



Directly Operated Early Learning and Child Care Program Statement

OUR MISSION

Meeting the current and future needs of the Durham community through leadership, co-operation, innovation and service excellence.

Capable, competent, curious and rich in potential; this is how the Regional Municipality of Durham sees children. We work with children, their families and educators to create high quality programs that focus on strengths. We are all co-learners.

How Does Learning Happen? forms the Basis of our Program

Using *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, the directly operated centres strive to support the children to achieve the following goals and will meet the expectations for programs building on the four foundations for healthy growth and development:

Foundation	Goals for Children	Expectations for Programs
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he/she is connected to others and contributes to his/her world.	Cultivate respectful relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self and health and well-being.	Nurture children's healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with her/his senses, bodies and minds.	Provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration and learning.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who is able to express himself/herself in many ways.	Foster communication and expression in all forms.

Our overarching strategies

Our early learning and child care centres have incorporated and embedded the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) principles, along with the provincial pedagogy for early learning, to strengthen the quality of our programs and ensure high-quality experiences that promote the health, safety, nutrition and well-being of children.

Working collaboratively, the directly operated early learning and care sites will plan for and create positive early learning environments that:

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

You will see:

- Photographs and names of all the educators posted, and all Regional staff have a photo ID badge.
- Well organized environments, with lots of materials that are easily accessible to the children – the children don't have to ask for everything that they need.
- A process to sign your child in and out of the program, to ensure they are safely supervised.
- Healthy menus, following Canada's Food Guide developed by registered professionals with the Canadian Society Nutrition Management Certification.
- Children and educators washing their hands frequently throughout the day to promote good hygiene and to prevent the spread of illness.
- Snacks are available to the children who arrive early and are set out for the children to serve themselves. Water is always available to the children throughout the day.
- At meal times, the educators sit and eat with the children and there is lots of conversation.
- Children serve themselves and are encouraged but never forced to try new foods.
- Lots of opportunities for gross motor play; children are encouraged to use their entire bodies to explore the world.
- Positive language that emphasizes accomplishment and effort.
- The centre is kept clean throughout the day, and is professionally cleaned on a nightly basis.
- Security systems are installed at each site, and all visitors are required to sign in and out of the centre.
- Based on current research related to children and screen time, there are no televisions, video games or computers in the programs for the children. Educators will assist children to look up information on the Internet to expand or enhance their play and learning.
- Educators follow the health and safety guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education and the Durham Region Health Department.

Healthy food and active play make a difference

Additionally, opportunities for rest and a balance between active and more reflective play are strategies that will be implemented to support positive interactions and facilitate healthy development.

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

You will see:

- During the process to enrol your child at our centre, the Supervisor or designate will provide you with a tour of the facility, introduce you and your child to the educators, complete the Looksee Checklist and compile

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information about your child's specific needs, likes and dislikes, and what comforts your child. This will allow educators to begin to build an understanding of your child's individual needs.

- This Parent Handbook provides the operational details of our programs, hours of operations, fees and payment processes, and outlines our operational policies so families know what to expect when they choose our services.
- Educators who greet and welcome you and your child upon arrival at the program.
- Educators using calm voices and at the child's level for face-to-face interactions.
- Parents and educators talking together, sharing information and knowledge about each child.

Strategies to support and strengthen positive interactions

Positive interactions are encouraged and supported by the development of enriched environments where all children belong and where there are a range of interesting, intriguing and developmentally appropriate activity options to engage children. Educators are reflective practitioners whose knowledge and understanding of the individual children and child development supports positive behaviours on the part of children, educators and families. The focus on the positive is a key component of our affirming approach.

Questions educators ask themselves:

- How do I **engage** with children in a way that builds on their strengths as opposed to identifying what they are doing "wrong"?
- Am I **learning** too? How do I respond when a child asks me something that I don't know? Do I redirect the child to something else or do I respond: "Let's find out together!"
- Am I **moving away** from viewing play as just something children do and **moving towards** viewing play as intentional and inquiry based; a way for children to **express** themselves in multiple ways?
- Am I having fun? Is at least a part of each day filled with a **shared sense of joy** that is the wonder of new learning for me and the children with whom I engage? What are the clues that demonstrate that I am engaged and interested in what I am doing?

Supporting children to manage their behaviour

Children benefit socially, emotionally and physically from our positive approach. Educators focus on helping the child understand their feelings and emotions, and provide support to help children regulate their behaviour.

