



Pathways School Parent Handbook

(edited 6/1/2023)

28900 Ranch Road 12, Dripping Springs TX 78620

512-858-7541

WELCOME

Welcome to Dripping Springs Methodist Church (DSMC) Pathways School, a ministry for children ages 2 years through Kindergarten age. The handbook has been prepared to provide information concerning philosophy, policies, and procedures of the Pathways School. Please read it carefully and in its entirety so that you will better understand the role we all play in making this a meaningful experience in the life of your child. We welcome your family and look forward to sharing our ministry with you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 512-858-7541.

Contact Information

Pathways School Office & Administrative Assistant	512-858-7541	pathways@dsmethodist.org
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DSMC Main Office	512-894-7123	
DSMC Mailing Address:	P.O. Box 99, Dripping Springs, TX 78620	
DSMC Physical Address:	28900 Road 12, Dripping Springs, TX 78620	
DSMC & Pathways Website:	www.dsmethodist.org/pathways	

Important Contact Information

Emergency (medical, fire, law enforcement)	911
Texas Poison Control Network	1-800-222-1222
Child Abuse Hotline	1-800-252-5400
Local Licensing Office	512-834-3426

Mission Statement:

Pathway's mission is to support the ministry and mission of Dripping Springs Methodist Church's by providing excellent spiritual and practical education, as outlined in the program goals contained below, for the community of Dripping Springs.

Purpose:

The objective of the Dripping Springs Methodist Church Pathways School is to offer an excellent educational Christian experience for preschool children in a Christian environment. This experience will provide an atmosphere and environment which will encourage development of the whole child; physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Program Goals:

To provide COGNITIVE GROWTH with a rich, stimulating, well-planned, age-appropriate curriculum and learning environment that encourages curiosity, imagination, creativity, problem solving skills, and language development as children learn through active play and firsthand experiences.

To provide SPIRITUAL GROWTH with a warm, caring and accepting Christian climate where children feel free to observe and explore, make mistakes, and live within the guidelines of a Christian community. We offer opportunities for children to develop an awareness of the love of God and our natural world as well as a framework of moral values.

To provide EMOTIONAL GROWTH by creating an atmosphere that encourages the development of a positive self-image, feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. We offer opportunities for each child to develop and mature within his/her own unique pattern and fullest potential.

To provide SOCIAL GROWTH with opportunities for working, playing and communicating with other children as he/she develops a growing awareness of the needs, rights, and feelings of others.

To provide PHYSICAL GROWTH with equipment and activities to promote physical growth and development involving both large and small muscle movement skills. We follow guidelines for development of good health patterns that promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being

OPERATIONAL POLICIES FOR PATHWAYS SCHOOL

Highlighted sections indicate possible changes in the COVID-19 Response Plan that supersede stated policy when necessary.

Hours of Operation:

- Before School Care 7:45am-8:30am
- School Day 8:30am-2:30pm
- Extended Day 2:30pm-3:30pm

Calendar and Holidays:

Pathways School generally follows the DSISD school calendar each year, with a few exceptions. We will not make-up bad weather days or hold school on the bad weather make-up days specified on the DSISD school calendar. For specific information on holidays, first & last day of school, and other special events, please see the Pathways school calendar on the website.

Parental Notification:

Pathways School will notify parents of any changes in schedules or closures due to weather or other emergencies. Parents will be notified of any non-routine situation that placed or may have placed a child at risk of injury or harm. Parents will also be notified about illnesses, injuries, or any other health or behavioral concern. For closures due to inclement weather or other hazardous situations, Pathways will make all attempts to contact parents via the email address(s) we have on file and through Brightwheel messaging. If the school start time is delayed per DSISD, doors will open at the specified time. **(No Before School Care if delayed start)**

Arrivals, Dismissals and Release of Children:

