



Directly Operated Early Learning and Child Care Program Statement

OUR MISSION

Supporting the growth, learning, and well-being of children and families in Durham through innovative, collaborative, and high-quality early learning experiences.

At the Regional Municipality of Durham, we view every child as capable, competent, curious, and rich in potential. Together with families and educators, we create high-quality programs that build on each child's strengths. In our approach, we are all co-learners, growing, exploring, and discovering alongside the children. How Does Learning Happen? forms the basis of our programs.

Pedagogical Framework

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years provides the foundational framework for all directly operated child care programs.

Guided by this pedagogy, programs are designed to support children's learning, development, and well-being through practices aligned with the four foundations for healthy growth and development. Each foundation includes clear goals for children and corresponding expectations for program delivery:

Foundations	Goals for children	Expectations for programs
Belonging	Every child experiences a sense of belonging through connections with others and opportunities to contribute to their world.	Cultivate respectful relationships and foster connections among children, adults and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a positive sense of self along with health and well-being.	Nurture children's overall development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with their senses, bodies and minds.	Provide inclusive environments and experiences that engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration and learning.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses ideas, thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways.	Support and encourage communication and expression in all forms, recognizing diverse ways children share their understanding of the world.



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Our overarching strategies

Our early learning and child care centres have incorporated the principles of Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) alongside Ontario's provincial pedagogy for early learning. This integrated approach supports continuous program quality and ensures children experience safe, nurturing, and high-quality environments that promote health, safety, nutrition, and overall well-being.

Through collaborative practice, the directly operated early learning and care sites plan for and create positive early learning environments that:

1) Promote the health, safety and well-being of young children, families and educators.

You will see evidence of this commitment through the following practices:

- Clearly identified educators, with photographs and names posted, and Regional staff wearing photo identification.
- Well organized, clean environments with a wide range of developmentally appropriate materials that are accessible.
- Secure environments with sign-in/out procedures and visitor controls.
- Nutritious menus aligned with Canada's Food Guide and developed by qualified nutrition professionals.
- Consistent handwashing and hygiene practices throughout the day to reduce the spread of illness.
- Access to snacks for early arrivals and continuous access to drinking water.
- Mealtimes that are calm and social, with educators eating alongside children, engaging in conversation, and modelling positive eating behaviours and manners.
- Meals and snacks that are prepared and served in a timely manner, allowing children to eat without unnecessary waiting or rushing.
- Opportunities for children to serve themselves, explore new foods at their own pace, and develop independence without pressure. Children are not rushed through the meal or snack time.
- Daily opportunities for active, gross motor play that support physical development and exploration.
- Use of positive language that recognizes accomplishment and effort.
- Ongoing cleaning throughout the day with additional daily professional cleaning of the centre.
- Secure facilities, including security systems and visitor sign-in procedures.
- Programming that reflects current research on screen use, with no televisions, video games, or computers accessible to children; technology may be used by educators as a tool to support and extend learning when appropriate.
- Adherence to all health and safety requirements and guidelines established by the Ministry of Education and the Durham Region Health Department.

Healthy food and active play make a difference

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In addition, programs provide opportunities for rest and a balanced mix of active and more reflective play. These strategies support positive interactions and contribute to children's healthy growth and development.

2) Support positive and responsive interactions between educators, children and families.

You will see this commitment reflected through the following practices:

- A welcoming enrolment process, including a centre tour, introductions to educators, completion of the Looksee Checklist, and the sharing of information about each child's needs, interests, and comfort strategies to support a smooth transition.
- Clear communication with families through the Parent Handbook, which outlines program operations, hours, fees, payment processes, and key policies.
- Educators who warmly greet children and families upon arrival and engage in respectful, responsive interactions.
- Ongoing, two-way communication between families and educators to share information and support each child's learning and development.

Strategies to support positive interactions

Positive interactions are fostered through inclusive, enriched environments where all children feel a sense of belonging and have access to engaging developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Educators are reflective practitioners who draw on their knowledge of child development and individual to guide positive behaviour, relationships and learning. The focus on the positive is a key component of our affirming approach.

Educators reflect on questions such as:

- How am I building on children's strengths and capabilities?
- How do I model curiosity and shared learning when answers are not immediately known?
- How do I support play as intentional, inquiry-based learning and expression?
- How do I contribute to a daily sense of joy, engagement, and shared learning?

