



OPEN CONNECTIONS™

Freedom to Learn and Create

OC Family Handbook

(Revised May 2022)

“It all starts with the belief that people are natural learners.”

- Peter Bergson OC Co-founder

“When you figure things out for yourself, you learn you can figure things out, and that far outweighs any bit of information you might absorb about the content itself.”

- Peter Bergson, OC Co-founder

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“A person’s a person no matter
how small.”

- Horton the Elephant

PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook was developed to answer many of the commonly asked questions that parents and youth may have during the program year and to serve as a repository of OC's guidelines and policies. Because the handbook contains information about youth and parent guidelines and responsibilities, parents and youth are responsible for knowing its contents. Please take the time to become familiar with the following information and keep this Handbook available for your use. It can be a valuable reference during the year and a means to avoid confusion and misunderstandings when questions arise.

OC reserves the right to interpret the content of this handbook, including the rules and regulations governing the conduct of youth and parents. This handbook is not a contract, nor is it intended to be so construed. OC reserves the right to modify and/or amend the content of this handbook at any time.

If you have any questions about the OC Family Handbook or any of its policies, please contact the OC Director, Rick Sleutaris.

*"Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him
and let him know that you trust him."*

- Booker T. Washington

OUR REASON FOR BEING

Welcome to Open Connections! We have a **VISION** of a world where all young people develop the foundation for a self-directed life of purpose and fulfillment.

At Open Connections, it is our **MISSION** to help young people and adults develop the tools needed to create the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment. We do this in two ways:

- by providing an Open Education environment (the Open Connections campus) which fosters the guiding principles of Respect, Freedom, Responsibility and Natural Learning; and
- by working with others who share our principles and values in order to tip the balance from the traditional model of compulsory instruction over to a more organic, learner-directed approach based on self-motivation and the creative process.

Open Connections focuses on three broad **CORE SKILL SETS** that we strive to instill and develop in each young person that will assist them in creating the life they want, full of purpose and fulfillment. These broad skills along with our idealized goal are:

- Intrapersonal Skills (I): Youth are knowledgeable and confident in who they are.
- Interpersonal Skills (WE): Youth are able to communicate their needs and wishes in a respectful and effective way.
- Impersonal Skills (IT): Youth are prepared to tackle life's challenges and opportunities using creative and critical thinking skills.

Our **VALUES** guide us in all aspects of the organization and we invite you to join us as, together, we foster a community on the basis of:

- Respect—for oneself, each other, and the environment;
- Freedom—to learn and create; and
- Responsibility—to oneself, each other, and the environment.

Please revisit this section often and let it serve as a foundation for your youth's educational journey. We are all in this together. Let's assist one another and serve as examples of adults walking the path of a life lived intentionally with purpose and fulfillment.

Thank you for being a part of our community!

“Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.”

-William Butler Yeats

HOW WE ARE ORGANIZED

Open Connections is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation. A nonprofit corporation has no owners and is formed to carry out a mission. The Board of Directors serve as stewards and are responsible for the governance of the organization.

The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors are responsible for the long-term health and sustainability of Open Connections, oversight of our mission, and management of our financial affairs. Board members serve without pay. Our Board members are listed on the Open Connections website. Please read about them at: www.openconnections.org/our-board.

Any parent or community member interested in Board service or committee participation is encouraged to approach any Board member. The Board has three standing committees: the Executive Committee, the Committee on Trustees, and the Finance Committee. Additional committees are convened on an as-needed basis.

The Administration Team

The responsibility of running the organization and providing support to our Facilitators rests with our administrative team. Our team consists of Rick Sleutaris (Director), Sarah Becker (Assistant Director), Margaret Welsh (Administrative Guru), and Chris McNichol (Property Manager).

Facilitators

The heart of our staff is our facilitators. They are vibrant, committed, life-long learners, naturally curious about the world around them. All staff members have been trained in the Open Connections philosophy and how to translate the philosophy into their programs. This process is on-going and there is always room for improvement. For that reason, all facilitators continue to receive additional training every summer and throughout the program year.

Each program has a designated Lead Facilitator who is responsible for the overall direction of the program as well as providing support and guidance to the parents and youth in that program.

“What we want to see is the child in pursuit of the knowledge,
not the knowledge in pursuit of the child.”

- George Bernard Shaw

IN PARTNERSHIP

At Open Connections, we view our relationship with each family as a partnership. We recognize the uniqueness of each young person and family unit and we strive to work together, with the parents/guardians and young person, to create and implement a vibrant, diverse and comprehensive educational and life experience. The success of your young person at Open Connections relies on the involvement of all three parties.

