Toddler
Operating Criteria
Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

1. Daily and Visual/Auditory Schedules

Intent: A Daily Schedule is posted that reflects the current outline of the day. Families, visitors, students, educators, and children should always be aware of, and have access to, how the day is scheduled. Being aware of how the day is planned allows for consistency, self-regulation and promotes positive behaviours. The Visual/ Auditory and Daily Schedules should be a reflection of the day and allow for flexibility promoting a sense of belonging. Regular use of the Visual/Auditory Schedule with the children promotes independence and positive transitions.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "A safe environment that offers consistency and continuity as well as graduated support for children's growing independence and capacity for self-care enables children to tackle challenges, learn to persevere, and explore ways to cope with manageable levels of positive stress." (How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (HDLH), page 30).

Reflective Questions: What considerations have been made to ensure the Visual/Auditory Schedule is developmentally-appropriate and easy for the children to understand? How flexible is the Daily Schedule? How does the Daily Schedule aim to meet the needs of the children and support their well-being and engagement? How does the Visual/Auditory Schedule encourage the child to reflect on what is happening next? How is the Visual/Auditory Schedule being used to support children through transitions?

Daily Schedule: A written schedule that lists when activities and events will occur during the day and is posted in a place accessible to families and educators. **Visual/ Auditory Schedule:** Real photos showing when activities and events will occur during the day. **Real photos depicting children using toilet/potty or being diapered are not considered appropriate.** The Visual/Auditory Schedule is accessible to the children. It is acceptable to have a Visual/Auditory Schedule that is not posted (for example, in a photo album or on a ring holder) as long as it is kept in an area that is accessible to the children at all times. If there are children in the program with a wide range of abilities and disabilities, modifications should be used to support their needs. For example, creating a schedule using braille or an auditory schedule.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Daily Schedule is not posted There is no Daily Schedule posted within the program space accessible to the families and educators.	**Daily Schedule is posted that indicates time is planned for:** The Daily Schedule covers the full hours of operation of the program and indicates that time is planned for ALL of the following activities:	**Alternate arrangements are indicated on the Daily Schedule** Should the children be unable to go outside due to inclement weather, the alternate gross motor location is identified on the Daily Schedule. For example, the gym, hallway, or program space is used as an alternate space.
Daily Schedule does not balance between structure and flexibility The Daily Schedule is structured and does not allow for flexibility. The Daily Schedule is not adjusted to meet the circumstances of the day or to meet the individual needs of the children. For example, the children are engaged in play and educators stop them to start circle time.	**Outdoor play** **Indoor play** **Child and educators-initiated learning experiences** **Time to meet children's physical needs**	**Daily Schedule is seasonally adjusted** Evidence the Daily Schedule is changed to reflect the seasons. For example, the posted Daily Schedule is labelled with the current season.
Visual/Auditory Schedule is not accessible The Visual/Auditory Schedule is not accessible to the children, or the Visual/Auditory Schedule does not reflect the main routines and transitions of the day. Some of the pictures in the Visual/ Auditory Schedule are not real photos.	**Photographs in Visual/Auditory Schedule include children in the program** Two or more children currently enrolled in the program are included in two or more photos of the Visual/Auditory Schedule.	**Visual/Auditory Schedule is seasonally adjusted** The Visual/Auditory Schedule is updated to reflect the current season through real photos.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
		Daily Visual/Auditory Schedule is referred to The Visual/Auditory Schedule is referred to with individual and/or groups of children. Educators and/or children refer to a Visual/Auditory Schedule and it is used as a teaching tool for children who are learning the daily routine. For example, using the Daily Visual/Auditory Schedule to support transitions, or using a pictorial schedule to support learning of toileting and/or diapering routine.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

2. Program Plan

Intent: The Program Plan is an information tool used to ensure families, educators, students, and visitors are aware of the learning experiences in which the children will be engaged in throughout the day. The Program Plan is developed by educators to promote the on-going learning opportunities and developmental growth for all children. Scheduled time away from the children for programming allows educators to incorporate documented observations, cues, interests, and developmental goals into the Program Plan.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "As defined in ELECT, early years curriculum is the sum total of experiences, activities, and events that occur within an inclusive environment designed to foster children's well-being, learning, and development and ensure meaningful participation for every child. It begins with an informed understanding of what children are capable of learning and how they learn effectively; it sets out goals for children's learning and development, health, and well-being; and it provides direction for educators." (HDLH, page 15).

Reflective Questions: How are recommendations from external agencies or professionals taken into consideration when programming? How are the children's individual goals incorporated into the learning experiences? How do educators collaborate with families and local communities to ensure the program is reflective of their beliefs, practices, and expectations as well as sociocultural identities? How is the Program Plan inclusive and responsive to meet the needs of all the children in the program?

Program Plan: Describes the specific learning experiences planned for children or documented by the end of the day in each curriculum area. It is different from a schedule in that it includes details of each learning experience. The Program Plan is unique to each individual centre/agency or program and reflects their curriculum model and philosophy. The program space has a Program Plan for both indoor and outdoor experiences that is reflective of the children enrolled in each particular program.

Posted: The Program Plan is posted in a place that is accessible to families and educators in the program space or at the entrance to the program space.

Learning areas are planned: Refers to pre-planned learning experiences based on current observations of the children.

Learning areas are documented: Refers to emergent programming. For centres that use an emergent curriculum model, learning experiences must be documented by the end of each day; however, learning experiences should be planned for the first day of each week. The previous week's programming will be reviewed to ensure experiences are documented for all learning areas.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
A current Program Plan is not posted There is no current Program Plan posted in a place accessible to families and educators. **Program Plan does not cover the entire time children are in attendance** The Program Plan does not provide for learning experiences throughout the day. **Each room does not have its own Program Plan** For example, there are two toddler rooms, and they share one Program Plan.	**The following learning areas are planned and/or documented:** **One sensory daily** **One art daily** **One cognitive daily** **One language and literacy daily** **One science and nature weekly** **One block weekly** **One music and movement weekly** **One pretend play weekly** **Current Program Plan includes descriptions of the learning opportunities** A description of the learning opportunities for each learning area being planned and/or documented needs to be reflected on the Program Plan.	**Evidence of formal programming time given to educators** Meetings are held away from the supervision of children that includes the whole program team for a minimum of thirty minutes per month. For example, evidence can be seen in meeting minutes, or posting of scheduled room meetings. Formal planning meetings occur at least once a month throughout the year.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
	At least one learning experience needs to relate to the learning opportunity. This can be accomplished in the following ways: - list materials with a direct reference to the number and root skill within the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) Continuum of Development which describes the learning opportunities, for example: *Finding hidden object using blanket - 4.6 Object Permanence.* Note: if only referencing the number, the Continuum of Development must be posted beside the Program Plan for reference. - describe the learning experience and include the competency children will potentially learn by participating in the learning experience, for example: Shape sorting toys - Coordination. - curriculum learning outcomes. For example, Key Developmental Indicators from High Scope, Play to Learn, Montessori. **Evidence that individual goals of children are incorporated into the Program Plan.** This can be accomplished in any of the following ways: - through observation notes - Individual Program Plans - meeting minutes, or - directly on the Program Plan. How this is accomplished is at the discretion of each individual centre/agency/program.	**Supervisor reviews Program Plans and signs them weekly** Evidence that the supervisor reviews the weekly Program Plans either prior to posting or the end of the week after learning experiences have been documented. Note: The person responsible for reviewing and signing the Program Plan should be someone other than the person implementing it. For example, the educators designate or the assistant supervisor. **Information is accessible to families regarding curriculum model** This information may be found on the family board or in the family handbook.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
	External agencies/professionals attend meetings to plan appropriately for children with individual support needs External professionals and/or specialists provide support and share suggestions on how educators can support the needs of individual children and/or programs. **Children who do not nap or who wake early are provided with play materials which are documented** Play materials are documented on the Program Plan or through a separate posting next to the Program Plan. Note: Not applicable for nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**	

Guidelines|Toddler

3. Learning Experiences

Intent: Educators plan learning experiences and transitions that are developmentally-appropriate throughout the day, based on individual observations, their knowledge of child development and the cues of the children. Educators use standardized developmental screens for each child to assess development and identify any red flags. The continuous learning opportunities are adaptable, promote choice and reflect the interests of the children. Educators collaborate with families and encourage them to be active participants in their child's learning environment. Photo documentation, whether posted or found in individual portfolios, highlight the children's interests, skills, and accomplishments. Educators incorporate specialized opportunities that introduce children to diverse learning topics. All play equipment, furnishings, and learning environments are developmentally-appropriate and safe. The program space is organized and inviting. Materials reflecting people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities and sociocultural identities are placed in an inclusive manner throughout the program space. Educators adapt the program space to meet the needs and interests of the children. Educators are given paid time away from supervision duties to prepare the materials needed for the planned learning experiences and program space set-up.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Educators are reflective practitioners who learn about children using various strategies. They listen, observe, document, and discuss with others, families in particular, to understand children as unique individuals. They observe and listen to learn how children make meaning through their experiences in the world around them. Educators consider their own practices and approaches and the impacts they have on children, families, and others. Educators use this knowledge, gained through observing and discussing with others, and their professional judgement to create contexts to support children's learning, development, health, and well-being." (HDLH, page 19).

Reflective Questions: How does the program space encourage all the children to be engaged? How is the program space set up to encourage children to follow their own interests and skills? How are the observations of the children being used to offer experiences that extend learning? How do educators ensure all the learning experiences are inclusive and reflective of diverse communities and cultures, varying abilities and disabilities, family structures, as well as sociocultural identities? How is the program space arranged in a manner that is inviting and encourages children to explore? How do the educators ensure the learning experiences are gender inclusive and support diverse gender expressions? How do educators regularly assess if there are any barriers to the children that would prevent them from playing freely? What strategies are used to ensure there are no barriers to supervision? How are the toys and play materials open-ended to support the children's natural curiosity and discovery during play? How do educators organize the layout of the program space to promote opportunities for children to master self-regulation within their play?

This indicator reflects the implementation of learning experiences from the Program Plan.

