Sault College YMCA Child Care

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Parent Handbook

Welcome to the Sault College YMCA Child Care

Philosophy

Parents have peace of mind knowing that their children are in a safe, nurturing environment that fosters independence and a positive attitude towards learning. YMCA Child Care activities and experiences are designed to help children realize their full physical and mental development in a climate of stability and trust.

The YMCA Child Care staff will work with families to ensure dependable service at this challenging stage of life when Child Care is required. We maintain an OPEN DOOR POLICY to allow parents the opportunity to observe their child in the program.

License

The Sault College YMCA Child Care is licensed under the Ministry of Education, Quality Assurance and Licensing Branch, offers care to children from infant (birth) up to and including twelve years of age.

The Sault College YMCA Child Care is licensed for integrated spaces with resources and support provided by Thrive Child Development.

Admission and Discharge Policy

An interview will be arranged to familiarize parent(s) and child(ren) with the Child Care setting and program, answer questions and complete registration forms prior to enrolment. Each family, parent(s) and child(ren) participate in a four-week orientation period to determine if the child and family are satisfied with the standards of service and the Child Care staff are able to provide a safe and nurturing environment.
Following the orientation period, written notice of withdrawal must be given two weeks in advance.

Withdrawal of YMCA Services

The YMCA strives to meet the individual needs of all children and families enrolled in our YMCA Child Care programs. However, situations do arise from time to time where it may be necessary for the Sault Ste. Marie YMCA to withdraw Child Care services for a child and/or their family. The YMCA does not take these decisions lightly and takes reasonable care to ensure a thorough assessment of the child's needs community supports available and the YMCA programs ability to support the child have been undertaken before withdrawing services.

Examples leading to withdrawal of services may include:

- Non-payment of program fees
- Frequent late pick up
- Parents/guardians or children who exhibit violent or harassing behaviour towards staff, volunteers, students on placements, other children or families
- Community resources for children with special needs are unavailable or have been exhausted
- Refusal by parent/guardian to meet with YMCA staff and /or consent to the use of support services for children

Arrival and Departure

It is imperative that you make a staff member aware of your child's arrival and similarly when picking up your child to leave.

Children will not be released to any persons other than those specified on the Child Care Information Form, unless the Child Care has been notified.

- If your child is going to be late or absent, please advise the supervisor. If you are going to be delayed when picking up your child, please telephone and advise the staff. If you are delayed beyond regularly scheduled program hours, a supplementary fee of $1.00 for every minute will be charged to your childcare account.

Children's Possessions

Children's personal toys should not be brought to the centre. Children in the full day Infant, Toddler and Preschool Programs are encouraged to bring a blanket for the Rest Period.

Holidays

The YMCA Child Care observes the following statutory holidays. Child Care will be closed for one week each summer for floor maintenance. Parents will be informed of the date of the closure as soon as the Child Care is informed from the school board.

New Year's Day	Canada Day	Boxing Day
Family Day	Civic Holiday	Christmas Day
Good Friday	Labour Day	
Victoria Day	Thanksgiving	

Service and Hours of Care

Spots Available	Program	Ages	Times	BASE RATES	PARENTAL RATES
Full Day Programs					
10	Infant	Birth - 18 mths	7:30 am - 5:30 pm	$47.00	$22.00
30	Toddler	18 - 30 mths	7:30 am - 5:30 pm	$42.25	$19.96
40	Preschool	30 - 44 mths	7:30 am - 5:30 pm	$40.00	$18.90

The Sault College YMCA Child Care is open Monday through Friday from 7:30am - 5:30pm.

Children must be enrolled a minimum of two days per week, same days every week.

The Full day Infant, Toddler and Preschool Programs operate twelve months per year. Parents are required to register for the September to August session.

Fees

The YMCA Child Cares have been approved by the Sault Ste. Marie District Social Services Board to participate in the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care System (CWELCC). By being approved to participate, the YMCA can provide reduced parent fees for children ages 0 to 6 years of age in order to offer quality licensed Child Care that is more affordable and accessible to the families in our community.