- School begins at 8:30 A.M. - All children **MUST** be accompanied into the building and to class by an adult. All children **MUST** be signed in via Brightwheel upon arrival.
- Before School Care (BSC) opens at 7:45 A.M. - Children registered for Before School Care will report to the green kitchen doors and ring the doorbell. They will be greeted by a teacher working Before School Care. Children must be signed in via Brightwheel upon arrival. Pathways Staff will transition the BSC children to their classrooms @ 8:30 A.M.
- School ends at 2:30 P.M. - All children **MUST** be accompanied out of the building by an adult. All children **MUST** be signed out via Brightwheel upon dismissal. Any child not picked up by 2:35 will be brought to the office to wait and a \$1 per minute late fee will be assessed.
- Extended Day- Children registered for Extended Day will transition out of their classroom at 2:30. All children **MUST** be picked up no later than 3:30 P.M. to avoid a \$1 per minute late charge.
- Children will only be released to adults listed on their registration form. **We will not release a child to an older sibling (unless the older sibling is of driving age and is providing the child's transportation).** You can add people to your pickup list by contacting the office and adding the names to your child's registration form. If you need to make a change in the middle of the day, you must call the office to make the change. Anyone who has been added to your child's list and/or is picking up for the first time must present his/her driver's license in order to pick up your child.

Visitors:

Parents, grandparents, and other special guests are always welcome at Pathways School. All visitors, including licensed therapists or support persons, must sign in and wear a visitor's badge while on campus. Please have your photo I.D. available.

Enrollment & Registration:

Children will be enrolled according to their age as of September 1st (except Bridge class) of that school year. Registration for current students and/or their siblings is not automatic. All students are required to re-register for the following school year.

In order to confirm enrollment and attend the first day of school, each child **MUST** have the following items on file:

- Completed registration form
- Completed medical information (*including up-to-date immunization records)
- Completed medical authorization
- Vision and Hearing Screening Results (ages 4 and up)
- Signed parental releases and permission forms
- Registration Deposit and Supply Fee paid

Wait List

- To place a child on a wait list, please call or email the office so your information can be properly recorded.
- Children are placed on a wait list, at the parent's request, based on the age of the child on or before September 1st of the current school year.
- The wait list applies to the current school year only. We do not take children on a wait list for future school years.
- There is no fee to have a child on the wait list.

- As a space opens, parents will be contacted in the order they were placed on the wait list.
- Parents have 72 hours to respond, then they will be moved to the end of the wait list and the next family will be called.

Tuition:

Payment	Description	Due date
Registration Deposit	1st tuition* installment + supply fee *tuition + add-ons, if applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Registration (1 payment) • Or ½ installment + supply fee @ registration, and other ½ payment by May 1st. (2 payments)
Tuition Installments (10, 2, or 1)	Your tuition for the divided into equal installments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st installment = Registration deposit • 2nd - 10th installments (Sept-May) due on 1st of month. • If paying 1 installment (less deposit), due Sept. 1st. • If paying 2 installments (less deposit), due Sept. 1st and Jan. 1st.

Pathways School tuition is a financial commitment for the stated school year. **All Tuition payments are non-refundable and due on the 1st and delinquent on the 10th.**

- Payments can be made by cash or check to the school office, ACH withdraw (no fee), or online through Brightwheel with a credit or debit card (processing fee).
- If there is a reason that your payment will be late or you cannot pay an installment, please speak with the Director or Asst. Director as soon as possible. We may be able to assist you in making alternative payment arrangements.
- Tuition installments not paid by the 10th will be assessed a late fee of \$25.
- Failure to pay your tuition installment by the 30th of the month, could result in your child(ren) being removed from the Pathways School program.
- There will be a charge of \$25 for all returned checks.
- A 30- day notice must be given for a child to withdraw from the program for any reason. If school is in session, you are still responsible for tuition being paid at regular intervals during this time period. If 30-day notice is not given, you are responsible for the remaining semester’s tuition.
- Sibling Discount- \$25.00/per installment amount per family
- \$200.00 Supply Fee (only partial refunds are given if student withdraws after the school year has begun and withdraws with proper notice per Parent Handbook)
- Credit Card Processing Fee- If you do not select to include the processing fee with your online payment using a credit card, a 2% fee will be added to your next tuition installment.

Illness and Exclusions:

Your child’s health is a matter of great importance to us.

