



Playground Operating Criteria Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning

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1. Supervision of Children

Intent: Children are able to engage in outdoor play experiences safely. Staff balance supervision of the outdoor environment, while interacting and participating in games and activities with the children. Unsafe conditions or situations are quickly remedied. A playground safety check is completed to ensure that children have a safe and hazard free play area. Staff have access to a working cordless phone, child care cell phone, intercom or walkie talkie in order to quickly obtain assistance when needed. Time is scheduled to set up the playground or indoor gross motor play area prior to children having access to it to decrease wait times and maximize children's participation.

Inspiring Pedagogy: " Opportunities to engage with people, places, and the natural world in the local environment help children, families, educators, and communities build connections, learn and discover, and make contributions to the world around them." (HDLH, pg 19)

Reflective Questions: Are staff able to position themselves for optimal supervision while still engaging with the children? Is there an emergency action plan in place? Are all the children dressed appropriately for the weather? How are you able to balance supervision with interactions?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>Staffing not in place to safely escort children to and from the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area Children are not safely transitioned from the classroom to the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area.</p> <p>Ratios not maintained on the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area Ratios are not maintained as per provincial requirements.</p> <p>Staff do not position themselves to ensure clear view of all playground and/or indoor gross motor play areas There are areas that are not being supervised by staff.</p> <p>Staff do not scan the playground and/ or indoor gross motor play area Staff are missing supervision in areas of the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area due to lack of continuously scanning the area.</p>	<p>Staff are able to balance supervision with interactions Staff are able to interact with children as well as scan areas of playground/indoor gross motor area.</p> <p>Staff are aware of the numbers and location of children Staff know at all times, how many children are in the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area, as well as where the children are located.</p> <p>Staff react quickly to remedy unsafe conditions and/or situations Staff move quickly to remedy unsafe conditions and/or situation.</p>	<p>Centre provides extra seasonal outdoor clothing The centre has additional outdoor clothing for all seasons. For example, extra snow pants, boots, gloves and sunhats.</p> <p>Communication is accessible by use of cordless phone, child care cell phone, walkie talkie and/or intercom The staff must have access to a phone that is paid for by the child care centre walkie talkie or intercom in the event they need assistance. All portable communication devices should be charged and in full working order.</p> <p>Time is scheduled daily to set up the playground prior to children having access to it Staff have time scheduled daily to set up the playground/indoor gross motor play area. For example, time is documented on the staff duty sheet, in a log book, when they are away from children to set up the playground and/or indoor gross motor play area in advance so that children are not kept waiting.</p> <p>Each age group has their own designated outdoor time Each age group has their own designated outdoor time which allows the children to have an experience with their peers.</p>

2. Outdoor Play Space and Shade Areas

Intent: Children have an outdoor play space that they can safely explore to maximize their nature experience. The outdoor play space allows for children to engage in developmentally-appropriate activities. Children explore and learn about their environment through their senses. Sensory experiences, diverse surfaces and nature inspired landscapes provide children with enhanced means to experience their environment. Inclined surfaces provide opportunities to explore and develop coordination and balance skills. Nature built furnishings promotes a connection to the environment and foster imagination skills. Shade allows an opportunity to participate in outdoor play away from the sun. Natural elements within the playground allow children to experience and learn about nature. Developmentally-appropriate gardening tools, with access to a nature area, vegetable and flower gardens provide hands on opportunities for children to actively take part in the learning process about nature.

Inspiring Pedagogy: " Children thrive in programs where they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge. While these environments need to be safe, it is also important for them to provide children with interesting opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk taking." (HDLH, pg 29)

Reflective Questions: When a sandbox cover is not used, are the staff raking all areas that the children have access to? Does the playground area support the natural curiosity of the children? Does the playground area meet the developmental needs of all the children in the centre?

