VISION

Creating communities where everyone is empowered to take meaningful steps toward reaching their fullest potential.

MISSION

Enriching lives by providing exceptional services through an individualized approach.

CORE VALUES

[Diagram with keywords: Safety, Trust, Compassion, Quality, Diversity, Integrity]
This handbook is a resource for children and families attending Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy at Merakey. These guidelines are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of your child while under our care and to provide a healthy and safe environment for everyone. Our goal is to be a provider of integrated specialized educational and behavioral resources to meet the increasingly complex challenges of children and adolescents with an Autism diagnosis, providing the right supports in the most efficient and effective manner to enhance traditional programs.

Merakey provides families with ABA therapy, training Speech and Occupational services within a supportive environment using evidence-based approaches.

Merakey is excited to provide services through state specific Medicaid funding and/or private insurance to children and adolescents ages birth-21 years with an Autism diagnosis. The services provided focus on skill development, maintenance of learned skills and behavioral supports. Thank you for choosing Merakey to provide services to your child. We are looking forward to working with you to provide the best quality of care and service experience for you and your child.

To best support you, the parent/guardian, we highly recommend your attendance and participation at weekly parent training. Parent training is provided by Merakey clinical staff. The trainings are designed to provide you with the tools, skills and information to best support you and your child in the therapy process and assist in the generalization of skills from center-based therapy into the home.

We look forward to working with you!
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ATTENDANCE

Arrival and Dismissal

Upon arrival for your child’s therapy session, you will check-in with the Administrative Assistant. The Merakey staff providing therapy that day will meet you and your child in the designated waiting area and take the child back to the therapy area for service. Parent/Guardian(s) are more than welcome to wait for their child in the waiting area or return to the Center upon session completion.

When your child’s therapy session is over, the Merakey staff will return to the waiting area with your child. Parent/guardian(s) are expected to arrange for transportation for their child to have them picked up at the Center no later than five minutes after the end of the session. If you are going to be late, please notify the Center immediately to make necessary arrangements. Participants will only be released to those individuals listed on the emergency contact form (see below).

If your child is picked up late three times within a one-month period, you will be required to stay at the Center for the duration of your child’s therapy session.

If you are more than 15 mins late to your child’s therapy session and have not contacted the center, the session may be cancelled and documented as a canceled session. If you are more than five minutes late to your child’s therapy session three times within a month period, then you may be contacted to change your scheduled time slot and/or reduce your hours.

Abandonment

Abandonment is defined as more than five minutes late, after the end of a therapy session, to pick up your child. This also includes refusing to pick up your child once contacted by the Center, not responding to phone calls or not sending someone else to pick up your child if you are unavailable.

If the child is not picked up within the designated time frame, the Program Director, will notify the police and will report the incident to Department of Children and Family Services, unless you have contacted the Program Director and other arrangements have been agreed upon.

Cancellations/No-Shows

If you have a therapy session scheduled for your child and you know you are unable to make the session, please contact Merakey within 3 hours of your scheduled session time. After three no shows in an eight-week time frame, the Program Director will contact you to discuss rescheduling your child’s services. If we are unable to contact a parent/guardian(s), the services will be terminated. In addition, Merakey will notify the payer of no shows which can impact continuation of services.

If you need to decrease your child’s hours of service, you will need to complete the Hours Less Prescribed Form which can be requested from program staff. If your child drops below an attendance percentage of 80% within a one-month period, you will be contacted to reduce the number of ABA therapy hours your child/children receives and/or to terminate services.

Closings/Delays

Merakey is dedicated to providing consistent, reliable therapy as scheduled. However, in the event of an extreme weather event or other unforeseen circumstance (power outage, etc.) a delayed start time or closure may occur. In the event of a weather emergency, Merakey may delay/cancel therapy
sessions. Closures/delays will be listed on local news channels and all scheduled families will receive a message from the School Messenger application. Please make sure to follow the directions on the School Messenger parent letter to ensure your information is registered to receive notifications. In the event a session must be canceled, Merakey will make contact to reschedule the missed session. If you are ever unsure whether therapy services will be held as scheduled, please do not hesitate to reach the main office.

**NUTRITION AND WELLNESS**

**Emergency Forms**

All children must have a current emergency form on file in the office. The form must be updated each year. In the event of an emergency, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately.