Supporting children to manage their behaviour

Educators support children's social, emotional, and physical development by helping them understand their feelings and develop self-regulation skills through positive guidance.

The following behaviour management strategies are not permitted under any circumstances:

- 1) Corporal punishment.
- 2) Physical restraint for discipline or in place of supervision, except as a last resort to prevent harm to the child or others and only until the risk has passed.



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- 3) Harsh, degrading or humiliating measures, including the use of derogatory language.
- 4) Depriving a child of basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, sleep, toileting or bedding.
- 5) Inflicting bodily harm or forcing children to eat or drink.
- 6) Confining a child by locking exits or using a locked or lockable space to separate the child from others.

3) Encourage and enable children to interact and communicate in a variety of ways with others and their communities.

You will see this commitment reflected through opportunities for children to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings using multiple forms of communication, including:

- Oral and written expression through storytelling, conversations with educators, and interactions with peers.
- Music and movement, including singing and dancing.
- Construction and design using blocks and other building materials.
- Inquiry-based learning through experimentation and problem-solving.
- Planned excursions beyond the centre to support children's connection to their local community.

In compliance with the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA), children of preschool age and younger participate in a minimum of two hours of outdoor play each day. Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten, and school-age children participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of outdoor play daily.

4) Foster exploration and inquiry through play-based learning.

Research across multiple disciplines confirms that play is a primary context for learning. Through play-based exploration and inquiry, children actively make sense of the world around them.

You will see this reflected through:

- Children engaging in play to explore ideas, test theories, and build understanding.
- Play that is supported by caring, responsive educators and enriched environments that provide appropriate materials, space, and time.
- Learning experiences that support the development of essential skills such as creative problem-solving, cooperation, perseverance, focus, and self-regulation, which form the foundation for literacy, numeracy, and broader life skills.

Supporting healthy development and learning

At the Regional Early Learning and Child Care Centres each child's strengths, needs and developmental goals are identified and supported. Educators use individual attention, inquiry-based play, and positive learning environments to promote holistic development across social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive domains.

This approach is strengthened by:



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- 1) Intentionally preparing environments that support learning and development.
- 2) Building on the children's ideas, questions and theories observed through play.
- 3) Collaborating as teams to support deeper exploration and learning.
- 4) Engaging families, children, and community partners, including educators within the school system, in ongoing program development.

Children learn through exploration, play, and inquiry with educators as co-learners. Educators engage in meaningful conversations that support communication, positive interactions, and self-regulation. Ongoing pedagogical documentation, including the Looksee Checklist, children's portfolios, learning stories, photographs, and other documentation, is used to observe, interpret, and make learning visible, informing both individual development and program planning.

5) Provide both child initiated and educator-supported experiences to foster development.

You will see this reflected through the following practices:

- Weekly program plans that outline a range of educator-planned experiences and are updated throughout the week as children extend their learning or explore new directions.
- Daily schedules designed to minimize transitions, reducing time spent waiting or lining up.
- A balance of experiences where the child takes the lead in their play and learning, alongside intentional educator-supported activities based on observation to extend children's skills and abilities.
- Posted program plans specific to outdoor learning.

6) Provide a range of experiences that support each child's learning and development.

You will see this commitment reflected through the following practices:

- Children actively engaged in learning activities, often in small groups.
- Positive, joyful interactions as children and educators play and learn together.
- Educators observing children and documenting learning to inform and extend experiences.
- Educators sharing and discussing documentation with children to support reflection and understanding.
- Play-based learning that encourages curiosity, questioning, problem-solving, and active participation, with educators providing guidance and support as needed.

7) Incorporate a range of experience modalities that support individual needs.

You will see this reflected through the following practices:

- Well-equipped indoor and outdoor environments with a variety of toys and creative materials accessible to children.



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- Comfortable, quiet spaces for reading, individual activities, rest and quiet time.
- Opportunities for children to engage in active play, quiet play, and reflective experiences throughout the day.
- Children taking the lead in their play and influencing the direction of activities.
- Educators listening to and learning from the children as much as the children are learning from the educators.
- Educators supporting exploration of nature and the natural environment.
- Alternative quiet activities available for children who do not sleep during scheduled rest periods.

8) Foster family engagement and ongoing communication about the program and their children.