Sociocultural Identities: Experiences that represent Indigenous peoples and cultures, different ethnicities, races, languages, sexual orientation, and diverse gender identities.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. (Ontario Human Rights Commission)

Learning area: An area in the program space that is intentionally set-up with similar play materials to support the focus. For example, the pretend play learning area includes all the required accessible materials.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Learning experiences offered are not developmentally-appropriate Learning experiences offered are either too advanced or do not present enough challenge for the children enrolled.	**Standardized Developmental Screening tool is completed for all children** The screening tool is to be used appropriately according to each child's milestones. For example, LookSee Checklist, Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), Brigance.	**Activity resources are accessible to families** Educators provide activity resources to families which extend the current learning opportunities. For example, printed copies of the recipe for the weekly cooking activity are made accessible to families.

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Learning experiences do not promote choice for children
Children do not have a choice of what learning experience they want to do. For example, children are only able to access books early in the morning, only one learning experience is offered at a time or children are not provided with a choice.

There is no current documentation which demonstrates that observations of children are used in the development of learning experiences
Educators do not keep a record of observations, photo documentation or storybooks. There is less than one observation per child per week documented. Documentation of observations on daily charts that relate to learning objectives can be used for programming, however, the daily information charts would need to be kept as a record to be considered as weekly observations. Note: For children who attend nursery school programs less than five days per week, at least two observations per month are documented. For children who attend nursery school programs daily, at least one observation is documented each week.

The play environment is not arranged into learning areas that are open and accessible throughout the day
All learning areas are not open during free play and planned program time. Learning areas do not provide space for:

- Sensory/Art,
- Language/Listening,
- Pretend Play,
- Construction/Block,
- Science,
- Cognitive/Manipulative, and
- Quiet space.

Meets Expectations

Children who are new to the program need to have one completed within four weeks of being enrolled.

Evidence of opportunities to discuss developmental progress with families
For example, this could be demonstrated using meeting notes, signed developmental tools, or a sign-off page.

Photo documentation of learning experiences available
Educators use photographs of children participating in activities and learning experiences to share what the child is learning during the day. Written descriptions of the learning opportunity must accompany the photograph. Photographs can be used for recall opportunities with the children. Photo documentation can be available in the program space or in the child care centre.

Two or more educational play materials reflecting people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities are accessible in two areas
Educational play materials may include toy wheelchairs or guide dogs, dolls with leg braces, puzzles, blocks and/or books that depict people with varying abilities or using adaptive equipment. These materials need to be integrated into two learning areas. For example, two puzzles in the cognitive area and two books in the book area.

Two or more educational play materials reflecting sociocultural identities are accessible in two areas
Educational play materials may include dolls with different skin tones, non-binary dolls, anatomically correct dolls, foods, books, puzzles that reflect Indigenous peoples and cultures, dishes, clothes, and wooden dolls reflecting sociocultural identities. These materials need to be integrated into two learning areas. For example, two foods in the pretend play area and two wooden dolls representing sociocultural identities in the block area.

Exceeds Expectations

The resources can be offered as hardcopies, via online apps, web links or emailed at least every four months.

Portfolios regarding each child's development are accessible to families
Educators compile portfolios that document the child's developmental progress. Portfolios include two or more types of the following items: developmental reviews, artwork, photographs, observations, pedagogical documentation. Each portfolio must contain two of each type. For example, two pieces of pedagogical documentation, two photographs. Portfolios are accessible to families for them to look through at their leisure.

Enrichment program, in addition to regular program, is included monthly
Evidence is shown that the program incorporates enrichment programming which goes above and beyond the regular program. An educator or family member within the centre can offer the enrichment program which is also extended to the other programs. For example, monthly music teacher, yoga instruction, creative movement instruction, a children's workshop.
Note: not applicable for half-day nursery school programs.

Time is scheduled daily for educators to prepare materials in advance of learning experiences
Educators have time scheduled daily to prepare materials in advance and/or to set up the program space in advance so that children are not kept waiting. For example, a daily set-up time or material prep time is provided for educators to prepare materials for up-coming learning experiences. Educators are on paid time and are not counted in ratios.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

4. Displays

Intent: Displays should be meaningful to the children in the program and intentionally placed throughout the environment in a thoughtful manner. They are inclusive and are changed regularly to reflect the recent interests and artwork created by the children. Displays, including photographs of the children engaged in learning experiences, are at the children's eye level which promotes spontaneous interactions, logical thinking, and memory recall. Displays include family engagement in the program and encourage community involvement. Displays of people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities, diverse sociocultural identities and family structures should be staged in an inclusive manner throughout the program space and used as tools for reflective practice and learning.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Enabling children to develop a sense of belonging as part of a group is also a key contributor to their lifelong well-being. A sense of belonging is supported when each child's unique spirit, individuality, and presence are valued." (HDLH, page 24).

Reflective Questions: How do the displays strengthen and give meaning to the program? How are the displays arranged to support all children and their families to feel a sense of belonging, taking into consideration each family's lived experiences? How do displays in the program reflect families engaged in everyday life and/or in the local community? How do educators ensure all the displays are inclusive and reflective of diverse communities and cultures, a wide range of abilities and disabilities, and family structures? How do the displays embrace different family structures, sociocultural identities, and traditional celebrations in an authentic and meaningful manner? How are educators using families as a resource to ensure displays reflect the local community and are meaningful? How are educators creating a sense of well-being, and supporting an inclusive environment through displays that reflect diverse gender identities?

Display: Anything posted on the walls, furniture, photo frames and/or in digital photo frames:
- commercial displays: store-bought artwork, paintings
- adult-made displays: family tree with pictures of the children in the room and their families
- child-made displays: children's art

Process Art: Open ended process where children can freely engage with art materials and express themselves individually and creatively.
Product Art: Specific materials are presented to the children and there is a finished end product in mind by the educator.
Family structures: Two-parent families, single-parent families, 2SLGBTQIA+ families, blended families, couples, multi-generational families, grandparent-led families, alternative family forms living in one household.
Sociocultural Identities: Displays that represents Indigenous peoples and cultures, different ethnicities, races, languages, sexual orientation, and diverse gender identities.
Gender Identity: Gender identity is each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. (Ontario Human Rights Commission)
Note: Displays should reflect different languages of the families, educators, and local community, and should be checked for accuracy before posting.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Less than two displays include sociocultural identities Less than two displays reflect Indigenous peoples and cultures, different ethnicities, races, languages, or diverse gender identities that are meaningful to children and families in the program and community.	**Displays include children in the room participating in learning experiences** Two or more photos in the program space include photographs of current children participating in planned and/or documented experiences. These photos do not include the photos of the children in the Visual/Auditory Schedule, or the family tree displays.	**Two or more displays are in more than one language** Displays in the program space include different languages. For example, sign language, braille, Indigenous languages, and languages spoken by the children and families in the program.

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

More than half of the children's artwork is product-oriented, not process-oriented
More than half of the children's artwork on display in the program space is product-oriented and focused on creating a standard product or achieving a specified outcome.

Less than three displays include children's own artwork as well as adult-made and/or commercial materials
The program space does not include three different types of children's artwork displayed along with adult-made and/or commercial materials.

Displays are not:

Reflective of children's recent activities
Less than three displays reflect children's recent activities. For example, artwork older than two months is not considered recent.

Developmentally-appropriate
Displays include pictures that are developmentally-appropriate for young children.

Socioculturally appropriate and free of bias
Displays are not socioculturally appropriate, they are presented in a way that reinforces stereotypes, tokenism and dehumanizes communities and/or individuals. Photographs and displays are not intentional and do not provide opportunities for learning, reflective practice and understanding.

Displays are not at child's eye level, as much as possible

Displays are arranged in a segregated manner
Displays are not placed in an inclusive manner, nor displayed throughout the environment. For example, all displays reflecting people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities are grouped together.

Meets Expectations

Two or more displays include people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities
Displays include images of people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities participating in everyday activities or using different types of adaptive equipment.

Displays promote inclusion in daily living
Two or more photos in the program space include images of diverse sociocultural identities and people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities participating in everyday activities.

Exceeds Expectations

Two or more displays include family structures
Displays include images of two or more different types of family structures. For example, two-parent families, single-parent families, 2SLGBTQ + families, blended families, couples, multi-generational families, grandparent-led families, alternative family forms living in one household.

Displays include family involvement in activities and/or events
Two or more photos in the program space include two or more current families engaged in centre activities. For example, family breakfast, summer BBQ, field trips.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

5. Sensory, Science & Nature

Intent: Materials reflecting sensory, science and nature encourage children to explore through cause-and-effect experimentation and observation. Continual exposure to these materials and experiences allows children to learn more about their environments.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Optimal conditions for learning occur when we are fully engaged. For children, this happens in play that evolves from the child's natural curiosity – active play that allows children to explore with their bodies, minds, and senses, stimulating them to ask questions, test theories, solve problems, engage in creative thinking, and make meaning of the world around them. These investigations through play fuse intellect and feeling to help children make connections and develop the capacity for higher-order thinking." (HDLH, page 35).

Reflective Questions: How are the play materials developmentally-appropriate? Which play materials promote critical thinking? How do the play materials enhance the natural curiosity and inquiry of the children? How are STEAM concepts embedded into planned and/or documented learning experiences?

Sensory learning experiences: Planned and/or documented learning experiences referring to one or more of the five senses - taste, sight, touch, smell, and hearing.
Science and Nature equipment and materials: For example, bottles filled with natural items, magnifying glasses, plants, coloured lenses, volcanoes, tornado bottles.
STEAM concepts: STEAM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
No materials for science and nature learning experiences There are no materials available in the program space for science and nature learning experiences.	**Permanent sensory equipment is accessible to children in the play environment** Sensory equipment is always accessible. For example, water/sand table, light tables. It is acceptable for sensory equipment to be closed at lunch and sleep time.	**Two or more planned and/or documented sensory learning experiences occur daily** Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**
No materials for sensory learning experiences There are no materials available in the program space for sensory learning experiences.	**Three or more science and nature equipment and/or materials that are developmentally-appropriate are accessible** For example, magnifying glasses, pinecones, and a weight scale.	**Sensory learning experiences are planned and/or documented weekly to reflect different senses** One or more of the planned and/or documented sensory learning experiences reflects different senses. For example, texture mats taped to the floor, containers with different smells.
Sensory opportunities are not available throughout the day During free play and planned programming times, sensory materials and learning experiences are not accessible to the children.	**Opportunities to experience natural objects and/or events** Educators offer opportunities that incorporate natural objects in the program space or through learning experiences. For example, snow, plants, honeycombs, nests, shells, gourds.	**Two or more science and nature learning experiences planned and/or documented weekly** Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**
		Science and nature learning experiences planned and/or documented daily Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

6. Art

Intent: Creative art promotes self-expression and individuality while providing experiences collaboratively and independently through different mediums for children. Regular expectations within the Daily Schedule and children's interests allow for time to complete/extend the creative process. Safe art materials and equipment are always accessible to the children and are developmentally-appropriate. Art materials reflect sociocultural identities, include a range of skin tones, and are placed in an inclusive manner. Depending on the type of extended art project, the final piece of art created by the children can be incorporated into their program space as a prop or play material.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Encouraging the creative expression of ideas, feelings, and interpretations using a variety of materials also helps solidify children's learning, enhances their creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and strengthens their memory and sense of identity." (HDLH, page 42).