Sensory Materials: for example, sand, woodchips, water, shaker bottles, scent bottles, sponges, ice cubes, pom poms, bean bags, tactile board, fabric

Garden and/or Nature Area Resources:

- www.PLAYbynature.org
- www.GreenHere.ca

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>One playground surface accessible The children have access to only one playground surface. For example, the playground is concrete.</p> <p>Sensory materials and/or sand are not accessible Sand is covered when the children are outside or sensory materials are not accessible to children.</p> <p>Play space is not defined The play space is not defined causing some safety concerns. For example, children who are running have to manoeuvre around children on wheeled toys.</p> <p>Outdoor play space is not in a state of good repair Areas of the playground are broken and potentially pose a hazard to the children and/or staff. For example, damage to protective surfacing, tripping hazard, rust, exposed bolts, wood splintering, vandalism, litter.</p> <p>No shade is accessible on the playground There is not a place on the playground where children can access shade from the elements.</p>	<p>Two playground surfaces accessible There are two playground surfaces accessible. For example, concrete and grass. A mat can be used to provide an additional surface. Soft surface or cushioned area is accessible for infants.</p> <p>Sensory materials and/or sand accessible to children during entire outdoor play time During outdoor time, sensory materials are accessible to the children. For example, water play, sensory bottles, musical instruments, sensory balls, snow or an open sandbox.</p> <p>Sand box covered when not in use A cover needs to be on the sandbox when not in use to prevent animals from accessing the area. If covering the sandplay area is not possible, sand must be raked daily, before the children access the area.</p> <p>Infants are provided with gross motor time Infants are provided with gross motor time on the outdoor playspace on a daily basis. This allows infants an opportunity to explore the outdoor environment.</p>	<p>Playground includes seating area Playground includes seating area. For example, a bench, chairs, a rock, a log or a ledge.</p> <p>Third surface provided There is a third playground surface. For example, concrete, large mat and a grassy area.</p> <p>Incline surface accessible There is an incline surface accessible within the playground. For example, a slight incline on a bike path, a hill, or a ramp. An incline in the playground means that the playground is not a flat surface.</p> <p>Each age group has their own designated play space Each age group have their own playground area.</p> <p>Nature built furnishings and equipment Nature built furnishings and equipment expands on children's experience of nature. For example, rocks or tree stumps to sit on or use as a table, stepping stones, logs to walk along, or driftwood.</p>

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>Water source is not available A water source is not available to allow for drinking water and/or water that can be used for plants, sensory, and science experiences. For example, a bucket with water, hose, a tap, a water jug. Drinking water is not accessible to children during the warmer seasons.</p>	<p>Balance of shade and sunny areas A balance of both shade and sunny areas should be accessible on the playground.</p> <p>Natural elements are in or beside the playground There are natural elements in or beside the playground in all seasons. For example, plants, grass or trees.</p>	<p>Evidence that a garden and/or nature area is accessible Children have daily access to a garden and/or nature area to extend nature related learning opportunities. This can be achieved by children maintaining a vegetable/flower garden and learning about plant life cycles. During winter months, evidence of the garden can be presented in a homemade book, photo album or poster display.</p> <p>Outdoor play space accessible in all weather conditions Outdoor play space is accessible and used by the children in all weather conditions. For example, an awning covers part of the playground, or covered rooftop.</p>

3. Physical Play Equipment

Intent: Physical play contributes to children's well being through sport play; children learn turn taking, communication, sharing, good sportsmanship as well as gross motor skills. Balls and equipment are in good condition and accessible to children. Staff role model and facilitate games and activities to further enhance children's skills; and provide opportunities to practice self regulation skills. Resources are provided to families to assist them in accessing programs and information within their communities.

Inspiring Pedagogy: " Through active play and physical exploration, children gain increasing levels of independence, learn to persevere and practise self-control, and develop a sense of physical, emotional, and intellectual mastery and competence." (HDLH, pg 29-30)

Reflective Questions: Do the planned and/or documented learning opportunities incorporate the physical play materials provided to the children? Are the materials and equipment in good condition? Are there enough materials and equipment for all the children who want to participate?

Developmentally-Appropriate physical play equipment:

Infants and Toddlers: tunnels, ball pit, musical stepping stones, push/pull toys.