- **Precautions are taken to safeguard the health of every child and staff member including refusing to admit sick children into the school and isolating children who become sick while at school.**
- **If you know or suspect that your child is sick or is getting sick, please do not send them to school.**
- Should your child become sick while at school, the parents will be contacted. If parents cannot be reached, emergency contacts will be called.
- **It is VITALLY IMPORTANT that one parent can be reached at all times while your child is physically in the care of DSMC Pathways School and that your information is current.**
- If your child is on any medications, please alert the staff and director (if available), and let them know of any side effects so the teachers may be aware.
- **Please do not bring your child if he/she has had ANY of the following symptoms in the past 24 hours.**
 1. Appears overly tired
 2. Has or has had fever (99.7) in the past 24 hours

3. Has or has had symptoms of diarrhea or vomiting in the past 24 hours
 4. Is on day 1 of antibiotics
 5. Has heavy or discolored nasal discharge
 6. Has a constant cough
 7. Is abnormally fussy, cranky or upset
 8. Has symptoms of a possible communicable disease
 9. Has an undiagnosed rash
 10. Has head lice and/or lice nits
- Children must stay home for at least 24 hours after recovery and resolution of symptoms without the aid of medication. A doctor's note clearing them to return will be required for any fever-related illness.
 - For Covid-19 symptoms & illness, please consult the guidelines from [Hays County Health Dept.](https://hayscountytexas.com/covid-19-information-for-hays-county-residents/) or your local health provider. (<https://hayscountytexas.com/covid-19-information-for-hays-county-residents/>)
 - Children may return to Pathways School when all lice, nits and eggs are removed. Often a second pair of eyes is helpful in ensuring your child is free of lice, nits and eggs. Therefore, please have your child's hair inspected by the Pathways School Director, Assistant Director, or Administrative Assistant prior to attending class.

Your child will feel better at home recovering, so please keep them home if he/she is not feeling well. It is extremely important that you notify the school immediately if your child has been ill and/or has a communicable disease. We are required to report certain communicable diseases to the Texas Health & Human Services as well as the Hays County Health Department.

Procedures for Dispensing Medications:

- ALL medication must be in original container.
- ALL medications will be dispensed according to either a doctor's note, as prescribed, or according to the medications label.
- ALL medication MUST be brought to the office by the parent and checked in through our Administrative Assistant. *DFPS defines medication as "a prescription medication, or a non-prescription medication, excluding topical ointments such as diaper ointment or sunscreen."*
- ALL medication must be current. Medication with past expiration dates will not be administered.
- Medications will only be administered to the person for whom it is prescribed.
- OTC medications that are not indicated for your child's age, MUST have an accompanying doctor's note with orders on the amount that is to be given to a child.
- Each time medication is administered, a note will be sent home through your child's folder indicating the medication that was given, the amount, the time it was given and the person who administered the medication.

Allergy Policy

The church is a shared space with many people in many rooms every day. For this reason, we cannot guarantee the absence of specific allergens. The staff will make reasonable accommodations if your child has an allergy. If your child has a food allergy, please let us know as soon as it is discovered. We will make every effort to avoid the product in our snacks and classroom activities. All students with severe allergies must have a completed Allergy Emergency Plan on file.

Special Care Needs

Pathways School strives to be a welcoming and inclusive place for all children. We will enroll a child with special needs if they can participate in our program with reasonable accommodations, and we can adequately care for and maintain an enriching environment for all students. If a student requires special care while attending school, Pathways School needs the following information (as applicable) from the parents before the child's 1st day of school.

- Medications prescribed for continuous use
- Limitations or restrictions on the child's activities
- Special care requirements including: reasonable accommodations or modifications; adaptive equipment and instructions for use; symptoms or indicators of complications that may warrant prevention or intervention while the child is in care.
- Contact with any early intervention specialists or therapists who will be providing extra support or services to the child while present at or outside of school.

Immunization Requirements:

Please see the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for the immunization schedule of required vaccines. *A copy of your child's up-to-date vaccine record must be kept in your child's file.* You can find more information in the Texas Department of State Health Service's rules at 25 TAC Chapter 97, Subchapter B (relating to Immunization Requirements in Texas Elementary and Secondary Schools and Institutions of Higher Education). You can access it on the Texas Department of State Health Services Internet website at: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/>, or you may obtain a copy from Licensing or your local or state health department.