*** The end of the month that the child turns 6, they are no longer eligible for the CWELCC rebates.**

- Fees are calculated based on the actual number of days per month your child is enrolled.
- Child Care fees are paid by pre-authorized payments. Voided cheque or credit card info must be provided at the time of registration.
- There are no deductions provided for absences. All absences must be paid in full.
- Please be advised a 2% per month interest charge will be added to accounts outstanding past 30 days.
- The YMCA will initiate collection proceedings to collect unpaid accounts.
- If you are delayed beyond regularly scheduled program hours, a supplementary fee of $1.00 for every minute will be charged to your childcare account.

Parents Must Provide

- Diapers and wipes for children not yet toilet trained.
- Inside shoes with non-marking soles
- A change of clothes
- Appropriate clothing for outside play

Program Curriculum

YMCA Playing to Learn

Play is the cornerstone of healthy social, physical and intellectual development for all children.

YMCA Playing to learn curriculum helps children to:

- Develop a lifelong joy for learning
- Discover the world through play
- Build confidence and self-direction
- Learn to make positive choices
- Prepare for school, including literacy, numeracy and writing skills

Throughout the day your child will participate in a variety of activities which may include creative art activities and crafts, dramatic play, nature and science activities, stories and songs, games, large muscle activities and outside play. Routines may include washroom/diapering, snack, lunch and rest time.
Occasionally children will leave the premises under the supervision of staff members for neighborhood walks.
Due notice will be given of any major field trips.
On a regular basis, students from Sault College Early Childhood Education Program and Secondary School Co-op Programs will be at the centre as part of their school curriculum.
Children may be included in photographs and videos connected with the Sault Ste. Marie YMCA.

Nutrition

A nutritious mid-day meal, as well as morning and afternoon snacks will be provided. Every effort will be made to accommodate children with special dietary needs and allergies. Weekly menus will be posted.

The Sault College YMCA Child Care strives to maintain a PEANUT FREE environment.

Food sent from home must be in original packaging with ingredients labelled. Any food brought into the Child Care must be discussed with the Manager in accordance with the allergy management/anaphylaxis policy.

Health and Administration of Drugs

- All Sault College YMCA Child Care staff maintain current First Aid and CPR certification.
- The Sault College YMCA Child Care is required by the Ministry of Education as stipulated by the Child Care and Early Years Act to have a record of your child's immunization. The Child Care also requires that a Medical History Form be completed prior to enrolment.
- If your child becomes ill during the day, temporary care will be provided until parents, or the emergency contact person can make arrangements for your child to be taken home.
- Children who develop a communicable disease (head lice, pink eye, etc.) will be required to leave the program until such time as specified in the guidelines provided by the Algoma Public Health.
- When emergency medical treatment is required, the parent will be notified at once and the child will be taken to the Sault Area Hospital Emergency Room.
- The Sault College YMCA Child Care will administer prescription drugs to children, in accordance with Provincial legislation. The Administration of Oral Medication Form must be completed providing all information required and the medication must be in the original container and bearing the child's name.

Volunteer/Student Policy

The Child Care has implemented a Volunteer/Student policy stipulating that the agency does not allow volunteers/students to provide unsupervised care to children. Volunteers/Students will be supervised by a staff member at all times and will never be left alone with the children or counted in the staffing ratios. Vulnerable sector checks are mandatory for all Volunteers and students prior to starting their placement with the YMCA. Review of all the Child Care policies including Behaviour Management will be reviewed on/or prior to placements starting. The YMCA provides adequate insurance to host volunteer/ students as required.

Waitlist

The YMCA Child Care does not maintain site wait lists. Parents will be instructed to add their child's name to the centralized waitlist site under all locations that they are interested in their child attending.
Management and Supervisors will check the list frequently when spaces become available. The YMCA does not charge wait lists fees nor do the Child Cares have registrations fees to hold a space for children.
The Manager/Supervisors will call parents on the waitlist in the order that they appear on the list. Some exceptions will be made for the placement of children including but not limited to siblings of children already in care, staff children, and referrals from DSSAB or Children's Aid. All subsidized spaces will be filled by parents whose name appears on the centralized waitlist.

Emergency Management

The Sault College YMCA Child Care has policies and procedures in place if an emergency were to take place while the Child Care was in operation. All staff are trained on their responsibilities and duties should an emergency occur. The YMCA Child Care has secured Prince Charles as an emergency evacuation site. In the occurrence of such an emergency that would require the Child Care to be evacuated parents would be notified immediately by phone that an immediate pick up would be necessary.

