involvement in Your Child's Classes
- Be involved in your child's classes. Check in with your child to be sure they are completing required work.
 - Check email at least weekly and read the weekly newsletter to ensure your child has all materials for class.

Student Responsibilities

- A. Students are required to participate in every class period by attending class or being pre-approved by the leadership team to serve in some other way that utilizes their skills, talents, and abilities.
- B. Any child who brings a phone or any other electronic device must keep it put away in such a manner that it cannot be a distraction to the class. Of course, if the device is required for a particular class, like computer class, it may be used within the parameters set up by the class teacher. Failure to respect this boundary may result in removal of the device with the parent having to pick it up in person. Parents/guardians will be called for student pick-up should any difficulties arise in this process.
- C. While Love First classes are a welcoming and relaxed environment for students, they are also orderly and organized. Students are expected to be respectful to others and participate to the best of their abilities.

Payments

Family Registration Fee

There is a \$250 non-refundable yearly registration fee, including those who join mid-year. Registration fees may be paid upfront in one payment or paid in three payments as listed below. For families who join mid-year, registration fees are due at the time of registration or as outlined below. The registration fee helps cover the cost of renting the facility, liability insurance, website fees, and professional fees.

Registration fee schedules are as follows:

Option 1:

- Pay \$250 in full upon registration

Option 2:

- Payment 1: \$50 deposit due immediately upon registering to hold spot in organization
- Payment 2: \$100 due by July 1 prior to the start of the school year. For those who register after July 1, this payment is due immediately.

- Payment 3: \$100 due by the first week of class of the second semester. For those who register after the first week of class of the second semester, this payment is due immediately.

The Academy registration fee also covers the Club/Event level registration. For example, Academy members have access to everything within the Club and Event level membership and do not pay the registration fee for Club/Event membership.

Fundraising

Our group is relying on fundraising participation from each family to help keep costs as low as possible. We will strive to provide a variety of fundraising opportunities so that each family can participate in the group fundraisers. Due to the nonprofit nature of our organization, all funds raised will go toward the benefit of the entire group. Funds raised will help reduce or potentially eliminate fees.

All fundraisers held or endorsed at Love First Homeschool Inc. must be Love First Homeschool Inc. sanctioned fundraisers. No other outside fundraisers, or other business transactions, are permitted unless explicit approval has been given by the leadership team.

Fundraising questions or suggestions can be sent to fundraising@lovefirsthomeschool.org.

Rebate Program

Love First Homeschool Inc. participates in the RaiseRight, formerly Scrip, rebate program. Using this rebate program, families can reduce their fees by purchasing gift cards for stores where they normally shop. Families receive the full amount of the gift card to use at the given store. The company gives a percentage of the purchase back to the purchaser in the form of a rebate which can be applied to the family's Love First account or "cashed out" in the form of a check from Love First. To learn more about RaiseRight, visit <https://www.shopwithscrip.com/how-to-earn>.

Financial Aid

When possible, financial aid is available on a limited basis and is needs-based. Financial aid is at the discretion of the leadership team. Please inquire with leadership if costs prohibit you from participating in the organization.

Tuition and Supply Fees

Each class has a set tuition amount that is required along with a supply fee that will vary depending on the individual class. Tuition for classes is an important part of covering expenses such as teacher payroll, insurance, etc. Some classes will require additional materials or books to be purchased. See the class description for required fees and materials/books/supplies. Refunds for tuition and supply fees are at the discretion of the leadership team and will be considered only prior to classes starting.

The full tuition fee for each class is due even when joining mid-semester; fees are not prorated.

Class supply fees must be paid in full by the first week of classes for each semester in order to remain a member in good standing and continue participation in the organization.