Our Commitment to You

Choosing this educational path can be incredibly rewarding, fulfilling and exciting. And, we also recognize that it can feel overwhelming and a bit scary to travel through uncharted territory. We are here to ease your fears and help you feel supported through being a member of the OC community. In addition to our weekly programs, we provide support and build community through additional services and events.

Parent Meetings

These gatherings are meant to be supportive of everyone's effort to be the best parents we can be: to learn from one another, to learn from outside resources, and to build a sense of community around shared values.

Parent Conferences

Conferences with Facilitators take place in February. These offer parents a dedicated time to sit down with their youth's Facilitator. Youth in their teen years participate in these meetings/conferences with their parent(s), as the youth are increasingly the drivers of their own education.

PA Home Education Law Support

We are a resource for questions regarding compliance with the PA Home Education Law.

- **Portfolio Evaluations:** For families registered with their school district under the Home Education law, one of the requirements is an annual evaluation with a PA-certified teacher or licensed school or clinical psychologist. OC helps connect families with evaluators who are familiar with OC programs.
- **Testing and Test Preparation:** Open Connections offers a half-day "test prep" in March in order to familiarize both parents and youth with what to expect if they take their state-required 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade test(s) at OC, including a chance to practice and ask questions about both the process and the content of such tests. We have found these preparatory experiences to be incredibly helpful in reducing anxiety levels and in providing insight into which areas, if any, a family might wish to practice more on their own. We administer the tests in May in a relaxed manner that allows for young people to fulfill the state requirement in a comfortable setting. Note: There is a small fee associated with this service.

Community Events

These events (ex. Dance, Movie Night, Open Mic Night, Film Fest) provide an opportunity to connect with other parents and form additional support networks. In addition, they are fun!

Open Connections Magazine

This quarterly publication highlights activities in our various programs, illuminates parts of the OC philosophy, and includes lots of photos of youth engaged in learning. The Magazine has been helpful to parents, grandparents, and family friends wanting a deeper understanding of what Open Connections is about and how a typical day looks.

Parent Library

Our Parents' Library is located in the Gathering Space located in the Barn. We have numerous books, periodicals, and reprints for your edification and enjoyment. Please use the honor-based checkout system if you'd like to borrow a book, CD, DVD or magazine by signing it out on the clipboard in the library.

Pausing Ceremony

It is our custom to gather together one last time before the summer to reflect on the past year and say our good-byes. This is an event for the whole family and includes a brief ceremony, live performances by the young people, and an opportunity to showcase projects they have been a part of both in OC programs and at home.

Your Commitment to Open Connections

For your young person to thrive, we need your help and involvement.

Parent Involvement

We recognize that parents have varying levels of commitments and responsibilities and this plays a large role in the amount of time they have available to connect with the OC community. We also recognize that a successful, long-term OC experience is directly related to a family's effort in connecting with the community and developing a deep understanding of the OC philosophy. We encourage each parent/guardian to engage with us to the best of their ability.

- One of the best ways to engage is to join our Parent Connections Group. The primary goal of the Parents Connections Group is to create opportunities for families to connect with one another and deepen their relationships with one another. Parent Connections plans many group events throughout the program year. Our hope is that caregivers of OC youth can be connected to one another just as the youth are, through opportunities to learn and play together.
- Sign-up for a parent conference in the winter;
- Participate as a family in Community Events – both OC organized and parent organized;
- Share resources with and ask questions of other families via the listserv: OC.Community@openconnections.org;
- If you are on Facebook, please join the private group for current OC families and staff. This is another way to share resources/opportunities/experiences that others might enjoy.

Communication

At OC we work to create a pro-social, positive, and safe learning community. Emotional and physical safety for the youth is our top priority and our staff is trained to address any conflicts that may arise. We approach such

instances in a non-judgmental way, with empathy and compassion. We work to create a win-win outcome, where all parties involved feel listened to, respected, and safe. If at any time you or your youth have a concern, or experience an unpleasant interaction, please alert the appropriate facilitator as soon as possible. Please alert the Director if it is a broader issue. We cannot stress enough the importance of open and honest communication in a timely fashion.

If you have a concern about the Director, please reach out to Jennifer Pohlhaus, our Board Chair, at Jennifer.Pohlhaus@openconnections.org

Financial Support

Annual Giving:

Each family is asked to participate in Annual Giving with a donation of any amount. We depend on Annual Giving to bridge the gap between income from Program Fees and the needs of our operating budget. You may notice that you can make a donation directly on your registration form. When we are reaching out to larger donors and foundations it is beneficial to demonstrate strong support among the current community members. Help us keep this percentage high! No donation amount is too small.