Discipline

Children are disciplined in a positive and consistent manner appropriate to the developmental level of the child to promote self-discipline, safety, care of property, good health habits and consideration for others.

Prohibited Practices

The YMCA Child Cares have developed and follow a list of prohibited practices that guide staff in self actions that are unacceptable and will not be tolerated when dealing with Children's behaviors.

These prohibited practices are:

(a) corporal punishment of the child;

(b) physical restraint of the child, such as confining the child to a highchair, car seat, stroller or other device for the purposes of discipline or in lieu of supervision, unless the physical restraint is for the purpose of preventing a child from hurting himself, herself or someone else, and is used only as a last resort and only until the risk of injury is no longer imminent;

(c) locking the exits of the Child Care centre or home Child Care premises for the purpose of confining the child, or confining the child in an area or room without adult supervision, unless such confinement occurs during an emergency and is required as part of the licensee's emergency management policies and procedures;

(d) use of harsh or degrading measures or threats or use of derogatory language directed at or used in the presence of a child that would humiliate, shame or frighten the child or undermine his or her self-respect, dignity or self-worth;

(e) depriving the child of basic needs including food, drink, shelter, sleep, toilet use, clothing or bedding; or

(f) inflicting any bodily harm on children including making children eat or drink against their will.

The above policies are to be enforced without question by ALL staff and that any occurrence whether observed or reported will be investigated and subject to disciplinary action.

Serious Occurrence

To support increased transparency and access to information the Serious Occurrence Notification Form will be posted on our parent board for the duration of ten (10) days. This will describe the incident and outline follow-up actions, while respecting the privacy of the individual. Long-term actions taken by the operator will also be included to help prevent similar incidences in the future, where applicable.

Parent Issues and Concerns Policy and Procedures

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a transparent process for parents/guardians, the Child Care licensee and staff to use when parents/guardians bring forward issues/concerns.

Policy

General

Parents/guardians are encouraged to take an active role in our Child Care centre and regularly discuss what their child(ren) are experiencing with our program. As supported by our program statement, we support positive and responsive interactions among the children, parents/guardians, Child Care providers and staff, and foster the engagement of and ongoing communication with parents/guardians about the program and their children. Our staff are available to engage parents/ guardians in conversations and support a positive experience during every interaction.

All issues and concerns raised by parents/guardians are taken seriously by the YMCA Child Cares and will be addressed. Every effort will be made to address and resolve issues and concerns to the satisfaction of all parties and as quickly as possible.

Issues/concerns may be brought forward verbally or in writing. Responses and outcomes will be provided verbally, or in writing upon request. The level of detail provided to the parent/guardian will respect and maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved.

An initial response to an issue or concern will be provided to parents/guardians within two business days. The person who raised the issue/concern will be kept informed throughout the resolution process.

Investigations of issues and concerns will be fair, impartial and respectful to parties involved.

Confidentiality

Every issue and concern will be treated confidentially and every effort will be made to protect the privacy of parents/ guardians, children, staff, students and volunteers, except when information must be disclosed for legal reasons (e.g. to the Ministry of Education, College of Early Childhood Educators, law enforcement authorities or a Children's Aid Society).

Conduct

Our centre maintains high standards for positive interaction, communication and role-modeling for children. Harassment and discrimination will therefore not be tolerated from any party.

If at any point a parent/guardian, provider or staff feels uncomfortable, threatened, abused or belittled, they may immediately end the conversation and report the situation to the supervisor and/or licensee.

Concerns about the Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a child

Everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

If a parent/guardian expresses concerns that a child is being abused or neglected, the parent will be advised to contact the local Children's Aid Society (CAS) directly.

Persons who become aware of such concerns are also responsible for reporting this information to CAS as per the "Duty to Report" requirement under the *Child and Family Services Act*.