The following are unacceptable behaviour management strategies and are **not** permitted at any time under any circumstances:

- 1) Corporal punishment.

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- 2) Physical restraint of a child for the purposes of discipline or in lieu of supervision unless physical restraint is for the purpose of preventing a child from hurting self or others and is used only as a last resort until risk of injury no longer exists.
- 3) Harsh or degrading measures or use of derogatory language that may humiliate or undermine a child's self-respect and self-esteem.
- 4) Depriving a child of basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, sleep, toilet use or bedding.
- 5) Inflicting any bodily harm on children including making children eat or drink against will.
- 6) Confining a child by locking the exits of the centre or using a locked or lockable space to separate the child from other children.

3) Encourage and enable children to interact and communicate in a myriad of ways with each other, with educators and with their communities.

You will see:

- Many different ways for children to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings including:
 - Painting, drawing, modelling with clay, plasticine and other art and creative / sensory materials.
 - Telling or writing stories.
 - Singing.
 - Dancing.
 - Talking with educators.
 - Talking with other children.
 - Building with blocks and other building materials.
 - Conducting experiments.
 - Solving problems.
 - Planned excursions outside of the centre site, to promote children's connection to their local community.

4) Foster exploration and inquiry that is play based. Evidence from diverse fields of study tells us that when children are playing, they are learning.

You will see:

- Children making sense of the world around them through play.
- Play that is supported by caring adults in environments with materials, space and time that encourage complex thinking and aid children to gain essential skills. These skills include: creative problem-solving, learning to get along with others, coping with challenges, overcoming obstacles, and learning to focus their attention. These are foundational activities that promote the development of literacy, numeracy and other important life skills.

Supporting healthy development and learning

At the Regional Early Learning and Child Care Centres each child's specific strengths, needs and developmental goals are identified. Educators set goals through individual attention, inquiry play-based learning activities, and positive learning environments in which each child's learning and development is supported. Educators focus on

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children's social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development in a holistic way. This approach will be strengthened by:

- 1) Preparing the environment to foster learning and development.
- 2) Building on the children's ideas, questions and theories as observed in play.
- 3) A collaborative approach that incorporates discussion among team members about how to support deeper exploration.
- 4) Inviting and engaging others in the continuing process of program development, including parents, the children themselves and other community partners, including, but not limited to, educators within the school system.

Children learn through exploration, play, and inquiry with the educators as co-learners. Educators have thoughtful conversations with children, which encourages them to interact and communicate in a positive way, and promotes their ability to self-regulate. We use the Looksee Checklist, children's portfolios, learning stories, pictures and other pedagogical documentation of children's activities on an ongoing basis to study, interpret, make visible, and help inform children's learning and development, as well as the overall program.

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

You will see:

- Weekly Program Plans posted with a variety of educator planned activities that will be added to throughout the week as the children expand on the activities or move forward in new directions.
- The number of transitions during the day are limited; children do not spend a lot of time lining up or waiting for activities to take place.
- Times when the child takes the lead in planning the activity and times when the educator builds on observations to develop and implement activities that support each child to stretch his/her skills and abilities.

6) Provide many opportunities for a range of experiences that support each child's learning and development, incorporating children's individual support plans as necessary.

You will see:

- Children actively engaged in activities, usually in small groups.
- Children and educators are smiling, laughing and having fun; playing and learning together.
- Educators observing and making documentation about children to build experiences.
- Educators discussing the documentation with the children.
- A focus on learning through play with educators encouraging and supporting questions, answers and problem solving on the part of the children.

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7) Incorporate a range of different experience modalities including indoor and outdoor play, active play, quiet play, rest and quiet time considering the individual needs of children.

You will see:

- Well stocked toy shelves and creative materials available to the children.
- Quiet comfortable spaces for reading or quiet individual activities or rest.
- Children engaged in a range of different activities throughout the day.
- Children taking the lead; actively shaping their play.
- Educators listen and learn from the children as much as the children listen and learn from the educators.
- Educators encouraging children to explore nature and their natural environments.
- Quiet activities provided for children who do not require a nap during rest times.

8) Foster engagement of and ongoing communication with parents about the program and their children.