Reflective Questions: Are the materials being routinely restocked to allow the children to engage in self-directed art? How are the art materials accessible in a responsive and inclusive manner? Do the children have the ability to manipulate the materials as they see fit? How do the materials inspire the children to be engaged? How are educators incorporating sociocultural identities that include skin tone materials into the program?

Note: Materials should not pose choking hazards. Children's allergies should be considered when choosing materials.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
No equipment for art learning experiences There is no equipment available in the program space for art learning experiences. For example, easel, paint brushes. **No materials for art learning experiences** There are no materials available in the program space for art learning experiences. For example, drawing tools, glue, or paper. **Art opportunities not available throughout the day** For example, art learning experiences only occur early in the morning when there are fewer children present	**Fabric, collage, modeling materials and three or more drawing tools are accessible for independent use** Drawing tools, fabric, collage, and modeling materials are in good condition and on open shelves so that the children can access them independently. Children can open any container without assistance to use these materials independently. **Three or more art materials reflect sociocultural identities through a range of skin tones** There are three or more art materials available that include four or more different skin tones. For example, markers, paint, and paper.	**Two or more art learning experiences planned and/or documented daily** Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)** **Three or more art mediums are used in planned and/or documented learning experiences** For example, paint and sponges, glue and collage materials, paper and crayons. Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

7. Language and Literacy

Intent: A comfortable and inviting environment is created to encourage natural opportunities for language and literacy enjoyment. Including books in a thoughtfully displayed manner in other learning areas, or with programmed experiences, provides opportunities for enriched, and extended learning possibilities. Educators promote authentic opportunities for the development of language and literacy by exposing children to a variety of materials and accessories. Planning language and literacy experiences every day encourages the children to use and develop their vocabulary, their questioning skills, recall abilities, and gain an understanding of sociocultural identities. Children can retell stories and situations with the accessible props, thus providing opportunities to enhance storytelling experiences and language development.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Programs can best support emerging literacy skills by providing open-ended materials that foster imagination and symbolic play, including signs, symbols, and props that support print awareness in authentic contexts; by encouraging children to engage in play with words and sounds in song and rhyme; and by offering numerous opportunities for children to share books and stories." (HDLH, page 42).

Reflective Questions: How are literacy experiences reflected and extended throughout the program space? How do the literacy experiences connect to the cues and interests of the children? Have the books been placed in other learning areas in a meaningful way? How are educators ensuring books are rotated based on the interests of the children and families? How do educators ensure the books are reflective and responsive to the sociocultural identities of the children and families? How do educators plan when books and book accessories are required to be rotated? What practice is in place for replacing and repairing old or well-used books?

Developmentally-appropriate: The content and material of the books are developmentally-appropriate and reflect the interests of the children enrolled in the program. Books represent the sociocultural identities of the children in the program.
Book accessories: For example, puppets, flannel boards and flannel pieces, finger puppets, stuffed animals, magnetic boards and pieces, play people.
Language and Literacy learning experiences: For example, labelling games, audio books, reading books, singing songs, telling stories.

Note: The total number of books accessible include the required books reflecting diverse sociocultural identities, a wide range of abilities and disabilities, different languages, and real images.
Note: Any labelling in other languages or homemade books in dual languages should reflect the commonly spoken languages of the families, educators, and/or the local community and should be checked for accuracy.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Books are not accessible for independent use Books are kept out of reach of children or for display only. **Books for rotation are not available** Note: The rotational books can be shared within the centre. **Educators do not read to children daily** Educators do not read to children daily, either spontaneously or planned, during large or small group times, or to individual children. **Educators do not verbally label objects and actions** For example, if a child points to a book, the educators give the child the book without labelling the action.	**Two or more books that are developmentally-appropriate are accessible** Multiply the number of children enrolled in the program by two to determine the minimum number of books that are required. **Three or more books which include sociocultural identities are accessible** Three or more books include images of people that reflect Indigenous cultures, different ethnicities, races, languages, sexual orientation, and diverse gender identities that are meaningful to the children and families in the program and community. The books are inclusive and bias-free.	**Homemade books are accessible** Books made by educators and/or children are accessible to the children and placed in the program space in a meaningful way. Homemade books are not counted as displays in the room. For example, a photo album, a collection of artwork that has been laminated and bound together, or photo documentation of an activity such as plant life-cycle.

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Area does not include soft seating and/or cushions for sitting
The program space does not have a separate reading area, or the area does not include things such as a sofa, chairs, cushions, that would make the area comfortable for children to sit. Floor mats are not considered soft seating if placed directly on a bare floor.

Less than two language and literacy toys or puzzles are accessible
There are no language and literacy toys/puzzles accessible to the children. For example, puzzles, matching games, braille blocks, alphabet blocks, sign language cards, tracing letters, play materials with letters or numbers.

Less than three books contain real images of people and/or objects
Less than three books portray real people or objects. For example, a book with images of actual food items, animals, or people.

Meets Expectations

Language and literacy opportunities are integrated into one other area
For example, audio books, keyboards, phones, word builders, alphabet and number blocks, braille rulers, cash registers with play money, braille slate kit, or letter and number stencils.

Two or more book accessories are accessible in the room
Two or more book accessories are accessible in the program space for children to use in combination with books to extend their play and storytelling opportunities. For example, puppets, finger puppets, flannel board with flannel pieces, masks, play characters/play people, animals, magnetic board with magnet pieces.

Children have exposure to different languages
Educators use different languages when communicating with children. For example, using sign language, singing songs in different languages, audio books in different languages, dual language books or play materials in different languages are accessible.

Two or more books which include people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities are accessible
Two or more books include images of people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities participating in everyday activities or using different types of adaptive equipment are accessible to the children. The books are inclusive and bias-free.

Exceeds Expectations

Three or more books which include people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities are accessible
Three or more books include images of people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities participating in everyday activities or using different types of adaptive equipment are accessible to the children. The books are inclusive and bias-free.

Toy bins and shelves are labelled with words and pictures
More than half of the toy bins and shelves are labelled with words and pictures. For example, the bins on the shelves are labelled with words and pictures and the shelf is labelled with words and pictures.

Books are incorporated into three or more other learning areas
Books are accessible to the children in three or more areas of the program space. For example, the science, art, and pretend play areas have books related to the learning areas or the focus of the areas. Books can be incorporated by placing them on shelves or in the toy bins. These books are used to extend and enhance children's learning.

Guidelines|Toddler

8. Music and Accessories

Intent: Children learn, through repeated exposure, a positive appreciation of music and movement. Music should be played in a meaningful manner that benefits the learning opportunities and experiences during the day. By providing a music rich environment, children have continued exposure to an assortment of cultural music and musical genres, while promoting competencies such as language development, rhythm awareness, self-regulation, and self-concept.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Creating and designing fuse together the cognitive, emotional, and physical domains – thinking, feeling, and doing. Encouraging the creative expression of ideas, feelings, and interpretations using a variety of materials also helps solidify children's learning, enhances their creative problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and strengthens their memory and sense of identity." (HDLH, page 42).

Reflective Questions: When music is played, how does it add meaning and purpose to the program, taking into consideration sociocultural identities and family preferences? How are the musical instruments and accessories made accessible in a way which encourages the children to engage and explore freely? How are educators including families when selecting music to be played to the children? How are the individual needs of children being considered when playing and/or choosing music, for example, the volume of music in the space, background music, music/white noise during nap time - is it over stimulating? How do educators ensure that the music that is played and sung to children includes different sociocultural identities?

Music: Music and lyrics are age appropriate. Music can include visual music and vibration that support a wide range of abilities and disabilities.
Visual music: is imagery based on music and/or sound, it often uses colour or shapes to depict sounds. For example, music videos with sign language, using instruments that are tactile to create vibrations, or music videos with colours.

Sing: chant, hum, rapping.

Accessories: headphones, musical instruments, CDs/books, puppets, scarves, ribbons, shakers, microphones.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Music is not appropriate for the age group Music and/or lyrics are not appropriate for the age of the children in the program space. **Educators do not sing to children daily** Educators do not sing with children daily, whether it is with an individual child, small group, or large group. **Audio playlists are not available** Where applicable, audio playlists are not made available when using electronic devices, if requested. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)** **Musical instruments are not in good condition** Musical instruments are not in good condition and/or not complete. For example, instruments are broken, do not have working batteries or are missing pieces. **Radio is played when children are present** The radio is played while children are in attendance. This is not appropriate as commentary and content cannot be controlled.	**Three or more different types of music are available to be played to children** Three or more different types of music, including more than one artist and more than one genre are available in the program space. For example, classical, jazz, tapping, Indigenous drumming music, blues, vibration sounds, children's music, nature sounds, calypso. **Three or more different types of musical instruments are accessible to children** Three or more types of musical instruments are accessible which children can use independently during free play and planned program time. For example, tambourine, tactile instruments, piano, drums, rainsticks, and cymbals.	**Two or more music and movement learning experiences are planned and/or documented weekly** Note: Not applicable for half-day nursery school programs **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)** **Educators sing/play songs from different cultures** Educators incorporate music into the environment by either singing songs or playing music from different cultures. Evidence can be seen on the Program Plan, in the selection of music available in the program space or observed during the assessment. **Props are used to enhance music experiences** Children use props while engaging in music play. Evidence can be seen on the Program Plan or observed during the assessment. For example, finger puppets, electronic devices to view visual music, scarves, noise-canceling headphones, musical instruments, streamers.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

9. Physical Literacy

Intent: Active physical play learning experiences promote large muscle movement, coordination skills, and support positive social interactions. Daily physical play learning experiences for children encourage health and well-being and allow children to experience their natural environment in all weather conditions. Children are given choices of physical play learning experiences both in the morning and afternoon, whether indoor or outdoor which are planned and/or documented daily. By giving children opportunities to lead the experiences, they can enhance their leadership qualities and turn-taking skills.