Sustainability Fund:

Open Connections continues to build a fund that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization. This fund is primarily intended to support our financial aid program in perpetuity.

“Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect.”

- Samuel Johnson

GENERAL POLICIES

Absences

When a youth is going to be absent from OC due to illness or special plans, parents are asked to notify the office in advance or on the morning of the absence so that we know not to expect the youth. You may leave a message on our voicemail, 610-459-3366, or email the office, office@openconnections.org. This ensures that we know where the youth are at all times and it also helps the Facilitators plan their days.

Arrival and Departure

Program Hours are from 9:00am to 2:30pm (or to 3:30pm for the Shaping Your Life Program). It is important for youth to arrive on time for their programs as many activities and critical group building time takes place at the beginning of the program day. If you will be arriving late or leaving early, please email or call the office.

When arriving or leaving campus:

- Families should inform OC by 8:45 am if their youth will not be attending.

- Be sure that your young people safely make it in the building before driving away.
- If your youth arrives significantly before 9:00 am, you are welcome to wait with them in the Gathering Space before they head to their designated program space at 9:00 am.
- Please wait outside or in the Gathering Space in the Barn if you arrive early for pick-up. The closing moments of programs are often important times not to be interrupted.
- If you would like to check in with your youth's Facilitator, we ask that you schedule a conference call rather than try to catch the staff at the end of the day. Scheduling time to chat outside of pick-up/drop off ensures that your youth's Facilitator will be able to give you his/her full attention.
- During program hours, Facilitators are responsible for your young people. If you will be more than 5 minutes late for pick-up, please call to let us know so that we can make sure your youth is cared for until you arrive.
- Let us know ahead of time if someone other than the usual driver (parent, grandparent, carpool, etc.) will be doing the pick-up. For the safety of your youth, we cannot release them to individuals unless a parent has authorized us to do so.

Birthdays

Families wishing to acknowledge their youth's birthday while at OC are welcome to provide a healthy snack (watermelon, trail mix, banana muffins, etc.) for their youth's group. Please check in with the Lead Facilitator to see if there are food allergies in the group.

Cell Phones

We have found youth, and adults, are most present when they do not have the distraction of handheld devices. Toward that end, our guideline is that young people should leave their handheld devices at home, or bring them and leave them powered off in their bag until their program has concluded. If you need to speak to your youth during program time, please call the office at 610-459-3366 and Margaret will have them paged.

Computer Usage Policy

OC recognizes that computers and devices are an important tool in today's world. We expect that computers and devices will be used in a responsible, ethical and legal manner in line with OC's educational mission.

Field Trips

On occasion, certain groups will take a field trip to an off-site location. In these instances, parents will be alerted about the trip ahead of time and will be asked to sign a permission slip. Youth will be transported by Facilitators and everyone will, of course, be required to wear a seatbelt and (if applicable) be properly restrained in a car seat/booster as mandated by PA law. Please be sure to send your youth with their car seat/booster if applicable.

Gathering Space

The Gathering Space in the Barn is a multi-purpose space and is the heart of the OC Campus. It is sometimes used for ...

- Events: Most large community gatherings take place here.

- **Connections:** The space is available for OC families to relax just prior to and after programs, as well as during (while their youth are in program).
- **Workspace:** Adults are invited to bring your laptop and enjoy our free Wi-Fi. You can make yourself a cup of tea in the kitchen. There are also several conference rooms available if you have phone calls to make – ask in the Office for availability.

Thank you for cleaning up after yourself before you depart from these spaces. Please note that food should only be consumed at the tables near the kitchen, not on the tables by sofas because of severe food allergies in our community.

Holidays and Religion

OC does not have any religious or cultural affiliation. We appreciate and respect the diversity of cultural and religious beliefs that comprise the OC family/community.

Lost and Found

The Lost and Found is in the hall closet outside the Gathering Space in the Barn. Items that are particularly small, or of value, may be found in the Office. Any items left unclaimed by the last day of the program year are given to local charities.