Preschool and Kindergarten: balance pads/beams, tetherball, velcro mitt and balls, scoop and ball set, hula hoops, hockey sticks, golf clubs, badminton rackets, balls & scoops. This does not include play structures, unless otherwise stated.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>No balls are available No balls are available within the outdoor area.</p> <p>Balls are not inflated Balls are deflated and not able to be used by children.</p> <p>No additional developmentally-appropriate physical play equipment is available There is no other physical play equipment available. For example, hula hoops, hockey sticks, bowling, tunnels. Note: Play structure, wheeled toys, balls can not be counted for this indicator.</p>	<p>Three or more balls are accessible Three or more balls are accessible in the outdoor area. Ball should be meaningfully incorporated into games and/or planned and documented activities.</p> <p>Three or more additional developmentally-appropriate physical play equipment is accessible Staff set up the physical play environment using three or more pieces of physical play equipment in addition to the play structure, wheeled toys and balls. For example, hockey sticks and ball, balance beams, hula hoops.</p> <p>Staff set up physical play equipment to facilitate participation Staff set up the physical play environment which promotes participation by children.</p>	<p>Three or more types of equipment accessible to foster balance, coordination and climbing skills Equipment is accessible that will help children work on balance and coordination skills. The play structure is acceptable in this indicator if it is open and accessible. For example, climbing ramps, slide, balance pod, purpose built incline, balance beams.</p> <p>Active lifestyle resources are accessible for families Resources are accessible to families that promote the importance of an active lifestyle. It is acceptable for these resources to be stored inside the centre. For example, a pamphlet on healthy eating and being active.</p> <p>Community recreation resources are accessible to families Information about community's recreation resources is accessible. It is acceptable for these resources to be stored inside the centre. For example, the local community centre, swimming pool or gym.</p>

4. Learning Materials

Intent: Children have opportunities to expand on social skills, role play and problem solve through use of various learning materials. Children can expand on their knowledge and skills by experimenting with materials in their outdoor environment. Materials such as bug keepers, magnifying glasses and binoculars help to foster learning about the natural environment and its habitat. Clipboards, cameras, and paper help to support children's curiosity, observations and learning of the environment at their own pace and interest. Developmentally appropriate 3D materials provide opportunities for exploration, imagination and social play.

Inspiring Pedagogy: " A growing body of research suggests that connecting to the natural world contributes to children's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being. Providing daily opportunities to explore, care for, and interact with the natural world helps to strengthen these connections." (HDLH, pg 21)

Reflective Questions: Are the children's interests from in the classroom reflected in the materials on the playground? Are the learning materials provided appropriate for the season? Are the learning materials complete for example, doll stroller and dolls or buckets and shovels of similar size?

Learning Materials:

Winter: igloo maker, snow ball amker, ice cube trays, empty food containers, hula hoops, snow shovels, pails

Spring, Summer, Fall: people, animals, dinosaurs, small vehicles, sand toys, puzzles, books, chalk

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>No learning materials accessible Learning materials are not accessible to the children.</p> <p>Insufficient amount of learning materials for the number of children wanting to use them There are insufficient learning materials accessible for the children who want to use them.</p> <p>Learning materials are not in good condition Learning materials are broken or missing pieces.</p>	<p>Three or more different types of learning materials accessible Three or more different types of learning materials accessible. For example, cars, animals and pine cones.</p> <p>Learning materials reflect the interests of children Children are engaged and interacting with the learning materials that have been provided.</p> <p>Learning materials are developmentally-appropriate Developmentally and seasonally appropriate learning materials provide children a chance to explore safely.</p>	<p>Three or more types of learning materials are accessible to explore nature are accessible The learning materials allow children to explore science and nature experiences. For example, butterfly nets, magnifying glasses, drift wood. All learning materials are seasonally appropriate.</p> <p>Two or more learning areas are extended to the outdoor environment To extend the children's experiences, two or more learning areas are extended to the outdoor environment. For example, books and art experiences are brought outside. All learning areas are seasonally appropriate.</p> <p>Two or more learning materials promote social and/or dramatic play Two or more small toys promote social play. For example, toy cell phones, dolls, dress-up clothing. All learning materials are seasonally appropriate.</p>

5. Wheeled Toys

Intent: Developmentally appropriated toys are accessible to children to further enhance development of gross motor skills. Opportunities are provided for children to utilize a variety of wheeled toys. Toys are safe and in good condition and encourage participation by all children. Resources are provided to assist families in learning about bike safety and helmets. Bike paths and trails allow for safe learning and development.