For more information, visit http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/childrensaid/reportingabuse/index.aspx

Procedures

Nature of Issue or Concern	Steps for Parent and/or Guardian to Report Issue/Concern:	Steps for Staff and/or Licensee in responding to issue/concern:
Program Room-Related E.g.: schedule, sleep arrangements, toilet training, indoor or outdoor activities, feeding arrangements, etc.	Raise the issue or concern to the classroom staff directly or the supervisor or licensee.	Address the issue/concern at the time it is raised or arrange for a meeting with the parent/guardian within two business days. Document the issues/concerns in detail. Documentation should include: the date and time the issue/concern was received; the name of the person who received the issue/concern; the name of the person reporting the issue/concern; the details of the issue/concern; and any steps taken to resolve the issue/concern and/or information given to the parent/guardian regarding next steps or referral. Provide contact information for the appropriate person if the person being notified is unable to address the matter. Ensure the investigation of the issue/concern is initiated by the appropriate party within two business days or as soon as reasonably possible thereafter. Document reasons for delays in writing. Provide a resolution or outcome to the parent(s)/guardian(s) who raised the issue/concern.
General, Centre- or Operations-Related E.g.: Child Care fees, hours of operation, staffing, waiting lists, menus, etc.	Raise the issue or concern to the individual directly or the supervisor or licensee. All issues or concerns about the conduct of staff, duty parents, etc. that put a child's health, safety and well-being at risk should be reported to the supervisor as soon as parents/guardians become aware of the situation.	
Student- / Volunteer-Related	Raise the issue or concern to the staff responsible for supervising the volunteer or student or the supervisor and/or licensee. All issues or concerns about the conduct of students and/or volunteers that put a child's health, safety and well-being at risk should be reported to the supervisor as soon as parents/guardians become aware of the situation.	

Escalation of Issues or Concerns

Where parents/guardians are not satisfied with the response or outcome of an issue or concern, they may escalate the issue or concern verbally or in writing to the Chief Executive Officer of the Sault Ste. Marie YMCA.

Issues/concerns related to compliance with requirements set out in the *Child Care and Early Years Act., 2014* and Ontario Regulation 137/15 should be reported to the Ministry of Education's Child Care Quality Assurance and Licensing Branch.

Issues/concerns may also be reported to other relevant regulatory bodies (e.g. local public health department, police department, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Labour, fire department, College of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario College of Teachers, College of Social Workers etc.) where appropriate.

Contacts

- Ministry of Education, Licensed Child Care Help Desk: 1-877-510-5333 or Child Care_ontario@ontario.ca
- Manager of YMCA Child Cares: (705)206-9711
- College of ECE complaints department email: discipline@college-ece.ca
- Children's Aid Society of Algoma (705)949-0162
- Algoma Public Health (705)942-4646

Keeping in touch with your child is just a tap away.

Today's families are busier than ever.
Between child drop offs, work, pick-ups, meal prep, and activities, you don't always have time to speak with your child's educators and learn about your child's day.
We're making it easier for our YMCA Preschool Child Care families to connect to the small moments and big milestones of their child's day, through our new YMCA app - Weemarkable™.

Weemarkable™ is the window into your little one's day - from wherever you are.

YMCA Child Care Program Statement

Welcome to YMCA licensed Child Care. Our program statement describes how our programs support and foster early learning, outlines our view of the child, philosophy and pedagogy, as well as the goals and approaches used to ensure healthy child development.

It also outlines how we evaluate our programs to maintain quality and how we support the professionals who work with the children.

The YMCA Program Statement is reviewed annually to ensure it is aligned with the Minister of Education's Policy Statement.

Our View of the Child

Every child is special in the eyes of their parents and those who love them. The children are also special to us. As educators of young children, we know that each child is an individual of great human worth and potential. Every child is different in their looks, their growth patterns, their genetic make-up, their previous experience, the way they think and in every aspect of what makes them human beings. We appreciate each child's uniqueness and view the child's growth and development occurring in a holistic manner.

At the YMCA we understand that children learn through play. Play by definition is enjoyable, spontaneous, active, and undertaken without external goals and sanctions. This means children are self-learners and do not require an adult to choose what or how they should learn. When the child's natural activity of play is supported by caring and responsive professionals in positive, developmentally appropriate learning environments, we believe, a child will flourish. The child's innate competence, capacity, curiosity and potential will be maximized.

"YMCA Playing to Learn is a wonderful, academically sound, and highly accessible document. At the heart is a view of children, teachers and parents as capable and competent. This is one document that will be highly valued in the field, not just sitting on a shelf."
Jean M. Clinton, BMus MD FRCP(C), Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University

PHILOSOPY

The study of the theoretical basis of a particular branch of knowledge.