Non-Program Time on Campus

Post 2:15pm (or 3:30pm for Shaping Your Life), youth are to be facilitated (within earshot and eyesight) by their parent/caregiver, either outdoors on the Front Lawn (including the Gravel Yard) or in the Gathering Space. We want to encourage a sense of community, so please feel free to enjoy those areas after your youth's program day has concluded. Please be sure that your youth cleans up after themselves. Note: Beside and behind the Barn and Farmhouse, both ponds, the creek, and beyond the fence-line are off-limits during non-program hours. (See also Outdoor Guidelines)

Community Day Guidelines:

Community Days are offered occasionally throughout the year as optional opportunities to connect with each other. These days are coordinated by the OC Parent Connections Group. These days may be completely open or include activities planned and offered by parents. In an effort to clarify expectations around Community Days and to ensure a great experience for all we would like to share additional guidelines for Community Days. They are:

- Community Days provide for a large amount of freedom for the youth (more than at any other time). ***Parents are responsible for their youth*** and should stay within earshot/eyesight of their youth if they feel it is necessary. This is at the parent's discretion and not required.
- In the hope of balancing the freedom to explore the campus with the safety of the youth, we ask youth to stay within the following areas: the Front Lawn, the Gravel Yard, the Backyard (including the Sand Pit and Outdoor Environments), the Blacktop, the Soccer Field, the Gathering Space, and inside the fence lines. Please refrain from visiting the White Pines, the ponds, the Treehouse, behind the Woodshop, the old orchard, the meadow by Delchester Rd, or from venturing beyond the fence line.
- In order to know who is on campus and who is responsible for whom, parents/guardians must sign-in in the Gathering Space upon arrival.
- In addition to the sign-in sheet in the Gathering Space, there will also be information on the

parent in charge of the Community Day, events that are happening, and the parents who have agreed to help with the end of the day cleanup.

Outdoor Guidelines

The outdoors is one of OC's greatest assets. The natural environment is a source of learning materials and experiences for all ages. OC youth are expected to treat its plant and animal life with tenderness and respect.

Latched gates and fences restrict access to the ponds, creeks and property beyond the fence lines. During program time, young people may venture into these areas only when supervised by a Facilitator. NOTE: Both ponds and areas beyond the fence line are off limits without a facilitator present.

Helmets:

All youth are required to wear a helmet on campus when they are biking, skating, in-line skating, skateboarding, etc.

See also "Non-Program Time on Campus"

Personal Conduct

A positive and constructive relationship between OC, youth and family members is essential to OC's educational purpose and responsibilities. We expect that all members of our community – youth, staff, families, visitors – will behave in a pro-social and respectful way both on campus and during OC sponsored activities off campus.

Pets

Your Pets

We ask that you keep your pets (dogs, cats, etc.) at home. In the event that your pet travels with you to OC, please keep it leashed. Of course, if they need to "do their business" while at OC, please clean up after them.

OC Pets

In addition to enjoying the many wild critters and creatures on the OC property, we also have some animals that are OC pets. Please check in with Facilitators for guidance on care and interactions.

Phones/Power Outage

Periodically a strong thunderstorm will come through the area leaving OC without power, but still able to run programs. Without power we don't have our landlines. In case of an urgent matter, we can be reached at the following numbers: Margaret 717-507-5467 or Rick 267-275-1820. Please take a moment now to put the OC Main number, 610-459-3366, and these back-up numbers, into your phone.

Photos/Images/Video

Parents agree to allow their youth's name, photograph, voice, image, and information to be used by OC, and those acting with OC's permission, for use in OC's publications, promotional materials, website, and social media accounts, without compensation and without prior notice. Parents agree to allow their youth to be interviewed by the media on campus or at OC-related events. Parents also consent to the recording and distribution or live streaming of their youth's voice, image and video in instruction or presentations as may be deemed appropriate in OC's discretion. Parents release and hold OC harmless from any liability stemming from

the use of their youth's name, photograph, voice, video, image, or information.

If parents wish to revoke this permission, written notification must be submitted to the OC Director so that it is received no later than September 1, 2021, or the first day of attendance if enrolling after the beginning of the program year.

Snow

OC families come to Edgmont from literally every direction of the compass and from widely varying distances. This means that you might have very different weather on a given day than we do here. Consequently:

- In the event of snow, or threat of snow, the decision to close or open late will be posted on the Open Connections website (www.openconnections.org) and on social media by 7:00 AM.
- If you decide not to come in on days that we are open, please call and leave a message to that effect so that we know not to expect you.
- If it starts to snow during a program day and you want to pick your youth up early, by all means do so. If we have a surprise storm, we'll contact you or your emergency friend.
- We all know that if there's new snow on the ground, most young folks are going to want to be out in it, at least for a while. So please send your young ones in with appropriate clothing (including snow pants, boots, mittens/gloves and a hat.)

Unfamiliar Faces

All members of the community are responsible for getting to know each other by sight and being vigilant in keeping an eye out for unfamiliar faces. Any community member who sees someone they do not recognize on campus during program hours should approach the person immediately. Unfamiliar people may be asked to identify themselves, requested to check-in at the office, or even asked, "May I help you?" If the unfamiliar person is indeed a visitor, this will be helpful. If the person is a community member, he/she should understand that we are checking for very good reasons.