T.B. Testing Requirements:

Requirements for tuberculosis screening and testing vary across the state. If your regional Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) or local health authority requires tuberculosis testing for children in your child-care center, then you must have documentation to indicate that each child in your care is free of active tuberculosis. Documentation of a TB screening is not required to be on file. If you are unsure of the requirements for your area, contact the TB manager at the DSHS regional office nearest you.

Hearing and Vision Screening Requirements:

All children ages 4 and up MUST have hearing and vision screening results in their child's file at Pathways School. The Special Senses and Communication Disorders Act, Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 36, requires a screening or a professional examination for possible vision and hearing problems for children of certain ages and grades. Refer to 25 TAC Chapter 37, Subchapter C, (relating to Vision and Hearing Screening), for specifics on vision and hearing screening. This information may be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/vhs/>.

Discipline and Guidance:

Please inform your child's teacher if your child has experienced a traumatic emotional or stressful event. Something as small as a fender-bender can trigger emotional episodes in young children, so please, let us know if something has happened with your child. This will enable our child's teacher to understand and deal with behavior difficulty(s) he/she may observe in the classroom.

Our staff members make learning fun and enjoyable through the development of weekly topics and daily lesson plans for each class. Our main emphasis is teaching the children that God loves them and He wants us to love others. This knowledge and faith in God's love should be shown in their daily lives by showing respect for the teachers and adults, getting along with others, following class rules, being kind to one another, and sharing God's love with others.

Children are encouraged to develop and grow in self-control by many means – redirection, positive reinforcement, use of logical and natural consequences, individual and group discussions, and development and implementation of consistent Christian classroom guidelines. As a last resort, when none of the above methods seem to be effective, a short "time out" in the classroom followed by more structure for the remainder of the day may prove to be helpful for some children. Home and school need to work closely with one another in developing consistent guidelines if and when problems do occur.

Please contact your child's teacher should you feel there is a problem that needs to be discussed. Your child's teacher will do likewise. Pathways School feels a strong Christian commitment to work with and help the children and families in our school within the limits of our capabilities. However, if a child is unresponsive to the above methods, and the student's behavior continues to cause problems, DSMC Pathways School reserves the right to request the withdrawal of a child who cannot adapt to the group situation. Should this be the case, it will be important that home and school work closely in order to best meet the needs of the child.

Snacks and Meals:

All children need to bring a morning snack and their lunch. A late-afternoon snack will be provided for all children in Extended Day. Children should bring a nutritious lunch and drink (no carbonated beverages) in a lunchbox labeled with their name. Pathways School is not responsible for the nutritional value of the snack/meal brought from home, or for meeting the child's daily food needs. Please label all containers and don't forget any needed utensils. All food should be ready to eat and easy to manage independently for ages 2 and up. Please pack food the child is familiar with and will eat. Do not send food that must be heated.

What to Bring to School:

- Your child in washable play clothes. Please remember that this is a learn-while-playing and learn-by-doing program. Your child will get dirty. Please do not dress them in their Sunday best, as they will probably not come home the same way.
- Rubber-soled shoes with laces or Velcro closures. Open-toed shoes are not appropriate for outdoor playground play or nature walks.
- A full-size tote bag or backpack that will hold a 9x12 folder, extra clothes, security items, lunch & water bottle. Small backpacks and totes look cute but do not hold all the necessary items for school.
- A small blanket and pillow, or nap mat for nap time. "Security" items are welcomed, but please keep them at a reasonable size and note that these will be used for rest time.
- 2 complete, weather and size appropriate changes of clothing in a large Ziploc bag clearly labeled with your child's name. (Don't forget to include underwear and socks!) This will live in your child's school bag. Please be sure to re-stock your child's change of clothes after each accident at school. Make sure the change of clothes kept at Pathways School fit the child and change appropriately with the seasons.
- A nutritious lunch in a lunch box and **water** bottle labeled with your child's name. (*Water only, please!*) Please consider a sport top or other type of bottle to minimize spills.
- For two-year-old classes, please bring sufficient diapers and wipes for your child in his/her bag each day. These must be refreshed daily in his/her bag.