If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, Merakey will contact an adult whose name and number have been provided on the emergency form. This form is also used to make appropriate contacts if a child becomes ill during a therapy session or has an accident and needs to go home. Any changes on the emergency forms must be immediately provided to Merakey by the parent or guardian.

**Diapering/Toilet Training**

Merakey staff will support your child in toilet training. For transfer of skills, we require parents to participate in toilet training. Parents must provide the following:

- Supply of diapers and/or pull-ups
- Wipes
- Portable changing pad (sheet, etc.)
- A few changes of clothes and shoes

CENTER: All items must be labeled with your child’s first/last name.

**Medication Administration**

Merakey understands some children take medication on a regular basis. Unfortunately, Merakey staff are unable to administer any medication under any circumstances. This includes medication that is pre-mixed with food and/or beverage. If your child needs medication the parent/guardian(s) must administer it.

**Illness and Accidents**

To protect the health of all children and staff, Merakey will not provide therapy to any child that is showing signs or symptoms of illness. The checklist below will help you determine if your child is appropriate to come to the Center for therapy during a scheduled session:

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

Children must be free of symptoms for at least 24 hours before returning to therapy. If the doctor has prescribed an antibiotic, your child must be kept at home for at least 24 hours after starting the medication. If a child presents with any of the above conditions during a therapy session, the parent/guardian(s) will be contacted to pick-up their child or make arrangements to have their child picked-up. Once contact has been made regarding the medical need for early pick-up, the
A written doctor’s excuse is required before returning to therapy if the student has been diagnosed with a communicable disease, such as chickenpox, ringworm, lice or pink eye. If a student appears to be ill or injured and staff feels hospitalization is needed, the parent or guardian will be notified immediately. If contact cannot be made with a parent or emergency contact, a supervisor will exercise reasonable discretion in sending the student for emergency care.

To ensure the health and safety of all children, if Merakey staff identified a child with lice their session will be terminated. Children are not permitted to resume therapy sessions until they are free from live lice and no visible signs of nits within 1 inch of scalp upon examination of a Merakey staff member.

**Allergies and Seizures**

Merakey Centers are allergy conscious; however, we cannot guarantee an allergen free environment. Parents must notify the Center if students have allergies to food, drugs, insect bites/stings or other environmental factors. The parent or legal guardian must provide the Center with specific written instructions regarding the actions to be taken in case of an allergic reaction during therapy hours. The written instructions must be signed by a physician.

Merakey appreciates the confidence you have placed in our staff to provide therapy to your child and to assure their physical and medical wellbeing. Merakey strives to assess and meet the varied needs of each individual child. If a parent/guardian(s) has disclosed their child is diagnosed with a seizure disorder, Merakey will develop an appropriate Seizure Action Plan with you and your child’s physician. The plan will be used if a child should have a seizure during a therapy session.

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

**CENTER**

If a seizure occurs unexpectedly during a therapy session with no prior knowledge of a seizure disorder, the Merakey staff will immediately call 911 or emergency medical support, then contact the parent/guardian(s). Merakey staff will support the child until emergency personnel arrives.

**Meals and Snacks**

If a child is attending therapy and requires a snack or a meal, please send appropriate food items to accompany your child to therapy sessions. Merakey does not have the ability to heat or refrigerate any food brought in, so please ensure any food items can be served directly to your child without any preparation.

**SCHOOL SAFETY**

**Participant and Staff Code of Conduct**

*Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Your Best!*

The “Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Your Best” platform requires all participants and staff to engage safely with responsible decision-making in an effort to succeed in program settings, school, home and community.
Professionalism
Merakey staff is not to engage in dual relationships with clients. Please refrain from asking Merakey staff to engage in activities outside of their responsibilities at Merakey (babysitting, running errands, watching other children, attending birthday parties or other events, etc.) Merakey staff may not accept gifts, including meals. Merakey staff may not engage in phone/text communication with clients/families of a personal nature.

Mutual Respect
Merakey staff have the right to work in a harassment free and safe environment where people treat one another with dignity and respect. When Merakey staff members are entering a participant’s home, we require that animals and unsafe materials be locked up and secured for the safety of our team members. Services should be provided in a safe space where distractions can be as limited as possible. If a Merakey staff member feels unsafe or the environment is not harassment free, he/she may choose to leave the home. The Program Director will contact the family to develop a plan for future service delivery.