Visitors

OC has always been and will continue to seek to have a warm and welcoming community environment. We understand that it is critical that in the event of an emergency, everyone on campus must be safe. Therefore, we must know who is on campus at any given time. All visitors are required to check-in at the Office.

*"I am always ready to learn, but I do not always like to be taught."
- Winston Churchill*

COMMUNICATIONS

Open Connections has an open-door policy. Please remember that open and honest communication is the key ingredient to a happy and fulfilling OC experience for all involved. If at any point you have a question, idea, concern, or wish, please share it with us. Remember, at any one time, we at OC are doing the best we can, AND we recognize that we are human and have room for continued growth and development.

Calendar

Our annual community calendar lists dates of all scheduled community events, holidays, meetings, and breaks. Additional events may be added and would be communicated through email. The calendar is available via our website or from the Office.

Email Communications

- **From OC:** We use Constant Contact for e-mail communication to groups of families or all families, as it is less likely to get caught in spam filters. If you are finding the emails caught in your spam or promotions folder, please reach out to Margaret in the Office for problem-solving assistance.
- **Friday Notes:** Each Friday, an email is sent to all families. Friday Notes are sent from the Office and are an effort to provide regular communication between OC and families about upcoming events.
- **Emergency Communication:** In case of an emergency that affects all programs during the program day, parents will be contacted using email, Facebook, and/or phone. It is absolutely essential that OC has up-to-date contact information, including work and cell phone numbers, for all parents and guardians.
- **Listserv for Parents:** There is a listserv for parents' use. The purpose of this group is to facilitate discussion among the OC parents, especially those who may not see each other much, and to make it easier for parents to pass along tips about upcoming events, resources, etc. The kinds of things that are appropriate for posting to the listserv are: announcements of general interest to the community, requests for professional services (such as help finding a new doctor), calls for help ("a pet sitter is needed..."), or a class offering that might be of interest to other families. To send an email to OC parents and staff simply type oc.community@openconnections.org in the "To" line of your message. If you answer a listserv message by hitting "Reply", it will go to the author of the original message unless you change the "To" field to oc.community@openconnections.org or hit "Reply all." Each message from this group will have [oc.community] at the beginning of the subject line. If you prefer not to be on the listserv, please unsubscribe yourself by going to the address at the bottom of each message. If you have any questions about the listserv, please contact Margaret in the office. OC reserves the right to remove comments from the listserv at its discretion.
- **Program-Specific email groups:** There is a group email for each OC Program. The primary purpose of these groups is to facilitate communication between facilitators and the families about information specific to a particular program. Note: For the Group IV and Shaping Your Life programs there are also email groups for the facilitators and youth in these programs since we promote teens taking increasing responsibility for their program activities.
- **Staff E-mails:** All staff members at OC have an @openconnections.org email account using our respective first names and last names separated by a period - ex: Margaret.welsh@openconnections.org. Email communication should be used for brief

exchanges of information. Questions about program happenings, challenges a young person is experiencing, etc. are best handled through face-to-face communication that is open, honest and direct and through which the nuances of body language, requests for clarification, etc., can be taken into account.

Family Mailboxes

Each family has a mailbox in the Gathering Space in the Barn. Please make sure to check your mailbox (or ask your youth to check it!) on a regular basis.

Family List

We publish a list of current family contact information. The information contained in the directory is to be used for OC-related communication only. The Family List can be accessed through the Family Area of the Open Connections website. Please let Margaret know if there are changes to your information.

Social Media

- **Facebook:** Make sure to “Like” us on Facebook: “Open Connections” (education) so that you can enjoy viewing the pictures we post. This is a great way to stay up-to-date on the various happenings in between Program Updates and OC Magazine issues.
- **The OC Parent Connections Facebook Group** is an extension of the Parent Connections group, facilitating connections between current families.
- **Instagram:** Make sure to “Follow” us on Instagram “openconnections” so that you can enjoy viewing the pictures we post. This is a great way to stay up-to-date on the various happenings in between Program Updates and OC Magazine issues.

Website

Our website is www.openconnections.org which contains information about our programs, alumni, special events, our philosophy, our Blog, and much, much more. Also on the website is a password protected “Family Log In” area where you can find the OC Family List, Parent Handbook, calendar for the year, access to Program Specific (private) websites, an interactive map of where families live, and more! We all use the same username and password which changes each summer. Look for an email at the beginning of the Program Year with the new information or reach out to Margaret in the Office. Please let us know if you ever find an error on the site or if you have suggestions for content. Please refer families who may be interested in OC to our web site for in-depth information.