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

Reflective Questions: How do the learning opportunities promote muscle movement? Do educators engage in physical play experiences that are responsive to the children's interests and needs? How have the planned and/or documented physical play experiences been considered to include the wide range of abilities and disabilities of the children? How are opportunities being given for children to develop a higher sense of self-regulation?

Planned and/or documented physical play learning experiences: Learning experiences that encourage large muscle movement. For example, an obstacle course, pulling wagons, bowling, yoga, crawling through tunnels, breathing exercises, rolling balls, pushing carts.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
No planned and/or documented physical play learning experiences There is no current outdoor plan posted or there is no physical play learning experience indicated on the Program Plan daily.	**Physical play learning experiences are planned and/or documented for both the morning and afternoon** Educators plan and/or document one physical play learning experience in the morning and one in the afternoon. The physical play learning experiences can be implemented inside and/or outside.	**Children are given a choice of two or more planned and/or documented physical play learning experiences for both the morning and afternoon** Educators plan and/or document two physical play learning experiences in the morning and two physical play learning experiences in the afternoon. The physical play learning experiences can be implemented inside and/or outside.
Educators are not engaged in planned and/or documented physical play learning experiences with the children		
No designated safe space for indoor physical play In the event children are unable to go outside for physical play, there is no designated space available. For example, a school gym, atrium, empty room, or the program space.	**Physical play learning experiences are planned and/or documented to ensure all children are able to participate** Learning experiences are developmentally-appropriate or are adapted so that children can participate.	**Two or more types of gross motor equipment are accessible to children in the room** Two or more different types of gross motor equipment are accessible within the program space during free play and planned learning experiences. For example, a tunnel for crawling through, balls, a shopping cart or baby stroller, ride on toys, stepping stones/pads.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

10. Cognitive & Manipulative and Blocks & Construction

Intent: Spontaneous cognitive and manipulative learning experiences occur throughout the day. Children have access to an assorted selection of cognitive and manipulative materials during the operating hours of the program. Block play offers opportunities to work together, use imagination, learn about cause and effect, patterning, and sequencing. Based on the children's observed cues and interests, planned and/or documented cognitive and manipulative experiences recognize the children to be capable and competent in following their own learning paths. Through weekly planned and/or documented learning experiences, educators support the development of STEAM concepts, spatial awareness, manipulation of two and three-dimensional materials and problem solving. Children have access to an assorted selection of block accessories and block materials, with which they can build, create, and explore concepts.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Through play and inquiry, young children practice ways of learning and interacting with the world around them that they will apply throughout their lives. Problem solving and critical thinking, communication and collaboration, creativity and imagination, initiative and citizenship are all capacities vital for success throughout school and beyond." (HDLH, page 15).

Reflective Questions: How do the children combine materials from different learning areas to enhance their play? How are the play materials open-ended and flexible to encourage children to adapt them to meet their individual needs? How does the accessibility of the play materials encourage children to be collaborative as well as independent? How are educators adapting the play materials to be developmentally-appropriate and reflect the interests all the children? How are educators scaffolding learning to meet children's individual needs?

Cognitive materials: Support the development of cognitive skills. For example, counting and sorting games, braille puzzles, puzzles, cause and effect toys, loose parts, and interactions with the outdoor environment.
Manipulative materials: Support the development of fine motor skills. For example, lacing beads, sewing cards, shape sorters, large knobbed puzzles, real materials such as nuts and bolts, things you collect on a walk.
Block and Construction materials: Different sizes of wooden blocks, Duplo, K'nex, cardboard blocks, foam blocks, squishy blocks, home-made blocks.
Block and Construction accessories: Race tracks, cars, play people, farmhouses, and animals.
STEAM: STEAM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Cognitive and manipulative materials are not accessible For example, puzzles, cause and effect toys, or shape sorters.	**Three or more different types of cognitive and manipulative materials are accessible** For example, puzzles, cause and effect toys, and shape sorters. The cognitive and manipulative materials reflect the age and developmental levels of the children in the program.	**One planned and/or documented cause and effect learning experience offered weekly** For example, pop-up toys, ring stackers, shape sorters, stacking cups, magnets, puzzles.
Block and construction materials are not accessible For example, wooden blocks, Duplo, or foam blocks.	**Three or more block and construction materials that are developmentally-appropriate are accessible** For example, wooden blocks, Duplo, and cardboard blocks.	**One planned and/or documented learning experience offered weekly to enhance knowledge of math concepts** For example, sorting games, bead counters, matching games, counting activities.
Block and construction accessories are not accessible For example, cars, dinosaurs, or play people.	**Three or more block and construction accessories are accessible** For example, cars, play people, farmhouses, and animals.	**Block and construction materials include three or more textures** Three or more sets of blocks are accessible to the children that feel texturally different. For example, smooth blocks, dimpled blocks, and squishy blocks.
Materials are not available for rotation Note: The rotational materials can be shared within the centre.		

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Meets Expectations

Two complete toys for each child enrolled are accessible
For each child enrolled in the program, there are two or more complete cognitive and manipulative toys accessible. If credit has been given in another section or sub-item for a specific toy, it cannot be counted twice. For example, puzzles, nesting cups, pegs/peg board, shape sorters, lacing shapes/beads, pop-up toys.

Exceeds Expectations

Two or more block and construction learning experiences are planned and/or documented weekly
Note: Not applicable for nursery school programs.
(Sub-item potentially not applicable)

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

11. Pretend Play

Intent: Children enhance their social interaction skills, emotional development, and language extension through pretend play. Educators promote imaginative play by providing the children an area rich in materials and accessories that are in good condition. Prop boxes are used to enhance the pretend play area with accessories and materials that support three or more role-playing possibilities reflective of the Program Plan focus. Mirrors in the pretend play area allow the children to see themselves from multiple perspectives.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "As children engage in various forms of social play and are supported to recognize the varied capabilities and characteristics of other children, they learn to get along with others; to negotiate, collaborate, and communicate; and to care for others." (HDLH, page 24).

Reflective Questions: How can play materials be added meaningfully to enhance what is already there? Are the props and play materials reflective of an inclusive sense of belonging? How does pretend play support children to build relationships with others? Are the props and play materials open-ended? How can the props and play materials be adapted to the child's play? How does pretend play promote opportunities for children to master self-regulation within their play? How are educators ensuring that sociocultural identities are reflected in the pretend play focus? How are children's ideas and interests included when creating props for pretend play? How do educators equitably encourage children of all genders to interact in pretend play?

Pretend play accessories: Dress up clothes, puppets, menus, food, toy appliances and furniture such as a stove, table/chairs, doctor kits, cash register, dishes, and workbench.
Kits/prop boxes: Bins filled with materials and toys for a specific focus. For example, a "paint store" prop box may include rollers, paint brushes, cash register, money, and smocks.
Sociocultural Identities: Play materials that represents Indigenous peoples and cultures, different ethnicities, races, languages, sexual orientation, and diverse gender identities.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. (Ontario Human Rights Commission)

Note: It is not appropriate to use real medication bottles, empty cleaning products bottles, or detergent bottles as pretend play props. Any container label that states "keep out of reach of children" should not be used as a prop. Children's allergies should be considered when choosing props/materials.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Insufficient accessories and equipment for the number of children enrolled There are not enough pretend play accessories for the number of children who want to use them. **Accessories and equipment are in poor condition** More than 25 per cent of accessories for pretend play are broken, missing pieces or frayed. **Accessories and equipment are not developmentally-appropriate** Pretend play accessories are not developmentally-appropriate for the children enrolled in the program.	**Pretend play area includes real items that are developmentally-appropriate** Two or more real items are accessible to the children in the pretend play area. For example, food containers, gardening tools, woodworking tools, clothing, phones, keyboards, bags. **Mirror is accessible in the pretend play area** A mirror at children's eye level is accessible directly in the pretend play area. Mirrors should always be free of obstruction and in good repair.	**Three or more accessories reflect sociocultural identities** Three or more types of pretend play accessories and/or equipment are reflective of sociocultural identities and are accessible to the children. There must be two items for each type of accessory or equipment. For example, two pieces of food, two anatomically correct dolls reflecting two different cultures and two pieces of cultural clothing.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Meets Expectations

Accessories and equipment reflect sociocultural identities
Two or more types of pretend play accessories and/or equipment are reflective of sociocultural identities and are accessible to the children. There must be two items for each type of accessory or equipment. For example, two pieces of food and two dolls reflecting two different sociocultural identities.

Accessories and equipment encourage three or more pretend play possibilities that reflect the Program Plan focus
A pretend play focus is identified on the Program Plan. Accessories and equipment provide for three or more role playing possibilities within the pretend play focus. For example, grocery store: cashier, customer, stock person. Roles do not need to be identified on the Program Plan but need to be reflected in the materials accessible based on the Program Plan focus.

Exceeds Expectations

Child's full body-length mirror is accessible in the room
A child's full body length mirror is accessible within the program space that is at the child's level.
Mirrors should always be free of obstruction and in good repair and must allow the children to see their full body.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

12. Routine Care Practices

Intent: The child's interactions and/or experiences are documented as well as shared with families, so they are aware of their child's experiences and accomplishments throughout the day. Each child has an individual schedule that is respectful and reflective of their needs and/or the family's requests. Educators follow the individual cues of the children and are aware that children adapt to situations and environments in individual ways. Educators document all snacks, meals and beverages consumed throughout the entire day. This information is used as a communication tool for both educators and families. The exchange of information builds ongoing rapport between the educators and family.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Gaining knowledge about children from multiple perspectives helps educators ensure that programs also value the unique and diverse characteristics of the children's families and the communities in which they live. It's not a "one-size-fits-all" approach." (HDLH, page 18).

