

Ontario Early Years Program Statement

Welcome to Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) in Waterloo Region. We are a universal service system supporting children and their parents/caring adults. Our program statement will outline our view of the child and parents, our shared philosophy and pedagogy as well as the goals and approaches we use to ensure:

- All expecting parents, parents, caring adults, home child care providers and professionals working with parents and children have access to high quality services that support them in their role;
- All children have access to inclusive, play and inquiry-based learning opportunities to improve their developmental health and well-being;
- All parents, caring adults and home child care providers have a better understanding of early learning and development, find it easy to access support, and are provided with an accessible, non-judgmental place to seek help;
- Local services collaborate in an integrated way to meet the needs of children and families actively engaging parents and caring adults to increase participation.

The OEYC Program Statement is reviewed annually to ensure it remains aligned with the Ministry of Education's Policy Statement for Family Support programs.

Our View of the Child

Every child is special in the eyes of their parents and those who love them. As Educators/facilitators 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 OEYCs 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.

Our View of Parents

The parent is a child's first teacher. As such they are capable and competent of making the best choice for their child. OEYCs build capacity of parents through family-centred practices which include: treating families with dignity and respect; providing individual, flexible and responsive support; sharing information so families can make informed decisions; ensuring family choice regarding intervention options; and providing the necessary resources and supports for parents to care for their children in ways that produce optimal parent and child outcomes.

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 is an opportunity for parents to learn more about their child and their child's development and for the child to learn more about themselves.

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 are utilized 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.

OEYC Goals and Approaches

The OEYCs of Waterloo Region have a well-established, research based approach to early learning. OEYCs WR are universal prevention and early intervention programs available to all parents and caring adults regardless of socioeconomic status, family composition or level of family functioning. Our curriculum has been successfully implemented in all programs for children 0-6 and their parents/caring adults since 2003. OEYC programs and services in Waterloo Region demonstrate:

Purposeful design of a “one stop shop” for programs, services and resources that contribute to healthy child development, enhance parenting skills and the early identification of special needs or developmental concerns.

Intentional planning to create an extensive range of universally accessible programs, services and resources to children pre-birth to age six and their families in the Waterloo Region.

Diligent work in a highly **collaborative and coordinated** manner with our partners to address gaps in service and to improve the integration of services within the community.

Demonstrated ability to deliver programs and achieve **positive learning outcomes** for children, youth and families based on strength based approaches and pedagogy.

Utilize both **central and decentralized** sites to meet neighbourhood and larger community needs.

Purposeful parent engagement and opportunities for parent to parent support.

Learning and Development

- ***Fostering exploration, play and inquiry***

Children are born with a natural sense of curiosity and wonder. They play naturally. As parents and educators/facilitators, we watch children explore their world through 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. OEYC educators/facilitators 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
- ✓ Collaborators
- ✓ Reflective practitioners

The educator/facilitator's role is to support play so that learning and development flourishes.

- ***Providing programs and services to build parent/caring adult capacity***

OEYCs offer a variety of programs to support and engage parents with concurrent early learning programs, and child and parent interactive learning opportunities.

- ***Planning learning environments to support every child's learning***

The OEYCs approach planning and creating learning environments for children and their parent/caring adults so that early learning and healthy development as well as parent capacity building is maximized.

We have created home like environments that include pleasing colours, soft furnishings, items from nature, family photographs and accessories intended to make families feel comfortable and safe.

- ***Supporting educators/facilitators' continuous professional learning***

The OEYCS are committed to the ongoing professional development of all our staff/volunteers. OEYC staff attend a variety of trainings throughout their career with an OEYC. Additionally the OEYC provides opportunities for staff to attend external learning events and conferences.

- ***Reflective Practice***

OEYC staff participate in a continuous cycle of observation. Links are made between theory, research, government pedagogy and children's interests to inform the planning decisions staff make. You will see this cycle reflected in the toys, materials and equipment provided in play areas, the furniture arrangement, the creative work of the children, and the activities offered.

This process of continuous program assessment is called reflective practice. In addition this cycle of observation is employed in being responsive to diverse and emerging parent needs and delivery of parent support.

Support and Engagement

- ***Supporting Relationships***

OEYCs create inclusive and respectful environments to foster positive, equitable, and collaborative relationships. When children and their parents/caring adults feel safe, secure, valued and a contributing member of their world they are able to learn, grow and develop.

- ***Fostering engagement and communication***

The OEYC understands that a parent is the most important person in a child's life. Getting to know the family is critical to creating a greater sense of belonging and building a community with the centres.

Other strategies of parent engagement include:

- Consistent staffing to foster relationships
- Non-judgmental support creating a safety net of services and resources around families
- Reflection of diversity of families and community in welcoming inclusive space, programs and organizational culture
- Engaging families where they live with programs and services offered throughout the region
- Digital media creating continuous dialogue with families
- Resource libraries
- Formal and informal peer support and connections
- Supporting families prenatally and at each stage of development

Referrals and Connections

▪ ***Fostering diverse and inclusive programs and services***

Our programs and services are intentional and coordinated. We work as a system to facilitate choices for parents.

We provide warm, welcoming environments for families to meet with peers and community professionals.

OEYCs support early identification and interventions in helping parents with the system navigation. OEYC staff work with parents to utilize screening tools connecting them with community agencies onsite at the OEYC as well as throughout Waterloo Region and the wider community.

▪ ***Developing partnerships and linkages***

OEYCs are one stop, hub like places. The range of community partners is broad. OEYCs work closely with community agencies and partners to support children and families.

OEYCs actively seek opportunities to share our knowledge and to learn from others in the community through networking opportunities, community planning tables and conferences.

Programs are offered in main sites as well as in satellite and service delivery locations located in areas with minimal services and at risk neighbourhoods; reaching families who do not attend the main sites.

System Planning and Accountability

- ***Promoting health, safety, nutrition & well-being***

Health and safety is a priority at OEYCs. We have developed comprehensive, research-based procedures to support children and their parents/caring adults. Some of the procedures in place at an OEYC include:

- ✓ Child protection procedures and training
 - ✓ Sanitation and disinfection procedures
 - ✓ Communicable disease prevention
 - ✓ Emergency Procedures
 - ✓ Standard First Aid and CPR
- Parent engagement and consultation is key. Regular opportunities for input is created
 - Internal evaluation and quality assessment occur
 - Service plans are developed on defined needs and local data

The goals and approaches of the OEYC align in philosophy, standards, and recommendations with the provincial frameworks below.

- ✓ **Minister of Education’s Policy Statement on Programming and Pedagogy**
<https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/programCCEYA.pdf>
- ✓ **“How Does Learning Happen?” Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years**
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/pedagogy.html>
- ✓ **Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)**
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/>
- ✓ **Think, Feel, Act – Lessons from Research about Young Children**
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/ResearchBriefs.pdf>