“Education is a social process. Education is growth.
Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”
- John Dewey

ENROLLMENT POLICIES

Non-Discrimination Policy

Open Connections (OC) admits participants regardless of race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, gender or sexual orientation, who possess the motivation, ability, and character which would enable them to succeed in our OC community. Furthermore, OC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, gender or sexual orientation in the administration of its programs.

Enrollment Conditions

To enroll or re-enroll at OC, families must submit a signed enrollment contract along with a 10% first payment. The signed enrollment contract obligates the parents/guardians as follows:

- Agrees to comply with OC's general policies, including those on health, youth behavior, safety, and enrollment, as outlined in the Family Handbook, and as amended from time to time.
- Recognizes that enrollment is for a full year unless specifically stated. Because Open Connections makes commitments for expenditures based on the enrollment contract, the signing of this contract obligates you to pay the entire program fee. In the event of withdrawal or dismissal for any reason, the entire fee is due. The fact that OC allows program fees to be paid in installments does not create a fractional contract or in any way relieve the parent/guardian of the responsibility for the entire year's program fees.
- Understands that youth will not be allowed to continue to attend programs unless program fees are paid by stated deadlines (or until parents make other written arrangements acceptable to OC). Payments received after the due dates may be assessed a late charge at the periodic rate of one- and one-half percent (1.5%) per Month (18% Annual Percentage Rate). All accounts must be paid in full before re-enrollment can take place for the following year. If OC has to engage third parties to collect unpaid program fees you will be responsible for all collection costs including attorneys' fees.
- Recognizes that a positive and constructive working relationship with Open Connections is essential to the fulfillment of the OC mission. Thus, OC reserves the right to dismiss and/or not re-enroll a youth if OC reasonably concludes that the actions of a parent (or guardian) make such a positive and constructive relationship impossible or otherwise seriously interferes OC's accomplishment of its educational purposes.
- Recognizes that Open Connections reserves the right to dismiss a youth at any time according to the best judgment and interests of OC.
- Understands that Open Connections' duties and obligations under the contract shall be suspended immediately without notice during all periods that OC is closed because of force majeure events including, but not limited to, fire, hurricane, governmental action, epidemic, pandemic or any other event beyond OC's control. If such an event occurs, OC's duties and obligations in this contract will be postponed until such time as OC, in its sole discretion, may safely reopen. In the event that OC cannot reopen due to an event under this clause, OC is under no obligation to refund any portion of the program fees paid.
- Recognizes that the program fee first payment is non-refundable except if a family has applied for financial aid from OC and does not receive an award or the award given still does not make it possible for their youth to attend. In either of those cases, the first payment will be refunded.

Changing Enrollment Mid-year

Once the program year has begun, families may want to add or switch programs in which programs their youth are enrolled. In order to provide youth and Facilitators with consistency and predictability, and to ensure that programs are adequately staffed, changes in enrollment may only be made in consultation with, and with the approval of the Director. Additions to programs will be made at the discretion of OC if there is adequate space and staffing and if parents agree to pay the additional program fees for the remainder of the year.

Withdrawal Policy

Families who choose to withdraw their youth at any time during the course of the program year or after an Enrollment Contract and deposit have been received for a particular program year, are still subject to full payment of the program fees for that program year as set forth in the Enrollment Contract.

Financial Aid

Open Connections wishes to cultivate and nurture a rich and inclusive community with families from varying economic, ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. An inclusive community can allow for more varied interactions between youth and can open up hearts, minds, and eyes to alternative thoughts, beliefs, and ways of living. These broad and varied exposures can aid in creating a life of purpose and fulfillment. Our financial aid program is one tool that helps us achieve our goal of a diverse community by providing tuition assistance to families who may not otherwise be able to afford OC.

Open Connections awards grants based upon a demonstrated financial need and uses the online service FAST to process applications. FAST does not decide whether financial assistance will be given or how much to give; instead, it provides a need-based financial aid analysis which includes a recommendation of what a family should reasonably contribute toward the program fee. Open Connections recognizes that each family's situation is unique and must be considered from both an objective and subjective viewpoint in reaching a decision as to any amount awarded, and therefore the FAST analysis is only a part of the decision-making process.

Enrollment deposits will be refunded to families who choose not to accept their financial aid amount and therefore choose not to join the OC community. If you are interested in exploring financial assistance options, please contact Rick Sleutaris.