Class Tuition, Multi-Class Costs

1 class = \$200 per year

2 class = \$350 per year

3 classes = \$500 per year

4 classes = \$650 per year

study hall = \$50/semester

Study Hall Guidelines

- Study hall is not a class and is not factored into the prices/bulk discounts.
- Study hall has been made an option for the convenience of families. For example, if due to parent work schedules it is helpful for the student to stay a class period that is not a class for the student, the student can sign up for a study hall during the assigned time.
- After tuition for classes is determined, the study hall fee will be added.
- Students must have work to do during study hall. For example, a student can bring his or her math curriculum to complete during study hall time.
- Study hall will be monitored by an adult. The assigned adult will be willing to assist the student with the work he or she brings if possible, but it should not be expected that the student receive any instruction or support for the work brought.
- If the student does not have a class at a given time and did not sign up for study hall, the student should be picked up by his or her pick up person. For example, if a student has a class first period and third period but does not sign up for study hall second period, the student should be picked up after first period and dropped off for third period while following all guidelines listed in the *Attendance* section of this handbook, including being subject to the fees listed in the *Early Arrivals and Late Fees* section.
- Students can sign up for a study hall per semester. Once signed up for a study hall, the fee is nonrefundable for that semester.

Communication

Website

www.lovefirsthomeschool.org

Our website has a public side and private side that is accessible only through logging in. Information, forms, and schedules are available for you to access on the private side of the website. Sign ups for events should be done through the website calendar.

Newsletter

A newsletter will be emailed weekly on Friday morning. Please send any information to be included to lovefirsthomeschoolinc@gmail.com by Thursday at noon. Please include “newsletter” in the subject line.

Facebook

There is a private Facebook group for current members only. This group is used to share information and build community, but please keep in mind that it is not the primary source of

communication as some members are not a part of Facebook. Facebook should not be used as the only means to inform of absences or important events.

Remind App

Text @LFHinc to the number 81010 to be added to the group in Remind. This group will be used to send a text in case of last-minute cancellations or to alert members of an urgent message during a regular meeting day.

Academy Classes

Class selection and enrollment

- Classes are planned with input from parents/guardians and final class decisions are made by the leadership team.
- Families must register on our website to have their own personal account where they can assign classes to each child.
- Some classes may have prerequisites to enroll. These prerequisites will be honored with exceptions being made on a case-by-case basis in collaboration with the leadership team.

Subcontractor Responsibilities

At times, the organization may choose to hire a subcontractor to provide a teaching service to students. The following guidelines will apply:

- In addition to the fee charged by the subcontractor, a class supply fee may still apply in order to cover the cost of using the room in our host location and will be determined by the leadership team.
- The subcontractor determines his/her fee for the course.
- The subcontractor may require each child to have/purchase materials/supplies in order to implement course objectives in addition to his/her course fee.
- A service agreement or contract will be set up and signed between the subcontractor and the organization.
- The subcontractor will provide proof of insurance and identification.
- The leadership team will determine:
 - if the fee is collected by the organization and then issued to the subcontractor with the requirement of a W9/1099
 - if each family pays the subcontractor directly, per child
- Subcontractors are required to provide appropriate clearances.
- Subcontractors are required to read Love First Homeschool Inc. Participant Handbook.

Homework Policy

Students will be in attendance on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Assignments will be provided for two additional 45-minute homework sessions per week. If any family or child has extenuating circumstances that prevent the child from completing assigned work, the parent should communicate this need with the teacher. The teacher and parent should respectfully work together in an effort to best serve the child. Ultimately, the final grade and “credit” earned is at the discretion of the parent, but sufficient work will be assigned so that a full high school credit can be earned.

Gentle Discipline Policy

Purpose

We believe the best way for all to enjoy their time at Love First Homeschool is for children to be engaged in inviting activities. So the best “discipline” is a well-run class. However, in the event that a child needs assistance with his or her behavior, we have set these guidelines.

Guidelines

Leaders have a menu of options to try. They may try other similar ideas, as well, as long as they are in the same spirit of treating children with respect and guiding them gently towards their best behavior.