Elopement
Elopement is defined as a child that leaves the Center property/home without receiving permission from an Merakey staff. If a child runs away or leaves the Center property/home, Merakey staff are responsible for the following:

CENTER
• Merakey staff will prompt the child to remain in the building if they try to leave the building via door or window. Merakey staff will do everything possible to keep the child on Center property.
• As soon as the child leaves Center property and Merakey staff are unable to stop the child, the therapist/Program Director or designee will follow the child to ensure his/her safety.
• In the event the team is not successful in immediately catching-up with the individual and returning him/her to the Center safely, then 911 will be called.
• The Program Director will collaborate with the local police department to ensure they are aware of this protocol and understand the needs of the children within Merakey.
A meeting will be scheduled with the parent/guardian(s) to review the incident and create a safety plan should this type of event occur in the future.

Duty to Protect Policy
Merakey staff is required by law to notify state authorities if there is knowledge or suspicion of harm, abuse, or neglect of children or other identified vulnerable populations in or outside of ABA therapy. Merakey complies with this law and cooperates with authorities in investigations.

Reports of suspected abuse will be reported immediately. All Merakey staff are MANDATED reporters and will document and report any suspicion of harm, abuse, or neglect. Mandated reporters are professionals who, in the ordinary course of their work and because they have regular contact with children or other identified vulnerable populations, are required to report whenever harm, abuse, or neglect may have been observed or is suspected. These professionals can be held liable by both the civil and criminal legal systems for intentionally failing to make a report.

Merakey is committed to the safety and security of all individuals we serve and thus fully embrace our collective/individual responsibility under this policy. Reports of suspected child abuse can be made at 1-800-252-5400 (toll-free 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, nationwide). For more information please see The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services website: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us
**Confidentiality**

Records are maintained by Merakey so that every individual is provided with the appropriate services. These records are kept confidential and are not released to unauthorized persons. Information regarding any individual we serve will not be shared with any requesting party unless an Authorization for Release of Confidential Information Form is filled out in its entirety and submitted to the center Director. Releases will need to be completed annually.

If caregivers/guardians need Protected Health Information for the individual we serve, they must complete a Request to Review or Copy Protected Health Information Form.

If caregivers/guardians need a Center employee to complete documentation sent under a psychiatrist's/clinical staff’s signature to an agency(s) regarding the individual’s status and/or ability to function in the community, a form or Letter of Completion Request Form and the Authorization for Release of Confidential Information Form must be filled out. Please submit a written request to the Center Director and he/she will be able to provide you with all the correct forms to complete.

**Emergency Procedures**

In the event of an emergency, Merakey will follow established protocols to ensure the safety and security of all children and staff. Emergency scenario drills are conducted to increase our preparedness in the event of emergencies. Merakey will collaborate with local police and emergency services as part of our emergency procedure preparedness.

If the emergency is life-threatening, evacuation will take place at a meeting zone that is a safe distance from the premises or threat. Merakey will notify the police and parent/guardian(s) of any emergencies on the property. Emergency drills include:

- Fire drills
- Intruder/active shooter/lockdown drills
- Tornado/Hurricane drills

**Compliment or Complaint**

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

If an individual served, caregiver or guardian has a Compliment or Complaint, that he/she would like to share, they can complete a Feedback, Compliment or Complaint Form: Individuals Served/Representative of Individual Served and submit following the instructions outlined within.

Merakey Centers are committed to providing exceptional and compliant services to individuals in our care, where they feel safe and empowered to thrive as contributing members of their communities. Parents and guardians are encouraged to reach out to Merakey team members if there are any questions or concerns with service delivery. Families may also reach out to the Merakey Quality and Compliance Organization if their concerns are not being met by the above-mentioned resources.

The Merakey Quality and Compliance Organization (QCO) Hotline is available to all staff and family members, Monday through Friday during normal business hours, to easily report any concerns with non-compliance and unethical behavior. The caller may speak to an Intake Specialist or leave a confidential voicemail. If the person does not wish to call, they may choose from any options listed below:

- **Helpline:** (888)- 439- 0100
- **Email:** QCO@merakey.org
- **Confidential Fax:** 215-273-5974
- **Mailing Address:** 620 E. Germantown Pike, Lafayette Hill, PA 19444