Force Majeure Event

Should events beyond the control of OC occur, OC has the discretion to close OC and/or modify its operations, programs, schedules, length of OC day, length of OC year, and/or means of delivery methods of programming. The family's contractual financial obligations for tuition and fees remain in full force and effect. Should OC close, OC's duties and obligations shall be suspended immediately without notice until such time as OC, in its sole and reasonable discretion, may safely reopen. If OC cannot reopen due to a force majeure event, OC is under no obligation to refund any portion of programming fees paid.

“Learning is not the product of teaching.
Learning is the product of the activity of the learner.”

- John Holt

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

Alcohol, Nicotine, and other Drugs

Open Connections is a smoke, drug, and alcohol-free* environment for people of all ages. We expect that all adults will help to reinforce this standard. We also expect that those who use these substances will refrain from bringing them to OC or to any OC-sponsored event. More specifically, smoking, vaping and tobacco use are prohibited in all OC facilities and on OC property. This ban includes all vehicles, including private vehicles, being used to transport OC youth to or from OC activities and field trips.

*Alcohol may occasionally be permitted at OC-sanctioned, adult-only events.

Allergies/Health Issues

If your youth has any allergies (food, medication, environmental, etc.), please make sure it is listed on your registration form and be sure to provide us with an epi-pen (when applicable). Similarly, if they have any physical limitations or health problems, please alert us as well.

Child Abuse Mandated Reporting

OC Facilitators and other personnel are mandatory reporters under the Pennsylvania child abuse reporting laws. Please understand that we must take our obligations seriously and if we assess that a situation requires it, we will make a report to child abuse authorities of situations that we reasonably suspect constitute abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Depending on the circumstances, we may not be able to communicate with parents about the report until authorized by child abuse authorities to do so. We ask for your understanding as we do our best to protect the youth under our care.

Confidentiality

All OC staff sign confidentiality agreements, so please know that OC values your family's privacy. In a similar light, we ask that you respect the privacy of OC youth, their families, and staff by not gossiping and sharing unnecessary personal information with others.

Emergencies

On your registration form, you listed the names of both your family doctor and a friend or relative for us to contact in an emergency if we can't reach you. If emergency medical care is required for an individual at OC, we use Riddle Memorial Hospital, which is located on Route 1 at the intersection of Route 352. If such an incident occurs off-campus (i.e. a field trip) we will use the closest suitable emergency care facility.

Food/Food Allergies/Food Sharing

Healthy Food Choices:

We don't want the staff to be the Food Police; however, we would like to encourage the consumption of healthy, nutritious food at OC. We have some requests (and suggestions) for parents as you prepare your youngsters' lunches and snacks.

- Nutritious breakfasts (vs. high sugar or no breakfast at all) really do work to help young people get more out of their day. Young people who travel a long distance to get to OC and those who rise

early or don't have a good breakfast, are most likely to start asking to eat as early as 9:30am or 10:00am. Please provide a morning snack as necessary.

- Sodas, candy and other sweets included with lunches are almost invariably consumed first; in such instances, the more nutritious components usually end up in the trash. We ask that you save any such "treats" for the ride home.
- The lunches that are most likely to be consumed are the ones in which the consumer has played a major role in the preparation. If young people help to make (or simply shop for) their own lunches, they seem much more likely to eat them.

Please pack a water bottle for your youth so he/she can stay hydrated throughout the day.

Food Allergies

We have designated eating areas and encourage all community members to practice good allergy awareness by washing hands and tables well when finished eating. Food Allergies span ALL food groups!

Food Sharing

We ask that youth enjoy their own snack and lunch, and not share or swap food with others. This ensures safety for all, as many youth have food allergies. Thank you for your understanding.

Harassment/Bullying

OC is dedicated to fostering an environment that promotes kindness, acceptance, and embraces differences among individuals. Therefore, OC will not tolerate any type of harassment, bullying, racism or bias based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. It is the responsibility of all members of the community to ensure that their words, actions, and interactions with others always reflect the intent to promote respect and trust. Attempts to justify behavior as a "prank" or "joke" do not change its harassing or bullying nature if the object of the joke or prank is not a willing participant. Whatever the basis for the harassment or bullying, it is prohibited.

We expect that anyone, whether youth, staff, family member, or visitor who witnesses, or has knowledge of an incident of bullying or harassment, will report the incident to OC Assistant Director, Sarah Becker. Please do not assume that OC is aware of the improper conduct. You will not be penalized in any way for making a good faith report of improper conduct. If you believe that you have been retaliated against for making a report under this policy in good faith, please reach out to the OC Board of Directors.

Illness/Injury/Communicable Diseases

We rely on our parents as the first step in preventing infections at OC. We count on you to use good judgment in protecting our OC community.