PEDAGOGY

The method and practice of teaching.

GOAL

An aim of desired result.

APPROACH

A means of attaining a goal.

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The philosophy or view of human development that recognizes the necessity to include all aspects or domains of development in order to understand the whole person.

SANCTION

For a recognized authority to give approval of something.

INNATE

Existing from birth (i.e. born with).

YMCA Curriculum

The YMCA of Greater Toronto has a well-established, research-based approach to early learning. Our curriculum YMCA Playing to Learn has been successfully implemented in all programs for children 0-6 since 2005. In 2006, all YMCAs across Canada adopted this curriculum.

YMCA Playing to Learn 2nd Edition was published in 2015. This edition incorporates new research, best practices, knowledge and experience. There is more information on infants and toddlers, and it has a greater focus on the social and emotional development of the young child.

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

Our YMCA Playing to Learn curriculum is consistent in approach with "How Does Learning Happen?" Ontario's pedagogy for the early years. The core and supporting principles of YMCA Playing to Learn mirror the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) guiding principles. Our pedagogical approach requires educators to be play partners, architects of the playscape, planners, recorders and communicators. We are delighted that our curriculum aligns so well with the Ministry of Education's framework for early learning and its "How Does Learning Happen?" document. We are confident that this alignment will help facilitate the development of the children in our care and their transition to Ontario's school system.

- ✓ **"Minister of Education's Policy Statement on Programming and Pedagogy" https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/Child Care/programCCEYA.pdf**
- ✓ **"How Does Learning Happen?" Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years**
- ✓ **https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-does-learning-happen-ontarios-pedagogy-early-years**
- ✓ **Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)**
- ✓ **https://preschoolcanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ELECT_compressed.pdf**

CURRICULUM

The deliberately organized part of the child's experience and the experience that occurs through everyday aspects of life. Playing to Learn is a curriculum based on play development.

SOCIAL LEARNING

The process of acquiring knowledge about individuals and groups by observing, imitating and interacting with others.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The complex changes within the individual over time that involves the self, feelings and regulating behavior.

Building healthy communities

Our Statement on Play

Each child can reach his or her full human potential through play. Our intention is to provide the best possible environment that allows the best possible play for all children in our care. We endeavour to meet the play needs of all children and must do whatever possible to support the natural urge to play.

Play helps the child to be both engaged with everyday realties and to be absorbed in an ecstatic self-forgetfulness. It ensures involvement, enjoyment, and various forms of success. Play can be powerful or profound, but it is always purposeful.

Play is a vehicle that propels learning and development. Play and development are intertwined; neither precedes the other. All domains of development are supported by play, and play has the additional benefit of being self-initiated and therefore a joy rather than a chore. Play makes discovery pleasurable, but it also propels the child into the vast realm of learning. Play provides a way for children to be healthy in body, mind and spirit.

Play fosters **skill** development. It offers opportunities for gaining new skills as well as refining existing ones.

Play is directly linked to the child's learning. His or her **cognitive** development and academic success are enhanced by the play experience.

Play is **physical** and increases activity levels, fitness, balance, gross motor skills and fine motor actions. A wide range of scientific, mathematical, perspective-taking and other cognitive processes in discovery and other types of play.

Play is **social** and aids in **language** learning while supporting social skills development. Self-concepts and emotions are better understood through play, as is the building of **emotional** intelligence. Important **self-regulatory** skills may be acquired and reinforced through play.

Play builds **resilience** and can help children **manage stress**. There are often therapeutic benefits to play. Typically, children direct their play in ways that address their own socio-emotional issues.

LEARNING

The process of changing existing understanding to accommodate new ideas; acquiring new knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions; discovering through play.

BODY

The physical self.

MIND

The individual's place of thinking; human consciousness emanating from the brain.

SPIRIT

The part of the self that transcends the physical self or thought processes.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

The categories that academics and practitioners use to manage the vast amount of information about human development.

SKILL

A learned behaviour.

COGNITIVE

Related to thinking or reasoning.