1. Leaders are asked to plan their classes well so children are busy (even when self-directed).
2. Leaders are asked to have predictable expectations for behavior and recognizable routines so children know things like when it’s time to listen to someone else talk or when it’s time to clean up and how to help.
3. If after expectations are explained, a child needs help following them, the child may be:
 - a. First, redirected to the appropriate activity
 - b. Second, asked directly to stop the inappropriate behavior
 - c. Third, given a logical consequence

We believe that in most cases, this is all that will be necessary.

4. However, if a child escalates the behavior to highly disruptive misbehavior after repeated attempts by the leader or assistants to correct the behavior, the child’s parent will be called to the room to address the behavior.
5. The purpose of the parent intervention is to obtain the parent’s assistance in reinforcing that the leader is in charge and that the child must follow the rules. The goal is to convey to the child that the adults, including the parent, are working as a team in supporting the child’s ability to use self-control. We ask that the parent convey this if/when they are called to address their child. The parent may need to consider the option of removing the child for a brief time until he or she is ready to participate in class appropriately.
6. Leaders are to seek restoration when an issue has been addressed. Lovingly welcome the child back into class for a second chance whenever possible.

7. If parental intervention is repeatedly necessary, the parent may be asked to attend the class with the child (and participate as an engaged assistant for all the children).
8. If the child is not able to bring the behavior under control with a parent regularly in the room, the child may be asked to no longer attend the class.
9. If the child is having severe trouble bringing his or her behavior under control in several classes, he or she may be asked not to attend.
10. If a child engages in bullying or any form of verbal abuse, physical fighting, brings a weapon, engages in theft, or willfully destroys property, the child will be subject to disciplinary action.

Unacceptable Corrective Methods

Yelling, humiliating, time out, and physical punishment by any adult are unacceptable at Love First Homeschool.

Conclusion

As children engage in activities that interest them, leaders set up well organized classes, and leaders and assistants use our gentle discipline guidelines if/when necessary, we believe that Love First Homeschool Inc. will continue to be a pleasant, safe place to learn, explore, and grow together.

Children with Special Needs

It is the parent's responsibility to make the teacher and leadership team aware of any special needs their child may have that would affect their learning or participation in the class. If the student requires consistent individualized assistance, the parent will be assigned as a helper in the child's classes in order to support the child. The goal of Love First Homeschool Inc. is to provide a safe, welcoming, and educational environment for every child participating in the organization, without exception.

Conflict Resolution

We understand that conflict is natural; however, as people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a Christ-honoring way. We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and to grow to be more Christ-like.*

We strive always to maintain an atmosphere of grace and love. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. (James 1) If possible, be willing to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19)

We ask that if there is an issue that needs to be addressed that you follow these steps:

1. Go directly to the involved person and address the issue calmly.
2. If the problem is not resolved, seek counsel from the leadership team.

*adapted from Peacemaker® Ministries. <https://peacemakerministries.org>

Safety and Security

Safety of everyone attending is always the first priority. As such, the following protocols are in place:

- We will enter and exit only through the main entrance.
- Doors will be locked during class time. Someone will have to let you in if you arrive too early or too late.
- If you are taking kids outside for any reason, let the leadership team know ahead of time.
- Children must be supervised at all times; no exceptions.
- All participating adults must have valid, required clearances.
- Adults should never be alone with a child who they are not the parent or guardian of.
- Keep classroom doors propped open.
- Adults should not make promises of confidentiality to any children.
- No weapons of any kind (knives, guns, swords, etc.) are permitted in student possession.

Emergency Procedures

We have procedures for two types of emergencies: those requiring students to remain in the classroom until further notice and those requiring the evacuation of the building.

Emergency Hold Plan – this plan will be used if a threatening intruder enters the building or if we need to take a complete head count of the student body, for example, if a student is missing.

1. The Emergency Hold Plan will be indicated by sending a text through the Remind app to alert all attending adults. When appropriate, members of the Leadership team or other appointed adults will also alert classes.
2. Upon receiving the “Emergency Hold” message, all students are to remain in their current classroom. The door should be shut and secured if possible, lights turned off, and students gathered into the safest area of the room.
3. Classrooms should remain secure until a member of the Leadership Team indicates it is safe to resume.