Illness/Injury (non-emergency) during the Program Day:

If your youth becomes ill during an OC program, we will contact you. If we are unable to reach you, we will contact your youth's emergency contact. Please pick your youth up from the Office. We will do our best to keep your youth comfortable while waiting.

Your youth's physical safety is top priority. If your youth gets injured while at OC (and it is a non-emergency), we will care for his/her emotional and physical well-being until pick-up time. The Lead Facilitator of your youth's program will touch base with you. All facial and head injuries are reported immediately to parents.

Policies for not attending on-campus programs at OC due to illness:

Youth who are ill should not come to OC. Please keep sick and/or contagious youths including possibly contagious siblings, home for the benefit of all. Youths must be asymptomatic without the aid of medications before returning to OC. In other words, youth must have no fever, vomiting, etc. for 24 hours prior to their return to OC.

Communicable Diseases:

For the health and safety of OC community, we ask parents to let the Office know if their youth has a confirmed communicable disease that poses a risk to others in OC community. Public health guidance will guide OC's communications. It may be necessary to alert others in the community who may have had exposure. OC will disclose sensitive medical information of youth no further than is necessary to ensure the health and safety of our community members in a manner consistent with applicable law. OC will comply with all federal and state laws in regard to confidentiality and privacy requirements.

The following criteria, in addition to staff discretion, are used by OC to determine when a young person will be sent home or not allowed to return to OC due to illness.

- COVID-19: Youth with positive or suspected positive cases of COVID-19 will need to follow current guidelines regarding quarantining and isolation.
- Fever: Youth should stay home if they have a temperature of 100 degrees or higher. They may return to programs when the temperature has been normal for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea: Youth should stay home if they are vomiting or have severe diarrhea. They may return to programs when the symptoms have been absent for 24 hours.
- Pediculosis (head lice): Youth with head lice or nits (lice eggs) in their hair should stay home until they have been treated and the nits have been removed.
- Streptococcal Infection (strep throat, scarlet fever, impetigo): Youth should stay home until 48 hours of appropriate antibiotic has been given and the temperature has been normal for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Chicken pox: Youth should stay home for at least 1 week after the onset/appearance of the first eruption. Youth may return to campus after all vesicles have formed scabs and their temperature has been normal for 24 hours. Furthermore, youth who have been exposed and are not immune must stay home days 8-21 after exposure.

Medication

Prescription medications:

OC Facilitators will not give youth any prescription medication while at OC unless there is an order from a physician and written permission from the parent. Prescription medications may only be dispensed from the original container with the youth's name and the doctor's instructions clearly printed on the label.

If a Youth has a medical necessity to carry medication, the parent should contact the Director.

Asthma inhalers and EpiPen's:

We strongly recommend that an extra asthma inhaler/EpiPen be kept in the youth's program space, clearly labeled and with a clearly stated action plan for indications of when it might be needed.

Youth may be permitted to carry an EpiPen or asthma inhaler with written permission from a parent stating it is medically necessary. The permission form must be renewed on an annual basis.

Youth who choose to keep their medication in their backpack must behave responsibly and appropriately by:

- Keeping track of the inhaler/EpiPen and keeping it in appropriate condition;
- Not allowing other youth to play with or use it;
- Knowing when it is necessary and appropriate to use the medication;
- Reporting to their Facilitator when they have need for the medication so that appropriate next steps can be taken if needed. (In the case of EpiPen usage we will call 911 and the parents.)
- OC may revoke the youth's privilege to carry medication if the youth does not behave safely, responsibly and appropriately.

Non-prescription medications:

OTC medications may be given at OC if there is parental permission (either verbally or on file for the current program year). The exception would be a true emergency in which case we will use our best judgment.

Ticks

While there are countless benefits to having a rural campus, there are a few downsides. At OC youth hike and play in and near the woods in the normal course of their program days. The youth are exposed to deer ticks while outdoors, just as they are in most backyards. We don't want youth to get sick, but we also don't want to eliminate enjoying and learning from nature from our program. It should be understood that youth are at risk for contracting Lyme Disease at OC. We recommend that parents check their youth daily for ticks, especially in the fall and spring. Parents will be notified when a youth is found to have a deer tick or a definite or suspected deer tick bite. In the event that you do find a tick, reach out to your family doctor to see how they suggest you proceed.

Weapons

Firearms, guns, explosives, and other weapons are prohibited on campus, including being in locked vehicles or trunks while parked or driving on campus.

*“When you are genuinely interested in one thing,
it will always lead to something else.”*

- Eleanor Roosevelt