Reflective Questions: How often are the individual schedules reviewed with families? How do educators ensure all children and families feel a sense of belonging within the program? How are families included to support the well-being of all the children within the program? How do educators share information about the child's day in a format that meets the needs of all families?

Daily information chart: Individual documentation which includes the following information:
- all food consumed,
- time and duration of sleep,
- information regarding interactions and/or specific experiences they were engaged in, and
- time/type of diaper changes (wet/soiled) and/or toileting (based on toilet training schedule specific to individual children).

Note: Daily information can be documented on a write-on/wipe-off board. The daily information chart can cover the entire week and be taken home at the end of the week. The diapering chart may be posted in the change area/washroom. To ensure the information is accurate, educators should document food intake and/or diapering/toileting in a timely manner.

Individual children's schedules: Individual schedules must show evidence that they are based on the children's developmental stages and cues and must be available to the educators in the program space. The schedules should be reviewed with families every four months, or more often as required. For children 18 months and older, it is acceptable to have a schedule by age grouping. For example, 18 to 24months and 25 to 30 months. A schedule for a younger group of toddlers may include them starting lunch at an earlier time, whereas an older group of toddlers may be toilet training and need to have a schedule which includes more frequent washroom routines. If toddlers are transitioning to the preschool program, they may need to follow a schedule that allows them to visit that program for a longer period of time over a week.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
A daily information chart is not completed for each child An information chart is not completed for each child or is missing information. For example, snack is not documented, or fruit eaten is not identified.	**Evidence of documentation of each child's interactions and/or learning experiences during the day** There is documentation on the daily information chart or in a separate place for each child about their interactions and/or specific experiences they were engaged in during the day. Documentation of observations on daily charts that relate to learning experiences can be used for programming, however, the daily information charts would need to be kept as a record to be considered as weekly observations.	**Daily information chart is available to be taken home** The daily information chart can be either the original, a photocopy or shared through online apps. If a program is using a write-on/wipe-off board as a daily information chart, a photograph of the board could be taken and/or emailed to families. Consider alternate formats to meet the individual needs of the families. For example, families with a visual impairment or those that English is not their first language.

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Daily information chart is not reviewed with families
Educators do not review the daily information charts with families daily. Daily information charts should be in a format that meets the individual needs of families. For example, consider families with a visual impairment, or those that English is not their first language.

Children's individual schedules are not available
Individual schedules are not kept for each child and/or age grouping. Individual schedules should be available to the educators in the program space. They should include information that is child specific. For example, eating habits, sleep routines, toileting information, likes/dislikes, general disposition, or special care routines.

Educators repeatedly do not follow children's physical cues
For example, during lunch a child is starting to fall asleep; the educators do not take the child and place them on their cot, or educators interrupt a child during play to complete a scheduled diaper routine.

Meets Expectations

Educators are following children's physical cues
For example, educators recognize when a child needs to use the washroom or when a child is tired and needs to sleep.

Exceeds Expectations

Children's individual schedules are reviewed with families based on the child's cues and stages of development
There is evidence that individual schedules are reviewed with families every four months, or more often as required.

Children's individual schedules are followed by educators
Educators follow the children's individual schedules to ensure their needs are being met.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

13. Toileting and Diapering Routines

Intent: Educators are familiar with and follow the Regional Public Health procedures and practices during all diapering and toileting routines. When followed correctly, educators maintain healthy and sanitary environments. All accessories and bathroom fixtures are in good condition. The diapering and toileting routine should be viewed as a positive learning opportunity as well as supporting the children's need for privacy.

Reflective Questions: What supports are needed to ensure educators are following the diapering and toileting routines correctly? How is the area set up in a way that allows educators to follow the diapering/toileting, hand-washing/sanitizing, and glove procedures correctly? How do educators engage with children to support the spontaneous learning opportunities during diapering/toileting routines? How are educators responsive to the developmental needs of the children to support individual independence? How do educators recognize and support the children's need for privacy? How are educators using proper body language to promote body literacy and self esteem, for example, using the terms penis and vulva while toileting and diapering? How are educators promoting privacy and teaching boundaries to the children while toileting and diapering? How are educators promoting a positive body image, verbally and non-verbally, while toileting and diapering?

Picture symbol schedule: Posted in the washroom and shows children what steps to follow when they are in the washroom, including how to use the toilet.
Toileting and/or Diapering procedures: Posted in the washroom or taken by educators, for example, on a portable clipboard when they are diapering/toileting children in a shared washroom.
Toilet and Diapering supplies: Hand soap, toilet paper, paper towels, diapers, pull ups, change table. The top of the diaper change table is not used as storage when not in use.

Note: Photographs depicting children using toilet/potty or being diapered are not considered appropriate.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
No change table	**Current Regional Public Health toileting routine is posted**	**Child-size sink is accessible in the washroom**
Change table is not in good condition	Regional Public Health toileting procedures are posted or taken by educators into the washroom and/or diapering area.	It is acceptable to use a one-step step stool.
For example, the change table/counter is dirty, ripped or has chipped paint.		**Toileting and diapering is viewed as an opportunity to encourage self-help skills**
Children are not given notice of upcoming diaper change	**Current Regional Public Health diapering routine is posted**	Educators use the time to encourage self-help skills. For example, pulling up their pants, flushing the toilet, or washing their hands.
For example, if a child is engaged in an activity, the child is not provided notice. For example, using verbal cues or a Visual/Auditory Schedule.	Regional Public Health diapering procedures are posted or taken by educators into the washroom and/or diapering area.	**Picture symbol schedule depicting diapering and/or toileting routine is visually accessible at child's eye level**
Washroom is not adapted for use by all children	**Current Regional Public Health potty routine is posted**	A visual depiction of the toileting routine is posted in the washroom at children's eye level in a place where children can see it while using the toilet. For example, on the side wall. **Real photos depicting children using toilet/potty or being diapered are not considered appropriate.**
Adaptations have not been made to meet the needs of individual children. For example, there is no step stool for children who cannot reach a sink or the adult-sized toilet. The washroom is not large enough to accommodate an assistive device such as a wheelchair if required.	Regional Public Health potty/toileting procedures are posted or taken by educators into the washroom and/or diapering area. If potties are not used, the potty/toileting procedure does not need to be posted. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**	
	Posted procedures for toileting/potty and diapering are followed by educators	

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Separate covered garbage is not being used for sanitary disposal of soiled diapers
A separate covered garbage container is not being used for soiled diapers and other supplies related to the diaper change. This applies to disposable and cloth diapers.

Meets Expectations

Washroom area includes a mirror at child's eye level
A mirror is accessible and at an appropriate eye level for children in the washroom and/or diapering area.

Toileting and diapering is viewed as an opportunity to interact with children
Educators engage in meaningful conversations with children during toileting and diapering routines, beyond providing direction to children. For example, educators verbalize the steps of the toileting or diapering process using proper words for actions and body parts "I am going to put some diaper cream on your vulva now."

Exceeds Expectations

Guidelines|Toddler

14. Meals and/or Snack Time

Intent: Meals and snacks are offered at times that are responsive to the developmental needs of the children and meet their individual needs. Educators extend and enhance conversations with and between the children that are authentic and meaningful and move beyond discussions about the food being offered. Age-appropriate eating utensils, dishes and furnishings that are developmentally-appropriate are available in the program space.

Reflective Questions: How are the children supported to serve food independently taking into consideration the children's individual needs? Are educators engaged in on-going conversations with children during snack and/or meals? How are educators engaged and developing relationships with all the children during mealtimes? How are meals and/or snack times seen as an opportunity to instill positive attitudes towards food, nutrition, and eating? How do educators ensure they are seated in the best location at the table to support all children and minimize getting up from the table? How are the developmental feeding needs of all children being met? How do the educators ensure that each child has enough space to sit and eat comfortably? How do educators ensure there are enough utensils and dishes for the individual needs of all children? How do educators make adaptations to ensure children with allergies and/or food restrictions are included in mealtimes in a safe manner? How do educators recognize and support each child's sociocultural identities during mealtimes, for example eating foods with their hands? How are family mealtime practices incorporated into the centres routines to support a sense of belonging?

Note: Napkins/paper towels are used for dry foods only.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Individual children's needs are not met during meal and/or snack times For example, a child who falls asleep at the table is not offered their cot and able to eat their meal later, serving utensils are not used, or a child is told they will be served last because of their behaviours.	**Meal and/or snack times are viewed as a time for socialization and conversation** During meal and/or snack times, educators engage in meaningful conversations with children. For example, teach children fine motor and self-feeding skills, or talk about the texture, temperature, and taste of different foods.	**Food preparation area in the room is not used for other uses** The food preparation area is only used for this purpose. For example, art supplies are not washed in this space, or a tray is used at the table as the designated food preparation area.
Children do not sit in small groups During meals and snacks, children are not seated in small groups. Small group ratio is 1:5 for toddlers.	**Equipment required for seating is appropriate for the size, ability and developmental level of the children and adapted** Chairs and tables are child sized. Where required to meet the needs of individual children, furniture has been adapted. For example, tables are wheelchair accessible, and assistive devices are used where necessary.	**Educators use meal and/or snack times as opportunities for enhanced language learning** During meal and/or snack times, educators engage in meaningful conversations with children to extend learning. For example, educators talk with children about that morning's activities, or topics of interest. Conversations are unhurried and meaningful to the children and educators.
No conversations and/or interactions occur during meal and/or snack times Less than two conversations and/or interactions occur between children and adults during meal and/or snack times, excluding when educators instruct or provide direction to children.	**Adult seating is accessible** Seating can be adapted for adult use.	**Children are encouraged to serve themselves** All educators provide opportunities for children to serve themselves two or more different types of food, except for hot soups and stews. It is acceptable for educators to assist using hand-over-hand help as needed. For example, children use serving utensils to self-serve fruits or vegetables and pour their own milk from a small jug.
Food is not served on dishes or napkins Food is not served on dishes or napkins/paper towels, and is placed directly on a table, trolley, or shelf.	**Educators serve food while sitting with children during meal and/or snack times** Educators sit with children while they are serving any food at the table. Unless the educators is supporting a child through hand over hand, educators should be seated with the children and engaged in conversation. For example, preparing some food ahead of time and serving food from the table.	
Food is used as a reward or punishment Food is used to reward, to acknowledge performance, to punish, or to control children's behaviour.		