Emergency Evacuation Plan – this plan will be used when complete evacuation of the building is needed for the safety of everyone inside, as in the case of a fire.

Teachers/helpers will be expected to locate the rooms where your classes are held and review the quickest way to exit the building in the event of an emergency. An emergency evacuation drill may be held sometime during the year.

In the event that we would need to evacuate the building, the fire alarm will be sounded. In response to this warning, teachers/helpers should follow these steps:

1. Gather the children in your class into a line and take a headcount.

2. As you exit the room, turn off lights, and close the classroom door to verify that the room is vacated.
3. Lead the students single-file to the quickest exit available. There should be no talking to allow everyone to hear any instructions that may need to be given.
4. Proceed to the furthest area of the parking lot.
5. Have your class line up and take a count of your students to make sure you have everyone.
6. Keep the students with you until the Leadership Team ensures that all students are present and gives further instructions.

Guests and Visitors

- A. Guest speakers will need to be pre-approved by leadership.
- B. Visitors who are visiting to determine if our organization is a good fit for their family must include at least one parent/guardian with their children. Parents/guardians and students of the organization should welcome visitors. Visitors may attend one time with no charge. Should they choose to join the organization, they will need to pay the required fees, like all other participants, in order to participate.
- C. For safety and insurance purposes, guest students (friends of participants) are not permitted unless pre-approved by leadership.

Cancellations

Organization cancellations, for any reason, will be emailed, texted through the Remind App, and posted on Facebook.

Building

Host church

Our host church, First Christian Church, has graciously agreed to host our group. Love First Homeschool Inc. is an independently registered nonprofit organization. We exist as our own legal entity upholding and maintaining all requirements of the law.

Cleaning

Every family is responsible to help clean. Our goal is to leave the church in better condition than when we got there.

Health Policy

Guidelines for Staying Home

You or your child should stay home if exhibiting any of the following symptoms:

- fever of 100.4 or higher
- vomiting or diarrhea
- rash with fever
- other symptoms that would hinder participation:
 - tired, unable to focus
 - uncontrollable coughing or sneezing
 - bad sore throat
 - eye drainage

24 Hour Rule:

- You or your child should be fever free without medication, as well as no vomiting or diarrhea for at least 24 hours before attending.
- If you or your child was given an antibiotic, please stay home for at least 24 hours after the first dose.

Please use wisdom when deciding if you should keep your family at home for the day. While your attendance is important, your health and the health of others is the priority. If it is a situation where only one person is ill, please use caution in deciding if the rest of your family will attend.

If you or your child begins to feel unwell after you have arrived, please inform a member of the leadership team prior to leaving for the day.

Guidelines for Incidents and Injuries

1. Care for the injury with proper first aid care and necessary attention. A first aid kit is available at the welcome table.
2. Inform a member of the leadership team of the situation.
3. Fill out an Incident Report form located in the file folder at the welcome table. This completed form needs to be signed by the child's parent/guardian as well as a member of the leadership team.

Rules and Facility Use Checklist

Outdoor activities-please protect the landscaping by staying out of the mulch and plantings. Use the sidewalks and grass areas for outdoor activities.

Pantry supplies and linens must be washed and returned as soon as possible.

Nothing is to be taped, stapled, or tacked to the walls without permission from the leadership team.

No church equipment can be removed from the church premises for any reason.

No commercial activity shall be conducted on the premises.

No alcoholic beverages may be served, consumed, or brought onto the church property.

Love First Homeschool Inc. is a smoke-free and tobacco-free facility.

Wipe down all tables and chairs as needed. Bathroom toilets must be cleaned and flushed and counters wiped dry.

Do not leave leftover food and drinks behind. Give away, take home, or throw away.

Collect, bag all trash, and place it inside the trash can located in the breezeway. If you fill the trash can, do not put bags outside. Instead, please take them with you for disposal.

Any shortages or maintenance issues discovered while using the facility should be reported to a member of the leadership team as soon as possible.