"The YMCA's Playing to Learn is a curriculum guide built on the importance and value of play for young children. The document makes, and backs up, arguments of why and how children's play is essential to the healthy social, physical and cognitive development of all children."
Martha Friendly, Executive Director of the Child Care Resources and Research Unit

YMCA Curriculum Goals & Approaches

1) Promoting health, safety, nutrition & well-being:

Keeping children healthy and safe is a priority at the YMCA and we understand that the well-being of their child is a parent's # 1 concern. Therefore, we have developed comprehensive, research-based procedures to support children.

Some of the procedures in place at the YMCA include:

- ✓ Safe supervision of children
- ✓ Child Protection procedures and training
- ✓ Sanitation and disinfection procedures
- ✓ Menu Planning following the Canada Food Guide
- ✓ Communicable disease prevention
- ✓ Emergency procedures
- ✓ Standard First Aid and CPR training

2) Supporting relationships:

At the YMCA we understand that young children flourish in all areas of development when they are in positive and responsive relationships with adults. YMCA educators build a foundation of trust with children by being available, sensitive, responsive, and caring.

YMCA educators create an inclusive and respectful environment to foster positive, equitable, and collaborative relationships. When children feel safe, secure, valued and a contributing member of their world, they are able to explore, discover, try new things, grow, learn and develop.

To support your child's care, growth and development, YMCA educators interact and communicate with parents on a daily basis sharing observations, documentations, and reflections.

GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

Learned actions involving the large muscles of the body. (E.g. kicking a ball)

FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Learned actions involving the small muscles of the body, including the hands, mouth and feet. (E.g. cutting with scissors)

SELF-REGULATION

The child's conscious or unconscious control of her body, relationships and other aspects of him or herself.

RESILLIENCE

The ability to recover quickly from difficulties.

WELL BEING

The state of being comfortable, healthy or happy.

RESPONSIVE CAREGIVNG

The process of offering consistent, reliable care via careful observation of cues.

3) Encouraging children to interact, communicate, & self-regulate:

The YMCA believes that it is the role of the adult in a child's life to support them to learn how to interact effectively with the world around them including other children, adults, and the environment.

Generally self-regulation involves gaining a degree of control over one's bodily functions and impulses, managing one's emotions, changing one's behaviours and maintaining focus or attention on something or someone.

"The better a child can stay calmly focused and alert, the better he integrates the diverse information coming from his different senses, assimilates it and sequences his thoughts and actions." **(Shanker 2012)**

"Caring consistent relationships with adults, provide external supports that serve as the basis for developing self-regulation." **(Gillespie & Seibel 2006)**

Some of the approaches implemented by YMCA educators to set the stage for positive interactions among children, include:

- ✓ Educators provide small group experiences that allow for more individualized adult attention
- ✓ Educators role model inclusive, respectful, and collaborative interactions with children and other adults
- ✓ Educators ensure the learning environment is flexible so they can respond in the moment and build on or scaffold the children's interests
- ✓ Educators ensure toys, equipment, and materials are plentiful and available to children at all times
- ✓ Children are given freedom to make choices
- ✓ By engaging as a play partner with children, educators are able to demonstrate pro-social skills including promoting discussion, problem solving when conflict arises, and understanding how their actions effect others

Discover
To find something unexpectedly.

OBSERVATION

The informal or formal perception of an individual or group of people, or the perceptions gained from looking at an environment or object.

DOCUMENTATION

The process of observation, data collection, careful analysis and reflection resulting in display that is an integral part of a play curriculum.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning.

STRATEGY

A plan or method of achieving a goal.

4) Fostering exploration, play & inquiry:

Children are born with a natural sense of curiosity and wonder. They play naturally.

As parents and educators, we watch children explore the world through their senses, repetition of tasks, imitation, asking questions and pretending. But what are children really doing? Children are putting together all the pieces of how the world works through exploration, play and inquiry.

YMCA Educators understand the importance of play. They foster, expand and scaffold this natural talent called play by being:

- ✓ active participants
- ✓ architects of the play scape
- ✓ keen observers
- ✓ planners
- ✓ reporters
- ✓ collaborators
- ✓ reflective practitioners

Observing a day-in -the-life of a YMCA Child Care program, you will note that the majority of activities are directed by the children. Children decide where, when, what and how they wish to play. Their decisions are based on their interests and curiosity. The educator responds by adapting the environment by adding new toys, materials and equipment, posing questions, and being a play partner. This sets the stage for further play, inquiry, discovery and learning. The educator's role is to support play so that learning and development flourishes.