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

15. Cots and Bedding

Intent: Each child has their own designated cot that is hygienically maintained. Educators provide a smooth transition from lunch to rest time. Educators show flexibility with regards to the routine of the program and follow the cues of the children. To prevent any accidents or injuries, educators demonstrate awareness of storing play materials and equipment safely on the top of shelves when placing cots at sleep time.

Reflective Questions: How do the sleep times meet the needs of the children? How is the program spaces set up in a manner that promotes sleeping/resting? How are the individual needs of each child being met on a regular basis? How are educators incorporating family preferences into sleep routines? When a child soothes by self-touching their genitals during nap time, how do educators respond in ways that recognize this is a common behaviour?

Cots: All children should have the opportunity to rest on a cot.
Bedding: All cots must have a sheet provided by the centre. A blanket/sheet to cover children who want to use one may be provided either by the centre or families.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Extra bedding is not available Sheets provided by the centre are not available for all the cots. Extra sheets are not available if they need to be changed.	**Bedding is changed once a week, or sooner if needed** For example, when a child wets the cot, or the bedding is visibly soiled.	**Areas above cots are free of storage** Areas around cots are free from hazards. For example, toys on shelves do not pose a risk of falling on a child.
Cots in poor condition Cots are visibly dirty, ripped or broken.	**Cots are disinfected weekly**	**Cots are not used for storage** Cots are not used to store toys, equipment, or personal items.
Cot set-up interferes with the program Cot set-up interferes with children engaging in activities or impedes them from accessing materials from shelves. For example, cots are set while children are still participating in free play or planned and/or documented learning experiences.	**Resting environment includes soft music and dimmed lighting** There is soft music playing in the background during the entire rest time. For example, white noise, calming sounds, humming, nature sounds. The lights in the program space have been turned down or dimmed and/or the curtains/blinds are closed. Educators can safely see what is happening in the program space.	
	Cots are designated Cots are assigned to a particular child and are clearly labelled with the child's name.	

Guidelines|Toddler

16. Health & Safety and Toys & Play Equipment Washing

Intent: All materials, play equipment, furnishings are in good working order, clean and safe for the children and educators. The fixed features in the program space, such as the floors, walls, doors, and windows are also safe and in good repair. All areas of the program space including materials, play equipment, and furnishings are maintained in a hygienic condition. Educators follow Regional Public Health requirements for toy and equipment washing which supports a clean and sanitary environment for the children. Educators provide resources to families to promote safe environments and healthy lifestyles. Topics may include recall notices, information regarding car seats or choking hazards. Information is located in a central location in the centre.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "A safe environment that offers consistency and continuity as well as graduated support for children's growing independence and capacity for self-care enables children to tackle challenges, learn to persevere, and explore ways to cope with manageable levels of positive stress." (HDLH, page 30).

Reflective Questions: How are safety hazards addressed? Are there any areas of the program space that have the potential to be dangerous or unsafe? How do educators ensure all toxic materials are kept out of reach of the children and/or are securely stored? How do educators ensure the first aid kit is kept well stocked and maintained on an ongoing basis? How are the health and safety practices being followed to ensure that all children are engaged in an environment that is free of hazards? What precautions are taken into consideration to promote the well-being of each child within the program?

Hazards: Anything that is potentially dangerous to children. For example, worn/frayed carpet, broken chairs, unstable change table, chipping paint, uncovered electric outlets, easy access to cleaning supplies, accessible sharp utensils or medications, or disorganization that affects the safety of children such as chairs stacked too high, toys piled on shelves.

Hygienic: Anything done to maintain cleanliness. For example, removing tape residue from shelves, mirrors, and windows; cleaning spills and dirt, washing/sanitizing tables before eating and following the current Regional Public Health cleaning guidelines.

Accessible Resources: Resources can be a hardcopy at the centre, emailed to families, shared via online apps and/or web links.

Toys and equipment: All toys and play materials that are accessible to the children. For example, pretend play furniture, large blocks, indoor riding toys.

Soiled: Objects that are dirty or that children have sneezed on or mouthed.

Schedule: Toys and play equipment washing plan is available and followed as per Regional Public Health requirements. It is not acceptable to sign and date the schedule ahead of time.

Note: Any materials, containers or items that have the statement "Keep out of reach of children" should not be used unsupervised by the children under any circumstance.

Note: First aid kits should be checked and re-stocked on a regular basis to ensure supplies are replenished and not expired.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Schedule for toy washing does not meet Regional Public Health guidelines For example, some categories are not documented as being washed in previous weeks.	**Health-related resources are accessible to families** Educators provide resources to families on health-related topics. For example, head lice information, illness prevention. The resources can be offered as hardcopies, via online apps, web links or emailed at least every four months.	**Safety-related resources are accessible to families** Educators provide resources to families on safety-related topics. For example, recalled toys, toys that are developmentally-appropriate. The resources can be offered as hardcopies, via online apps, web links or emailed at least every four months.
No schedule for toy washing		
Playground toys are not washed a minimum of two times a year There is no evidence that playground equipment is washed a minimum of twice a year.	**Toys and play equipment washing schedule is signed and/or initialed and dated by educators** Educators should sign and/or initial and date the schedule after the toys, materials and play equipment have been washed.	

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

First aid kit is not available in the room
There is a first aid kit available within the program space for educators to access.

It should be checked and re-stocked on a regular basis to ensure supplies are replenished. If small grouping occurs, a first aid kit needs to remain in the program space.

All areas are not kept in a state of good repair
More than one area of the program space is/are observed in poor repair. For example, furniture, carpets, physical structure, paint chipping.

All areas are not maintained in a hygienic condition
More than one area of the program space is/are observed as being dirty. For example, carpets, toys, shelves are visibly soiled.

Play equipment, toys and materials are disorganized
Similar equipment, toys and materials are not grouped together and/or toys and materials are carelessly piled on shelves. For example, toys and chairs are organized in a way that they will not fall on educators or children.

Meets Expectations

All areas are safe
All areas of the program space are observed as being safe. For example, there is no tripping hazard, and electric outlets are covered. Children do not have access to toxic art materials.

Toys and play equipment are washed as they become soiled
It is acceptable to use a soiled toy bin and wash at a more appropriate time.

Floor space with suitable floor coverings is available
There is at least one area of the floor with a soft covering. For example, mats or carpets for children to sit comfortably on the floor to play.

Safe storage space available for equipment/toys and materials
There is space for educators to be able to store rotational toys and other play materials. The space does not pose a safety issue. For example, boxes are not stacked on top of each other.

Exceeds Expectations

Transitional toys used prior to meal and/or snack times are washed after each use
Meal and/or snack transitional toys refer to clean toys or play materials the children can use at the table once they have washed their hands prior to eating. These playing materials are then removed to be washed prior to the next meal and/or snack time.
(Sub-item potentially not applicable)

Safety/health resources are accessible to families in their preferred language
Educators provide safety/health resources to families in their preferred language. The resources can be offered as hardcopies, via online apps, web links or emailed at least every four months.

17. Educators and Children's Hand Hygiene

Intent: Children and educators follow, and practice posted hand hygiene procedures that promote healthy living. Educators encourage children to maintain healthy hygiene habits by reinforcing hand washing. Educators' role-model proper hand-washing procedures through the use of the hand-washing Visual/Auditory Schedule. Glove usage provides barriers to potential illnesses and exposure to harmful materials. The centre supervisor monitors the educators hand hygiene practices to support awareness and healthy habits.

Reflective Questions: How do educators role-model and teach the correct routine each time hands are washed/sanitized? How does the program space support hygienic hand-washing/sanitizing practices? How do educators support the individual child's lifelong learning of proper hand hygiene?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Current Regional Public Health hand washing procedures are not posted Hand-washing procedures are not posted by the sinks used by the children.	**Current Regional Public Health hand-sanitizing procedures are posted** Sanitizing procedures are posted within the program space. **(Sub-item potentially not applicable)**	**A sink is accessible in the room** Educators and/or children have access to a sink for hand washing directly in the program space.
Current Regional Public Health hand-washing procedures are not followed For example, educators and/or children miss a step in the process.	**Evidence supervisor reviews hand hygiene expectations with educators** It is up to the individual centre/agency to determine how often the supervisor monitors hand-washing practices. There is evidence to support that it is being done. For example, educators annual sign-off and/or documentation in educators meeting minutes.	**Child-sized sink is accessible in the room** Children have access to a child-sized sink directly in the program space. It is acceptable to use a one-step step stool.
Sufficient supplies are not accessible to ensure hand-washing is conducted in a hygienic manner There is not enough soap, paper towels, hand dryers, or hand sanitizer to ensure handwashing can be carried out.		**Real photographs are used for visual/auditory hand-washing procedure** All sinks used by the children include real photos outlining the proper hand-washing procedure as per Regional Public Health guidelines. The photos for the hand-washing procedure can include hands only. The procedure should be verbalized to support all children's understanding of the process.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

18. Transitions and Attendance Verification

Intent: Educators transition the children in small groups. Educators are aware of the individual children's cues while children further develop their self-regulation and self-help skills. Interactions during transitions reflect a positive learning environment. Props and visuals are used to help facilitate smooth transitions. Small group transitions ensure children are not waiting for extended periods. Transitions between activities and routines are planned so that children can safely change activities individually or in small groups with minimal waiting/rushing. Educators are aware at all times of the number and names of children that are in their care. Documentation on the main attendance record must accurately reflect the location of all children in care throughout the day. It is the responsibility of the educators to ensure all arrival and departure times are accurately documented on the main attendance record in pen or digitally using an online application, notes app, or other electronic method. By completing written verification after all educators and child transitions, educators can communicate and self-check that the attendance is always accurate.

Reflective Questions: How have the individual child's needs and development been taken into consideration when planning the routines and transitions throughout the day? What can be improved in the routine and daily transitions to support the well-being of the children within the program? How much of the day is spent in transitions? How can the process of documenting and maintaining accurate attendance forms be improved? What supports are in place to encourage educators to communicate with one another the number of children that are in their care? What strategies are used to ensure educators are verbally communicating with each other after transitions? If online apps are used to record the children's attendance, what is the backup plan if the Wi-Fi is not available?