You will see:

- Educators seek out opportunities to talk with parents without ignoring the needs of the children.
- For Infants and Toddlers, daily information sheets will be completed by the educators for parents.
- Educators will complete the Looksee Checklist in collaboration with parents upon child's entry into the early learning and child care program and then continue to assess each child's development with the results being shared with parents.
- Opportunities, both planned and informal for parents and educators to share ideas about how best to support each child.
- Portfolios for each child which are accessible to parents.
- Accident / Incident reports completed if your child has an accident to provide you with information as required.
- Notes posted as reminders for parents about upcoming activities.
- Newsletters for parents sharing information about our programs.

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 with children and their families. We recognize and value each family for their unique strengths, perspectives and contributions to our program. Families are encouraged to participate in the Region's early learning and child care centres—as we are partners in supporting the development of healthy, happy, capable and competent children.

A strong, respectful and equitable relationship with parents is key to our ability to fully engage as co-learners with the children and with their families. To this end, we seek out opportunities to engage parents in a way that meets their needs and builds on strengths while respecting the challenges that face young families, including long commutes, time

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pressures and the busyness inherent in raising a family. Strategies include but are not limited to:

- An “open door” policy that welcomes parents to drop off and pick up at the times that work best for their family within the hours that the centre is open and allows them to drop-in to observe whenever convenient for the parent.
- Informal discussions on a daily basis.
- Posted documentation of activities, interactions and engagement.
- Use of the Looksee Checklist and parent/educator (and sometimes child) interviews.
- Sharing resources and materials about community supports and activities.
- Inviting parent participation in the development of curriculum; to share cultural and family experiences.
- Inviting and encouraging parents to participate directly in the day to day activities of the centre.
- Social and open house activities.
- Annual questionnaires.

Key ideas and messages we share with parents:

- Our program is **play and inquiry based** because research tells us that this is the way children learn best. A play based program provides the kinds of opportunities that children need to be fully **engaged** and to learn how to **express** themselves many different ways. We will be sharing our learning with and about your children in many different ways.
- What do you think that it is important that I know about your child to support his/her **well-being**?
- These are our **goals for your children** and this is what we will be doing with your child to support the achievement of these goals.(outline the program expectations)
- How can we support your **engagement** with our program so that you feel that you **belong**? What works for you, your schedule and your family?

9) **Actively engage with community partners and provide opportunities for the children and families to develop close connections with a range of community supports.**

You will see:

- Parents are welcomed at any time and are encouraged to drop in when and if they have time to do so.
- Planned excursions to community services and programs such as the local library, grocery stores and other neighbourhood locations.
- Use of community partners as a resource and support to families, children and educators. These community partners may include but are not limited to Resources for Exceptional Children and Youth, Grandview Kids, Kinark and Durham Behaviour Management Services.

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- Staff supporting parents to connect to community partners through referrals with parental consent.
- Staff working collaboratively with parents and community partners to best support the children and families in our Early Learning and Child Care Centres.

10) Strengthen the capacity of educators to collaborate effectively with children, families and their colleagues through the provision of ongoing opportunities for continuous professional learning.

You will see:

- Educators encouraged and supported to attend professional development.
- Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE's) are required by their membership in the College of Early Childhood Educators to commit to their own ongoing professional learning.
- New ideas and strategies to support children's development introduced throughout the program.
- Materials and research shared with parents.

Continuous professional learning for educators

Our early learning and child care centres are environments that support educators, and others who interact with children, to continually self-reflect, have discussions, foster ongoing collaboration, and engage in continuous professional learning, in order to provide the best possible learning environment for children. 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. In addition,

- Educators are encouraged to participate in up to three personal professional learning opportunities each year, based on their annual Feedback and Development learning goals.
- Educators have scheduled planning time.
- Educators meet together to share ideas and information and to develop programs.
- Educators are encouraged and supported to participate on Divisional and/or Departmental Committees as well as community networks or committees.
- Educators are encouraged to participate in community learning opportunities through Capacity Building 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 many languages to document and review the experiences of the children and the educators in order to:

- Provide an ongoing record of development.
- Provide tools to enable educators to reflect on the impact of their activities and strategies.
- Provide a visual and oral record that enables parents to review and explore the developmental trajectory of their child.

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You will see:

- Documentation posted on the walls that tells and shows you what the children are doing.
- Different methods of recording observations about what the children are accomplishing.

A Commitment to continuous improvement

All new educators, students and volunteers are required to review the program statement prior to interaction with children in our care, and any time the program statement is updated. All educators are required to review the program statement on an annual basis. This will be accomplished at a year-end team meeting which provides an opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges of the past year and to set goals for the upcoming year.