ROLE-MODELLING

Demonstrating appropriate behaviour that can be seen by the children so that they can observe and internalize what they see; showing how a particular role is conducted.

SCAFFOLD

The role of the adult (or more mature child) in providing a mental bridge to support a child's learning.

PRO-SOCIAL SKILLS

Learned behaviour that demonstrates empathy, esteem, honour and consideration to another person.

CURIOSITY

Mental interest that leads to behaviours of discovery and learning.

INQUIRY

The act of asking questions in order to gather information.

5) Providing child-initiated & adult-supported experiences:

Children and parents are warmly greeted upon arrival. After a brief check-in to share news from the evening before, the children get down to the serious business of playing.

The room is set up with a variety of activities that support the observed interests of the children. The children might join some friends at the creative art table to work collaboratively on a collage, or they might work on a Lego structure they safely stored on the counter to complete the next day.

There are no expectations imposed by the educator or curriculum on where children play, or whom they play with, or how long they play at one activity. That is for the child to choose based on their interests.

You may overhear a small group of children in the dramatic play centre dressed in costumes acting out a scene of being "mama, papa, and baby at the doctor". The educator has been assigned the role of "doctor" by the children and takes this opportunity to ask the children questions that expand their understanding of what happens at a check-up.

The following day, the educator supports the children's interest by adding books about doctors and hospitals to the dramatic play centre hoping to build on the children's interest and spark more questions and play – resulting in more learning.

CHILD DIRECTED PLAY

Spontaneous activity initiated by the child that is allowed to take the course decided upon by the child; may involve careful adult planning.

PLAY PARTNER (SHIP)

One or more individuals playing together with a shared interest; in the case of adult-child play partnership, the adult allows the child to take the lead.

DRAMATIC PLAY

Sustained pretend play in which the child acts out a role using movement and props.

CHILD CENTRED EDCUATION

A philosophy of Child Care and education that emphasizes the importance of the child's need to direct his own activity, to make play choices spontaneously, and to learn at a self-determined level.

6) Planning environments to support every child's learning:

YMCA Child Care programs are located in a variety of facilities including schools, community centres, and YMCA owned buildings.

At the YMCA, we understand that the parent is the child's first teacher; the YMCA educator is the second teacher, and the learning environment is the child's third teacher.

The YMCA's unique approach to planning and creating learning environments, supports children's play so that early learning and healthy development is maximized.

YMCA learning centres are designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the children.

We have created home like environments that include calm colours, soft furnishings, items from nature like plants and pets, family photographs, and accessories that are intended to make children feel comfortable and safe.

YMCA educators understand that children learn holistically, not in one area of development at a time. We understand that riding a tricycle involves gross motor and fine motor skills, but the play children engage in while riding a tricycle involves many more - communication skills, social skills, etc.

Therefore, you may find books, paper and crayons in the block area because children are using these items to figure out how to build a bridge from one shelf to another. You may also find play dough in the dramatic play area where children are making pizza. On a beautiful day, you may see indoor furniture move outdoors to take advantage of the weather.

PLANNING

The act of preparing and designing experiences and activities (in this instance in accordance with YMCA curriculum).

ENVIRONMENT

Aspects of the immediate surroundings including the delineation of space, the presence or absence of objects, furniture, light, colour, toys and playthings and the inclusion/exclusion of indoor and outdoor space.

LEARNING CENTRES

Specially prepared places where materials are provided to respond to children's interests or trigger new ones; spaces for learning in content specific areas; discovery or inquiry-based spaces designed by educators for small groups of children.

PLAY MATERIALS

Any found items or purpose-made manufactured items that are used for props, for creative enterprises or construction.

WHOLE CHILD

A concept of the child that sees all developmental domains as interacting with the child being more than the sum of domains.

7) Incorporating indoor, outdoor, active, rest & quiet activities:

YMCA educators design a daily schedule that meets the needs of the children and provides for a balance of activities throughout the day.

Consideration for the care requirements include age, developmental level, energy level, and interests of the children.

Generous blocks of time for children to explore, play, and inquire are included both indoors and outdoors.