Transitions: When children move from one experience to another.
Small groups: One educator with a group of up to five toddlers (1:5).
Attendance Verification: Children's attendance is recorded on the main attendance record promptly upon arrival and departure.
Main Attendance Record: A permanent method of recording and verifying children's daily arrival and departure times. The main attendance record is completed in pen or through a digital program that captures the daily arrival and departure times. The main attendance record must always accompany the whole group. It must reflect the names of children who have left the program space/group for small group learning experience.
Portable Attendance: A record of attendance that accompanies a small group of children when they are in a different program space. For example, going to the gym.

Note: The portable attendance is not required during transitions and washroom routines.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators are not the recorders of the children's arrival and departure times Educators do not record the children's arrival and departure times to ensure all children are always signed in and out.	**Arrival and departure times are completed in pen and/or digitally**	**Written verification of attendance after each educator change** After an educator change or transition, educators check the main attendance record against the number of children physically in the room for accuracy. For example, educators indicate the number of children present, the time of verification and their initials when an educator starts their shift, goes on break, or returns from lunch. This does not include random head counts unless it is identified as an educator change.
Children's arrival and departure times are not recorded on the main attendance record The main attendance record does not show that all children's arrival and departure times are recorded. A review of previous attendance records shows that not all children in attendance were signed in and out of care.	**Transitions are conducted in a smooth and seamless manner** Educators consistently support children's transitions, ensuring they are carried out in a way that children are not waiting. Children are transitioned in small groups. Small group ratios are 1:5 for Toddler.	
	Attendance is verbally verified after educator transitions After educator transitions, educators communicate the correct number of children in attendance to each other. For example, after an educator returns from a break or lunch.	**Transition play materials are available** Play materials are available for children to support the transition process. Transition play materials are specifically used for transitions. For example, a basket of toys, books, or puppets.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations

Positive interactions do not occur between educators and children during transitions
Educators do not support and encourage children during transitions. For example, educators are observed rushing the children or not allowing the children to do things at their own pace, to speed up to the process.

Extended waiting during transitions
For example, children wait beyond what is developmentally appropriate.

Educators do not prepare children prior to transitions
Educators do not prepare children ahead of time for upcoming transitions. For example, educators do not use songs, lights, a gong, verbal cues, or a Visual/Auditory Schedule to signal an upcoming transition.

Meets Expectations

Portable attendance travels with each group
When educators leave the program space with a small group of children, they take a portable attendance that accurately lists the names of the children in their small group.
(Sub-item potentially not applicable)

Small groups of children who have left the room are reflected on the main attendance record
The main attendance record reflects the names of the children who have left the program space for small group experiences. For example, names are written on a sticky note which is placed on the main attendance record, or the time the children left with the small group is recorded next to each name in pencil. When the children return, the sticky note is removed from the main attendance, or the pencil is erased.
(Sub-item potentially not applicable)

Exceeds Expectations

Guidelines|Toddler

19. Positive Atmosphere

Intent: Positive interactions and relationships among educators, colleagues, children, families, and visitors create a strong sense of belonging within the community. These interactions foster respectful behaviours and interactions with others. Educators and staff consistently role-model effective social skills, recognizing and celebrating the diverse sociocultural identities of all children, families, and visitors. Through their empathetic and welcoming approach, educators create a nurturing environment that supports children in developing essential interpersonal skills and allows them to build meaningful relationships. It is vital for educators to remain positive and supportive, promoting an atmosphere of inclusion and respect throughout the day.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "When educators believe that all children have the right to participate and when they use inclusive approaches, they are more likely to find ways to reduce barriers, understand how each child learns, and create environments and experiences that are meaningful and engaging." (HDLH, page 36).

Reflective Questions: How are positive social interactions modelled for the children? How are all people who enter the program space treated with respect? How is a sense of belonging evident within the program for both children and families? How is a positive atmosphere nurtured with all children in the program space?

This indicator applies to educator's interactions with children, co-workers, and visitors within the program space.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators shout at children Any educators are observed shouting at others or from across the program space at others. For example, educators shouting at children across the program space to redirect their actions, or educators are raising their voice to get an individual's attention. **Educators use sarcasm, mocking or harsh words** Any educators are observed using sarcastic, mocking, or harsh words that would negatively affect any individual or be considered demeaning. **Educators are repeatedly not welcoming** Any educators are repeatedly observed not displaying happiness when welcoming individuals into the environment. Not everyone is greeted in a friendly manner. **Educators repeatedly do not model appropriate positive social behaviour** Any educators are repeatedly observed interacting with others in a manner that is discouraging and unsupportive. Positive social skills are not role-modeled with all individuals in the program space. For example, not speaking in a respectful manner to others or not reinforcing pro-social interactions.	**All educators maintain a positive tone of voice** All educators are observed using a friendly tone of voice with any individual in the program space. For example, educators interact with others in a supportive and encouraging manner. This includes educator to educator, educator to child, and educator to family/adult communication. **All educators are patient** All educators are observed remaining even-tempered and composed during all situations. **All educators direct positive attention to all children** All educators are observed speaking and interacting with children in a positive and supportive manner.	**All educators model positive non-verbal communication skills** All educators can read the cues of the individuals in the room and role-model positive non-verbal communication skills. For example, mirroring and turn-taking with a toddler, attempting to press buttons on a cause-and-effect toy or role-modelling appropriate use of play materials with a toddler. **All educators use teachable moments to further develop positive social behaviours** All educators are observed reinforcing positive social behaviours of the children by encouraging the children "in the moment". For example, an educator role-models the hand sign for "more" during lunch, or educators use hand-over-hand to role-model how to not hurt others.

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
		All educators display empathy Empathy is the ability to take another person's perspective and understand that individual's feelings about the situation. Empathetic educators acknowledge the experience, or the message given by others. All educators acknowledge the situation by rephrasing what is said or has happened and adjust their tone of voice and body language to reflect the emotions of the individual. For example, an educator is down at the level of the child, claps and shows excitement while saying, "Look at you! You put your shoes on by yourself!" or an educator holds and comforts a crying child and says, "I know it's hard, mommy had to leave to go to work."

20. Supervision of Children

Intent: Educators maintain constant awareness of the whereabouts of all children in their care. This is accomplished through effective communication among team members, ensuring that everyone is informed about each child's location. By collaborating, educators provide seamless supervision throughout the program space. This teamwork enables them to balance engaging interactions with children while always prioritizing their safety.

Reflective Questions: What are the strategies in place to ensure educators are aware of all children in the program space? How do educators position themselves to be able to scan the whole program space? How do educators ensure effective supervision in the program space? How do educators openly communicate about the location of all children throughout the day?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators unaware of the number of children in the room Any educators are unaware of which children are present or who has left the program space. **Educators unaware of the location of the children** Any educators are unaware of what the children are doing. For example, the child hiding in the closet or standing on the table. **Educators are repeatedly unable to balance supervision with interactions** Any educators are repeatedly observed unable to manage between supervision and interactions. For example, educators either focus on interactions with a small group of children or are solely supervising and not interacting with any children. **Educators repeatedly position themselves with their back to the children** Any educators are repeatedly observed to have their backs turned to the children. For example, educators position themselves where they cannot see the entire program space or are busy with cleaning and/or paperwork instead of supervising the program space.	**All educators work as a team to position themselves so all children are supervised** All educators are observed using verbal and/or non-verbal communication with each other to supervise and interact with the children within the program space. **All educators anticipate situations to support children's interactions and activities** All educators are aware of the children's behaviours and can anticipate situations. All educators are observed supporting the children's individual needs to ensure positive interactions and outcomes. **All educators scan the room at all times** All educators are observed scanning the program space to ensure the safety of the children.	**All educators communicate with each other about the location of children** All educators are observed communicating with each other regarding the number and location of the children within the program space. For example, verbalizing where children are playing in the program space, such as "Michelle is in the tent." **All educators are seamlessly weaving from one learning experience to another, balancing support with monitoring and supervision** All educators are observed interacting with the children throughout the program space, monitoring the needs of the children and supervising the group. For example, while one educator is engaged in a small group experience, the other educator is moving throughout the program space monitoring and interacting with other children. **Supervision is conducted in a non-disruptive manner** Attendance verification is completed without interrupting the children during play. Educators' supervision allows the children freedom to move throughout the entire program space.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

21. Foster Children's Independence

Intent: Educators consistently observe children throughout the day, adapting their verbal and non-verbal interactions to respond to each child's cues. This attentive approach helps children understand natural consequences resulting from their choices. Educators enrich these meaningful experiences by offering a range of choices both individually and in groups, at times that meet the children's needs and the program's goals. Children are given ample time to engage in play and complete learning activities, while also being encouraged to develop their self-help skills.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "When children initiate experiences, generate ideas, plan, problem-solve, make meaningful choices, and act spontaneously through play, they are more likely to be happy and get along well with others, to have lower levels of stress, and to be attentive and motivated to learn." (HDLH, page 35).