What to NOT Bring to School

- Toys of any kind unless requested by the teacher. *Specifically, no toy guns, knives, war toys, swords, weapons or toys of destructive nature.* Security items will be used at rest time if needed, but need to stay in your child's backpack during the remaining parts of the school day.
- Carbonated drinks
- Money, jewelry, and other valuables. Children cannot be responsible enough to care of these items, and the staff cannot be held responsible for these items being lost or misplaced.
- Gum, candy, candles, or party favors as these may prove to be an unsafe hazard to children
- Anything fragile/breakable unless pre-approved by the teacher

Toileting Policy:

Children in our 3-year-old, Pre-K, Bridge, and Kindergarten classes must be fully toilet trained before attending Pathways School. These classrooms are not equipped with individual restrooms, but the classes have several scheduled class restroom times. Our Support Staff supervise children in the bathroom, but it's important that they know how to independently use the toilet (including wiping and clothing) when starting a 3-year old class. The children in our 2-year-old classes may experience toilet training during the year, and we happily include toilet learning in our program at school. It is important that parents stay in good communication with the teachers and staff about their child's toilet training, so that we may work together in the best way possible.

Animals:

We have a variety of animals at Pathways School such as rabbits, fish, and turtles. *Please let us know if your child has any allergies to any of these types of animals.* We will notify you if any other animals are added to our classrooms. The animals' habitats are changed regularly, and we will not let the presence of animals create an unsafe or unsanitary condition. *The children will never be allowed to touch the turtles as Child Care Licensing does not allow enrolled children to have contact with reptiles, amphibians, or poultry.* **As a precaution to all students and staff, we do not allow pets to be brought into the building except for service animals. We also ask that pets stay at home or in the car during arrival and dismissal.**

Curriculum:

All classes follow a monthly chapel topic, Bible verse, and weekly Bible story. Daily lesson plans and longer thematic units are individually designed by the teacher based on a developmental checklist by age group. The planned activities serve to reinforce and build on the theme, as well as provide opportunities to develop concepts and skills in all areas of development: language, cognitive, social/emotional, fine and gross motor. In addition, emphasis is placed on eye-hand

coordination, large and small motor development, auditory and visual perception skills, and receptive and expressive language.

Creative art activities are planned to introduce the child to a variety of art media, to broaden the child's experiences, to promote creativity, to provide opportunities for feelings of accomplishment, and to develop thinking and planning skills. Emphasis will be on the experience and the learning process, not on the finished product. Your child may or may not choose to participate in each day's activity and therefore may or may not bring home daily work.

All Pathways students benefit from additional enrichment opportunities within the context of music, movement, science, and our corporate Chapel service. Kindergarten and Bridge also enjoy additional enrichment opportunities. Pathways School hosts a *Preschool for Parents* night in the fall to discuss classroom-specific curriculum and routines.

Teachers/Staff Requirements and Teacher/Student Ratios:

Pathways School employs qualified and nurturing professionals who are committed to enriching the development of each child. We strive to keep teacher-child ratios that exceed recommendations by state licensing and child development experts. *All Pathways staff members are addressed using their last name during hours of operation with children... i.e. "Mrs. Fernandez or Mr. Moon."*

Optimal Pathways School Ratios:

- 2 year-old classes: 6-7 children with a teacher and shared support staff
- 3 year-old classes: 8-9 children with a teacher and floating support staff
- Pre-K (4 yr old) classes: 10-11 children with a teacher and floating support staff
- Kindergarten classes: 12-15 children with a teacher and part-time teaching assistant.

Outdoor Play:

We have a daily scheduled recess time for every class. In the event of inclement weather, or the director has deemed it's not safe or in the best interest of the children to go outside during the scheduled recess, classes will have "indoor recess" in the gymnasium.

The following criteria will be used to determine unsafe weather conditions for outdoor recess:

- Wind-Chill of 30' or below
- Heat Index of 90' or above

Classes are encouraged to go outside for nature walks, gardening, picnics, or other class activities. Please always send your child to school in weather appropriate clothing.

Water/Splash Days:

The children will have the opportunity to participate in water activities throughout the year. These activities include sprinklers, squirt bottles, water tables/tubs, splash pools, etc. Parents will always be notified of these water activity days in advance and what to bring (swimsuit, towel, water shoes, etc.) for their child that day.

