



## YMCA Program Statement

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

### 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 2000. In 2006, all YMCAs across Canada adopted this curriculum. YMCA Playing to Learn 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. The YMCA of Greater Toronto launched our school age curriculum, A Place to Connect for children 5-12 in 2009. The national roll-out of this curriculum will begin in January 2016. The YMCA has been involved in shaping the development of the provincial early learning framework by sharing YMCA Playing to Learn and our training materials to support educators in implementing a play-based approach. The goals and approaches of the YMCA curricula align in philosophy, standards, and recommendations with the provincial frameworks below. It is



gratifying to see Ministry of Education embrace play and adopt a very similar approach.

Minister of Education's Policy Statement on Programming and Pedagogy  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/programCCEYA.pdf> - website address

Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/> - website address

### **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 realities 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.

"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 Childcare Resources and Research Unit



## **YMCA Curriculum Goals & Approaches**

### **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

### **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 each child's care, growth and development YMCA educators interact and communicate with parents on a daily basis sharing observations, documentations, and reflections.

### **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 affect others

Educators attend trainings that address self-regulation and resilience

### **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 their world through their senses, repetition of tasks, imitation, asking questions, 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.

### **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.

Tomorrow 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.

### **Planning learning 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. Or you may find play dough in the dramatic play area where children are making pizza. And on a beautiful day you may see indoor furniture move outdoors to take advantage of the weather.



### **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, age, developmental level, energy level, and interests of the children are included.

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 meal times are consistent as is the rest period in the afternoon for young children.

### **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 aged child's learning and development in their Continuum of Development booklet 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

- Parent/Educator interviews

- 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

### **Involving community partner:**

While our range of community partners is broad, the largest and most important is the education system. Many 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.

### **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 learning huddles to focus on a particular area of YMCA curriculum with the entire team, 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.

### **Documentation:** YMCA educators participate in a continuous cycle of observation

- Documenting play and its significance

- Determining the children's interests

- Planning activities that support the 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 Continuum of Development booklets, 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.

## Glossary of Definitions

**PHILOSOPHY** -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).

**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 and feelings and regulating behavior.

**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.

**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.

**RESILIENCE** -The ability to recover quickly from difficulties.

**WELL BEING** - The state of being comfortable, healthy or happy.

**RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING** -The process of offering consistent, reliable care via careful observation of cues.

**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 of 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.

**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.

**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 EDUCATION** - A philosophy of childcare 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.

**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 play things 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.

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

**WHOLE CHILD** - A concept of the child that sees all developmental domains as interacting, the child being more than the sum of domains.

**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 life-styles; 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.