You will see this commitment reflected through the following practices:

- Educators actively seek out opportunities to communicate with families while maintaining attention to the needs of the children.
- For infants and toddlers, daily reports on activities, routines, and experiences are shared with parents through the Lillio app.
- The Looksee Checklist is completed in collaboration with families upon child's entry and used to assess ongoing development, with results shared with families.
- Planned and informal opportunities for families and educators to exchange ideas on supporting each child's learning and development.
- Individual child portfolios are maintained and accessible to families either in hard copy or through the Lillio App.
- Accident/incident reports completed and shared as required.
- Notes, reminders, and newsletters provide parents with updates on upcoming activities and program information.
- The Lillio app is used to document children's experiences, play, snacks, and other updates, which are shared directly with families. Families are required to download and register on the app to receive these communications, including notifications about supplies or other program-related information.

Parents as partners

Educators foster engagement and ongoing communications with families regarding the program and their children. We strive to build positive and responsive relationships, recognizing and valuing each family for their unique strengths, perspectives, and contributions. Families are encouraged to participate in the Region's early learning and child care centres as partners in supporting the development of healthy, happy, capable and competent children.

Strong, respectful and equitable relationships with parents enables us to fully engage as co-learners with both children and families. We seek opportunities to involve families in ways that respect their needs and challenges, including long commutes, time pressures and the demands of raising young children. Strategies include:



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- An “open door” policy allowing families to drop in during centre hours, observe, or participate as convenient.
- Informal daily discussions.
- Posted documentation of activities and engagement.
- Use of the Looksee Checklist and parent/educator (and sometimes child) interviews.
- Sharing resources about community supports and activities.
- Inviting parents to contribute to curriculum development and share cultural or family experiences.
- Encouraging participation in day-to-day activities, social events, and open houses.
- Annual parent satisfaction surveys.

Key ideas and messages we share with parents:

- Our program is play and inquiry-based because research shows this is how children learn best. We provide opportunities for full engagement and self-expression, and we share learning outcomes in multiple ways.
- What is important for us to know about your child to support their well-being?
- These are our goals for your child and how we will support them in achieving these goals.
- How can we support your engagement so that you feel a sense of belonging? What works best for your schedule and family?

9) Actively engage with community partners and foster connections for children and families.

You will see this commitment reflected through the following practices:

- Parents are welcomed at any time during operational hours and are encouraged to visit the centre.
- Planned excursions to local community services and programs such as libraries, grocery stores and other neighbourhood locations to support children’s learning and engagement.
- Collaboration with community partners to provide resources and supports for families, children and educators. Partners may include, but are not limited to, Resources for Exceptional Children and Youth, Grandview Kids, Kinark and Children’s Developmental and Behavioural Supports (CDBS).
- Educators assist families in connecting with community supports through referrals, with parental consent.
- Ongoing collaboration among staff, families and community partners to ensure coordinated support the children and families in our Early Learning and Child Care Centres.

10) Strengthening educator capacity through ongoing professional learning.

You will see this reflected through the following practices:



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- Educators are encouraged and supported to attend professional development opportunities.
- Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE's) fulfill their College of Early Childhood Educators requirement for ongoing professional learning.
- New strategies and research to support children's development are shared with educators and families.
- Educators engage in self-reflection, collaboration, and discussion to continually enhance program quality.

Continuous professional learning for educators

Our centres provide environments that support educators in maintaining and expanding their knowledge and skills. Educators are provided with many mandatory health and safety related training sessions, such as Standard First Aid and Infant Child CPR; Occupational Health and Safety training, and WHIMIS. Additional opportunities include:

- Up to three personal professional learning opportunities per year aligned with annual feedback and development learning goals.
- Scheduled planning and team meetings to share ideas and develop programs.
- Participation in divisional, departmental, and community committees or networks.
- Engagement in community learning opportunities, such as Capacity Building initiatives and the Durham Region Child Care Forum.
- RECEs are encouraged to participate in the College of Early Childhood Educators Continuous Professional Learning Program.

11) Use multiple forms of documentation to review and reflect on children's and educators' experiences.

Documentation serves to:

- Maintain an ongoing record of each child's development.
- Provide tools for educators to reflect on the impact of their activities and strategies.
- Offer visual and oral records that allow families to explore their child's developmental progress.

You will see this reflected through the following practices:

- Documentation displayed on walls that illustrates and explains children's learning and activities.
- Multiple methods of recording observations to capture children's accomplishments and experiences.

A Commitment to continuous improvement

- All new educators, students and volunteers are required to review the program statement before interacting with children.



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- Educators review the program statement annually at a dedicated meeting, reflecting on successes, challenges and setting goals for the year ahead.