Rest Time Policy:

All classes will have a designated rest time in their daily schedule. This rest time will be after their lunch meal. Children will not be forced to go to sleep but encouraged to rest quietly so not to disturb the other children in the class who may want to go to sleep.

Birthdays & Other Celebrations:

If you and your child would like to prepare a birthday snack, please contact your child's teacher in advance so he/she can plan accordingly. Special plates and napkins may be sent, but please do not send party favors. For children in the program with summer birthdays, please contact your child's teacher to decide how/when to celebrate. We have several school celebrations throughout the year including: Pumpkin Patch Party, Walk the Walk, Christmas Chapel and Birthday Party for Jesus, Donuts with Dad, Easter Egg Hunts, Muffins with Mom, End-of-the-Year parties, and Pre-K, Bridge, and Kindergarten Recognition. Parents are encouraged to volunteer and participate in these celebrations.

- **Birthdays**

We want your child to celebrate their birthday with their class at school, but we encourage you to consider some ways to celebrate that are not food- or trinket-related. Your child's teacher will be happy to consult with you on this. If a special snack is served, it must be individually portioned and packaged.

Open Door Policy/Communication:

The parents and families are an important part of Pathways School. We encourage you to volunteer your time, talents, special interests, or profession in your child's classroom. The staff understands that communication is key to any effective relationship. For this reason, you will be notified of needs in your classroom and kept up-to-date on school activities through daily notes, Brightwheel messages, emails, and the monthly Pathways School Primer. The Primer lists the month's chapel topics, bible stories & verses, snack calendars, and other school news. We want you to know what your children are doing here at Pathways School and what will be coming in the next month. ***PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION SENT HOME***

All Teachers will invite you to a Parent-Teacher conference in the fall to discuss your child's adjustment to school and his/her development. Pre-K, Bridge, and Kindergarten parents will have additional conference times offered during the school year. Pathways Teachers are available to conference by appointment at any time in the year. **Please do not confer with the teachers during arrival or dismissal time as it takes their attention away from their students.** *It is in the best interests of the children to discuss any issues in a private setting.*

Policy Changes:

Parents will be notified in writing of any policy changes that may occur.

Minimum Standards and State Licensing

The DSMC Pathways School is a licensed child-care facility. Therefore, all staff members follow the Minimum Standard Rules, as outlined in the Texas Department of Health & Human Services. This agency conducts annual inspections of our facility. The most recent Licensing inspection report is posted on the bulletin board next to the Director's office. Copies of the Minimum Standards are in all the Pathways School offices as well as on the TX Dept. of Health & Human Services website. Please contact DSMC Pathways School Director or Administrative Assistant if you wish to view the Minimum Standards or the most recent licensing inspection report.

Preventing and Responding to Abuse and Neglect:

The Child Abuse Hotline can be found in contacts section in the front of this handbook. The Texas Department of Family Protective Services website is https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Contact_us/report_abuse.asp. The TX Abuse & Neglect Hotline is 1-800-252-5400 and our local Child Care Regulation office number is 512-834-3426.

Emergency Preparedness Plan:

DSMC has a master Disaster Plan and all staff has been advised and trained on it. An emergency evacuation and relocation plan is posted in every classroom, hallway bathrooms, the Family Life Center and outside the office of the school to ensure safety of children during a fire, weather, or other emergency requiring evacuation or relocation of the children.

At Pathways school, we conduct monthly fire drills, and severe weather and lockdown drills 4 times a year, in accordance with state and local licensing procedures. In addition, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are checked on a regular basis. We are a secure campus where entrance and exit doors are unlocked during arrival and dismissal times only, with staff members present at each door. If for some reason you need to come into the building at a different time, you will need to ring the doorbell to be let in.

In the case of an individual emergency, the parent/guardian will be called. If the parents cannot be reached immediately, EMS will be dispatched (at your expense) to take your child to the nearest hospital. Every effort will be made to contact the parents as soon as possible. In the event the parents cannot be reached, the persons listed on the registration form will be contacted. For minor injuries and non-threatening circumstances, as a courtesy to the parents, we call as we feel it is necessary to do so. If it is not an emergency, our staff will inform you upon arrival and have you sign an accident report (if necessary).