The daily schedule is not rigid but operating in small groups is mandated. One small group of children may be on a walk in the community, while the other small group may prefer to stay indoors and bake cookies.

Periods of active and quiet play are interwoven throughout the day both indoors and outdoors.

At the YMCA, we don't let the weather stop us from having fun in nature. The children love to bundle up in warm, dry clothes and head out to jump in puddles or make snowballs. In very poor weather, active play takes place indoors so that children get the physical activity their bodies require.

YMCA educators are trained to keep transitions from activity to activity to a minimum, so children get to play more.

However, young children thrive on regular schedules and feel secure when they can predict what will occur throughout the day, therefore snacks and mealtimes are consistent as is the rest period in the afternoon for young children.

Buildi
communities

TRANSITIONS

Aspects of the planned and unplanned day that create changes from one type of activity or event to another.

FAMILY

A number of people who decide to live together or who are bonded by birth-ties, who share a home and who share common values and similar lifestyles; adults taking on a parental role, and one or more children living and functioning as a unit.

ENGAGEMENT

Time spent paying attention to something or someone.

COMMUNICATION

The two-way process of sending and receiving information to reach a shared understanding.

8) Fostering engagement & communication with parents:

At the YMCA we understand that a parent is the most important person in a child's life. YMCA educators play a supporting role, while parents go to work and school.

YMCA educators and parents communicate on a daily basis about children's activities and health. YMCA educators keep a record of each infant, toddler, and preschool age child's learning and development in their Daily Journal, which are available to parents to read each day.

Getting to know family members is critical as an educator, and including family members in program helps a child to feel a greater sense of belonging.

Other strategies to engage parents and gain input include:

- ✓ Documentations that describe play and its connection to learning
- ✓ Celebrations & events
- ✓ Parent surveys
- ✓ Displays of children's artwork, sculptures, and creations
- ✓ Photographs of children at play
- ✓ Posting planning documents that include observations of children's interests and activities introduced by YMCA educators

9) Involving community partners:

While our range of community partners is broad, the largest and most important is the education system. Some of our centres are located in schools, so relationships with principals, faculty and staff are critical.

The YMCA works closely with local community agencies and partners in order to support the children and families in our programs. We view the community as a valuable resource and our staff plan learning opportunities to engage the community in our programs.

The YMCA actively seeks out opportunities to share our knowledge and to learn from others in the community through networking opportunities, community planning tables and conferences.

10) Supporting educators' continuous professional learning:

The YMCA is committed to the ongoing professional development of all our educators.

After all, what the educator learns informs practice, and the benefit is passed onto the children.

YMCA educators attend a series of YMCA curriculum training sessions throughout their career with the YMCA. Additionally, the YMCA provides opportunities for educators to attend external learning events and conferences and keep legislated training requirements like Standard First Aid & Infant and Child CPR, up to date.

On a day-to-day basis, the Child Care centre supervisor is responsible for the leadership, mentorship, coaching and development of educators. Based on the learning needs of the educators, the supervisor may meet with staff to suggest strategies, conduct regular staff meetings to reflect and plan, invite speakers from other YMCA departments or community agencies to attend the centre, or provide materials including links, articles, and various readings to supplement educator's professional learning.

11) Documentation:

YMCA educators participate in a continuous cycle of observation:

- ✓ Documenting play and its significance
- ✓ Determining the children's interests
- ✓ Planning activities that support interests
- ✓ Discussion with team members
- ✓ Reflection that informs the planning of activities and the learning environment

Links are made between theory, research, YMCA curriculum, the YMCA Program Statement, government pedagogy, and children's interests to inform the planning decisions YMCA educators make.

You will see this cycle reflected in the toys, materials, and equipment provided in the play areas, the furniture arrangement, the creative work of children, the activities children are engaging in, on the planning documents posted weekly for parents to read and discuss with the educators, in individual children's' Daily Journals, and in photographs and written descriptions of activities.

This process of continuous program assessment is called reflective practice. Daily educators are observing and engaging with children and evaluating the effectiveness of the learning environment to build on children's interests. Weekly, they are reviewing planning and discussing with their team and supervisor to ensure they are supporting children's learning and development, and monthly, they are meeting as a team to look back on what did and didn't work and then plan for the future.