Reflective Questions: How do educators follow the children's leads? How do the children direct their own play? How are the children supported in developing self-help skills that will support their development in the future? How can the children access the materials in which they are interested? How are the children seen as capable individuals and encouraged to follow their own interests? How do educators remove barriers to ensure all children, including those with a disability, have a choice of accessible learning experiences?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators repeatedly do not provide time for children to complete tasks Any educators are repeatedly observed not allowing children the time to complete tasks and learning experiences. Children are rushed through routines or are not allowed to complete learning experiences at their own pace.	**Children are provided with choices** All educators are observed providing appropriate choices for the children based on their abilities. For example, the choice of learning experiences, adapting equipment and/or activities, or the sequence of tasks.	**Children are provided with choices within their interests** All educators are observed providing children the choice of learning experiences or tasks based on their interests. For example, a toddler who has demonstrated an interest in vehicles, is provided a choice of different cars, dump trucks and firetrucks.
Educators repeatedly do not allow children to make their own decisions Any educators are repeatedly observed making all decisions for the children. For example, educators decide which learning experience the child will participate in or educators do not allow a child to leave the small group activity.	**All educators consistently follow the children's cues** All educators are observed following the children's learning cues. Educators are aware of the children's individual needs and personalities. For example, educators respond by labelling the pictures in a book when the child points to the pictures.	**All educators respond to children's interests** All educators are observed responding to children's interests. Educators provide materials or opportunities to extend the children's learning and inquiry. For example, educators provide different materials on which a toddler can bang like a drum, or educators may provide different types of toy trains and vehicles for the children interested in trains.
Educators repeatedly do not encourage self-help skills that are developmentally-appropriate Any educators are repeatedly observed not allowing the children to try for themselves or making the task too difficult for a child to follow. For example, educators expecting a toddler to dress themselves.		**All educators create opportunities for enhancing self-help skills through play** All educators are observed creating opportunities to enhance the children's self-help skills through play. For example, educators provide dress-up clothes for toddlers that would enable them to practice getting dressed and undressed.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

22. Supporting the Development of Self-Esteem

Intent: Educators consistently work to create an inclusive environment that promotes self-expression and well-being. They provide ongoing encouragement in task completion, helping children feel confident in their abilities. By identifying and articulating emotions, educators equip children with the language necessary for self-awareness and understanding the feelings of others. This expressive practice nurtures empathy, encourages perspective-taking, and supports self-regulation. Additionally, educators engage with children in ways that enhance self-esteem, using each child's name and preferred pronouns to affirm their identity and foster a sense of belonging.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Studies show that when educators modelled and helped children express feelings, recognize others' feelings, and help others, children developed positive social skills such as perspective taking, empathy, and emotion regulation and were less likely to engage in problematic behaviours." (HDLH, page. 24-25)

Reflective Questions: How is positive attention directed toward all the children? What strategies are used to ensure the children are made to feel proud of their effort no matter what the outcome? How is the process of the children's efforts the focus rather than the end product? How do the children have an opportunity to share their accomplishments no matter what they are? How are the children encouraged to develop a sense of belonging within the program? What opportunities are in place to promote ongoing interactions and to support children with developing self-regulation skills?

Note: General terms of endearment such as "Buddy, Sweetie, or Honey" are discouraged.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators do not demonstrate inclusive practice **Any educators are observed segregating, dismissing individual needs, or excluding children from the group.** For example, a child eating on their own due to allergies or behaviours, or children being excluded due to their adaptive equipment, being separated from the larger group due to dietary restrictions or forced to sit during a group experience.	**All educators demonstrate encouragement** All educators encourage the children or show support for the children.	**All educators assist children to process their own emotions** All educators are observed supporting the children to understand their emotions. For example, an educator comforts and acknowledges the emotions of a child who lost a toy, discussing the different feelings of sadness and anger, or identifying joy and pride when a child has completed a puzzle.
Educators repeatedly give too many directions for a child to follow successfully Any educators are repeatedly observed giving multi-step directions that are not developmentally-appropriate and too difficult for the child to follow.	**All educators role-model how to accomplish tasks** All educators are observed showing children how to succeed at completing tasks without doing it for the children.	**All educators encourage children to identify the emotions of others** All educators are observed encouraging empathy in the children. Educators label the emotions as well as role-model support for the children. For example, educators explaining to an inquiring toddler why one of the children is crying or explain why everyone is excited to dance to the music.
Educators repeatedly do not acknowledge children's emotions appropriately Any educators are repeatedly observed dismissing the children's emotions. For example, educators telling the child there's no reason to cry, they're okay, or ignoring the child's joy at completing a task.	**All educators address children by their real name** All educators are observed addressing the children by their name and pronoun. Educators should address children by the name and pronoun identified by the child or their families.	

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators repeatedly do not focus encouragement on how the tasks are completed Any educators are not observed showing support and encouragement to the children as they complete tasks. For example, "You must be so proud of yourself for putting on your own shoes!"		

23. Behaviour Guidance

Intent: Educators use strategies that are developmentally-appropriate to effectively support children's behaviour within the program space. By role-modeling positive guidance techniques, educators promote self-regulation, problem-solving skills, and peer interactions. When redirecting children, educators consistently apply these strategies, tailored to each child's unique needs. They are aware of the individual personalities of the children in their care, allowing them to anticipate and address potential challenges proactively.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "Traditionally, educators have found that much of their communication with children involves directing them – giving instructions, telling children what to do, and correcting their behaviour – rather than really connecting with them in a meaningful way. However, an approach that emphasizes listening, responding to, and building on child-initiated communication and conversation can be a more effective way to promote children's language acquisition and their development of social skills, empathetic understanding, and ability to pay attention." (HDLH, page 41).

Reflective Questions: How are the educators equitable when dealing with the children's behaviours? How do educators ensure redirection strategies are appropriate for the specific incident? How are the children encouraged to develop the ability to self-regulate and express themselves?

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators are physically abrupt with children Any educators are observed being aggressive with the children. For example, educators are observed grabbing children, using threatening body language, or pushing children.	**All educators use appropriate behaviour guidance strategies** All educators are observed using appropriate behaviour guidance strategies. For example, when a child dumps containers of toys, educators role-model how to put the toys back into the container, or educators provide teething rings for children who are biting.	**All educators respond to all children involved in an incident, to resolve the issue in a calm manner** All educators are observed supporting the emotional needs of all children involved in a conflict situation. Educators address all perspectives in a calm manner to resolve the issue.
Educators repeatedly do not explain consequences in a calm manner Any educators are observed repeatedly explaining consequences in an abrupt, harsh manner. Educators appear angry at the children for their behaviours. For example, an educator is observed speaking to a child in an angry tone regarding grabbing a child or toys from others, or threatening consequences for a child's actions.	**All educators use redirection strategies that are developmentally-appropriate** All educators are observed using strategies that are developmentally-appropriate. For example, when a child is taking dolls from other children, the educator explains why they should not take those dolls and provide an alternative doll.	**All educators model turn taking/sharing** All educators are consistently observed role-modelling turn taking and/or sharing. Educators stay with the children while role-modelling the strategies to ensure the children understand the process and are successful.
Educators repeatedly do not reinforce positive behaviour Any educators are observed not reinforcing positive behaviours in the children. Any educators do not acknowledge and support the positive behaviours exhibited by the children. For example, educators are only redirecting negative behaviours and not connecting and building relationships.		**All educators adapt expectations based on the individual needs of the children** All educators adapt expectations based on the individual needs and personalities of the children. For example, shortened wait times or fewer steps for younger children, or longer wait times for the children who have a stronger ability at self-regulation.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators repeatedly do not follow through with strategies Any educators are observed repeatedly not using strategies that are developmentally-appropriate. For example, educators tell a child to stop climbing on the table but does not stay with the child to support this strategy.		

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), Embracing Quality in Child Care and Early Learning
Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement 2025 (AQI)

Guidelines|Toddler

24. Supporting Communication and Extending Children's Learning

Intent: Educators skillfully balance verbal and non-verbal interactions with children, creating rich experiences and opportunities for inquiry that enhance learning for everyone. They actively engage in play, role-modeling positive social interactions that encourage connection and collaboration. Ongoing, meaningful discussions foster a mutual exchange of information, allowing educators and children to explore new concepts and perspectives together. Key components of this dynamic environment include active listening, open-ended questioning, recalling past experiences, and introducing spontaneous resources. These practices foster complex play, inquiry, promote engagement, and nurture a strong sense of belonging. Educators encourage children to ask questions, problem-solve, and experiment, fostering a culture of exploration and discovery that is inclusive of all identities and experiences. This process of trial and error not only reinforces the belief that every child is a competent and capable learner but also ensures that each child's unique voice and perspective are valued. By being attuned to the diverse personality traits, sociocultural backgrounds, and learning styles of each child, educators can respond effectively to a wide range of learning experiences. This approach supports equitable growth and development, ensuring that all children feel seen, respected, and empowered to thrive in their educational journey.

Inspiring Pedagogy: "When educators are aware of and able to understand and respond to the many "languages" children use to communicate, they give every child a "voice". Regardless of the child's age or ability, reciprocal communication exchanges (especially those that allow children to initiate conversation with others) build a sense of connection and enhance children's language skills, social conversational skills, and cognitive activity." (HDLH, page 41).

Reflective Questions: How are the children's conversations valued by the educators? How is non-verbal communication from the children acknowledged by educators? How do educators engage as co-learners with the children? How do educators engage meaningfully with the children and ask critical questions about their play to extend learning? How are the children encouraged to express themselves within their play? How do the educators encourage children to make meaning from their play, engage in reflection, and express their thoughts aloud?

Non-verbal interactions: includes facial expressions, body language, body contact, eye contact, personal space, and tone of voice.

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Educators repeatedly solve the children's problems immediately Any educators are repeatedly observed solving the children's problems.	**All educators support the children's learning** All educators are co-learners with the children. All educators are engaged in the children's learning experiences, encouraging new vocabulary, and suggesting ideas to extend the learning opportunity. For example, looking at a book of farm animals while playing with the farm animals.	**All educators recall past experiences to extend current learning opportunities** All educators are observed recalling past activities or experiences and linking them to new learning opportunities. For example, while playing in the sandbox with diggers and other construction props, the educators recall the time they went for a walk in the community and encountered some construction occurring on a local street or when they are doing a planting experience, they recall a time when they read a book about Indigenous ways of being and appreciation of the land.
Educators repeatedly miss opportunities to build children's knowledge Any educators are repeatedly observed ignoring opportunities to extend children's learning.	**All educators extend verbal/non-verbal interactions with materials** All educators are observed using play materials to extend language opportunities. For example, using finger puppets during songs, or imitating eating while playing in the pretend play area together.	
Educators repeatedly do not support children to follow through with strategies Any educators are repeatedly observed not simplifying the steps to successfully solve a problem or leave a child without support to complete a task that is not developmentally-appropriate. For example, an educator tells a group of toddlers to clean up without breaking down the individual steps required.	**All educators are observed participating in play with children** All educators are observed actively participating in the learning experiences with children. For example, using open-ended questions and encouraging inquiry.	**All educators extend children's vocabulary** All educators are observed using language wherever possible to extend children's vocabulary. For example, when a child gestures to an object, educators are labelling or providing descriptive words, braille, or sign language.