Inspiring Pedagogy: " Children have a sense of self and health and well-being when they: are physically active and confident in their growing abilities; are increasingly aware of and able to make healthy choices to meet their basic needs (e.g., for food, sleep, physical activity, self-care)." (HDLH, pg 32)

Reflective Questions: Are the wheeled toys developmentally appropriate? Are there a variety of wheeled toys accessible? Are the wheeled toys in good condition? Are the large winter toys accessible on the playground during winter months?

Wheeled Toys: For example, bicycles, tricycles, wagons, ride on toys, scooters, push toys.

Bike Safety Resources:

- **Young Cyclist's Guide** - <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/cycling/young-cyclist-guide/index.shtml>
- **CAN Bike** - <http://canbikecanada.ca/>

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>No wheeled toys available Wheeled toys are not available.</p> <p>Wheeled toys are not in good condition Wheeled toys have broken or missing parts.</p> <p>Only one type of wheeled toy available There is only one type of wheeled toy available. For example, only tricycles.</p>	<p>One wheeled toy for every four children accessible One or more wheeled toys are accessible for every four children, weather permitting. For example, there are 16 children on the playground; four wheeled toys must be accessible for use.</p> <p>Wheeled toys are developmentally- appropriate Wheeled toys are developmentally-appropriate for the children using them.</p> <p>Two or more types of wheeled toys are accessible Two or more types of wheeled toys accessible, weather permitting. For example, bikes and wagons.</p> <p>One large winter toy for every four children is available One or more large winter toy for every four children are accessible during the winter season. For example, there are 20 children on the playground; 5 large winter toys are accessible.</p>	<p>Three or more types of wheeled toys are accessible Three or more types of wheeled toys accessible. For example, bikes, scooters and wagons.</p> <p>Bike path or trail is accessible to children Children have a bike path in the play area where they can ride their bikes safely. The use of the bike path or trail is enforced by staff in order to keep all the children safe.</p> <p>Bike safety resources are accessible to families Helmet and bike safety resources are accessible to families. In winter months, it is acceptable to have resources for toboggan safety, helmet safety, ski safety.</p>

6. Outdoor Storage

Intent: Storage is provided for all outdoor equipment to ensure that it is stored and maintained in a safe manner. The storage area is easily accessed by staff all year round. Outdoor equipment is cleaned and organized to allow for easy access of equipment/toys. A first aid kit is accessible to staff outside to deal with emergency situations promptly.

Reflective Questions: Is the storage area safe and free of hazards? Can the storage area be accessed in deep snow? Is the first aid kit well maintained and easily accessible? Is the storage easily accessible from the playground?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p>No storage provided for outdoor equipment Storage is not available for outdoor equipment and toys.</p> <p>Outdoor equipment is stacked on top of each other in an unsafe manner Storage area is disorganized and not easily accessible by staff. Toys are stacked on top of each other; posing a safety hazard.</p> <p>Outdoor storage is not securely locked When not in use, the storage is not safely secured to prevent children from accessing, theft and any other potential hazards. Storage does not have to be a shed, it can be a secure locations that is designated for storage. The storage space should not be accessible to the public when the playground equipment is not being used.</p>	<p>Designated storage provided for all outdoor equipment Designated storage space is available for all outdoor equipment to ensure toys and equipment are well maintained.</p> <p>Storage is accessible all year round Storage is accessible to staff all year round; in all types of weather. Staff can easily open locks and doors to access toys and equipment during summer and winter months.</p> <p>First aid kit is accessible outside First Aid Kit is accessible to staff outside during outdoor play. It can be stored in the storage area, portable in a backpack or fanny pack. It should also be checked and re-stocked on a regular basis to ensure supplies are replenished and not expired.</p>	<p>Storage for outdoor equipment is located close to or on the playground The storage space is located close to or on the playground so that equipment and toys can be accessed easily by staff without impacting the supervision of children.</p> <p>Storage is organized Toys and equipment are neatly stored to allow easy access to take out and put away.</p> <p>Storage is labelled Storage is labelled and categorized to allow for quick and easy access of toys and equipment.</p>