

A PARENT'S GUIDE

TO

EARLY CHILDHOOD

PROGRAMS

ISSUED BY

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

**A PARENT'S GUIDE
TO
EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS**

ISSUED BY

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

**PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
REVISED 1999**

**NO PART OF THIS BOOKLET MAY BE
REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Message to Parents	2
Child Care Facilities Board	3
Definitions	4
Child's Needs	6
Special Needs Children	7
Child Care Subsidy Program	9
Characteristics of a Good Child Care Program	10
Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act	11
Developmental Areas/Activities and Equipment	13
Questions Parents Should Ask	16
Helping Your Child Adjust	18
Ongoing Responsibility	21
How to Find a Licensed Centre	23

INTRODUCTION

Child care involving family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. has existed for generations. During the past 10 years, however, there has been a steady expansion of child care to include care of children by non-family members and in early childhood centres.

Recent estimates show that the majority of Island families with young children need child care services for a variety of reasons. This demand has resulted in a steady increase in the number of licensed child care facilities.

“A Parent’s Guide to Early Childhood Programs” has been designed to assist parents in the careful selection of a child care centre. The guidelines presented were developed with respect to all licensed centres, whether they be half-day programs, full-day programs, early childhood centres, day care homes, or school-age centres.

While the Department of Health & Social Services does not become directly involved in unlicensed private child care arrangements, parents could apply the guidelines presented in this booklet to such situations as the advice is based not only on regulation but on principles of child development, safety and well-being of the children, and common sense.

For more information/consultation, contact:
Early Childhood Services
Department of Health & Social Services
P.O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8
Telephone: 368-6130

Dear Parents:

In choosing a child care centre, it is very important to remember that each centre has its own approach or philosophy that guides its program.

Licensing requirements deal with such areas as staffing requirements, health, safety, fire, emergency, daily program schedule, nutrition, and administration. These requirements ensure that all centres meet basic standards.

Each program, however, will naturally reflect the individual expertise, interests, attitudes, and personalities of the staff involved, and therefore each program will be unique. It is up to you to decide which program meets your child's needs and best reflects and supports your way of dealing with your child.

You are about to make an important decision. For your child's sake, please give it the consideration it deserves.

CHILD CARE FACILITIES BOARD

In Prince Edward Island, the Child Care Facilities Act authorizes the licensing and regulation of child care facilities. The Act also provides for the establishment of the Child Care Facilities Board, which is responsible to the Minister of Health and Social Services. This Board's function is to license child care facilities, as well as to enforce the Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act.

In addition to the chairperson, the Child Care Facilities Board has 6 members: 1 representative from the Department of Health & Social Services; 1 from the Department of Education; 2 members from the community; and 2 members of the Early Childhood Development Association, 1 representing day care centres and 1 representing kindergartens. The Early Childhood Consultant and the Secretary for Early Childhood Services are resource staff to the Board.

A policy of the Child Care Facilities Board states, "In order to carry out our responsibilities to children under the Child Care Facilities Act, it is imperative that all persons in the community who have knowledge regarding concerns relating to the function of an early childhood centre, the staff, or children who may be felt to be "neglected", feel comfortable enough to pass this information along to our Board".

It is important to remember that the Board has a strict policy that, whenever someone (early childhood staff, parent, etc.) approaches the Board or a Board member, any information given will be held in utmost confidence and that their name will not be given to other individuals or the community without their permission.

The Board realizes that most people who approach the Board with a specific concern experience some degree of discomfort in reporting someone. The Board stresses, however, that this action could very well be the key factor in recognizing a child who is in danger.

If you have a concern, contact:

Child Care Facilities Board
c/o Dept. Of Health & Social Services
P. O. Box 2000, Charlottetown, PEI CIA 7N8
Telephone: 902-368-6130

DEFINITIONS

A child care service is one which is offered to parents by private individuals or community/church-sponsored groups who provide care to children in an environment which fosters their overall development.

The Child Care Facilities Board licenses two types of facilities:

A. Type I:

Early Childhood Centre - A facility whose primary objective, in the judgment of the Board, is to provide an early childhood developmental program emphasizing age-appropriate activities.

Note: Early childhood centres are usually advertised to parents as:

Day care centres - full day, mixed age group
Kindergarten - half day, 5 year olds
Nursery school - half day, mixed age group

B. Type 11:

Day Care Home - A facility in a private residence whose primary objective, in the judgment of the Board, is to provide relatively informal care emphasizing family-oriented activities for children.

Note: A day care home usually offers a full day program for mixed age groups of children.

School-Age Child Care Centre - A facility that operates outside of school hours and, in the judgment of the Board, provides a relatively unstructured program emphasizing supervision and recreation for school-age children.

Note: A school-age child care centre may provide child care before and after school, and on a full-time basis on school holidays, teacher workshop days, March break, etc.

Occasional Centre - A facility which, in the judgment of the Board, provides child care to individual children on a one time only or irregular basis regardless of its hours of operation, and focuses primarily on supervision.

Note: An occasional centre may be found at shopping malls, babysitting rooms at exercise clubs, hotel services, etc.

CHILD'S NEEDS

Humans have four basic needs - physical, emotional, social and intellectual:

1. Children have **physical** needs for nutrition, rest, exercise, and safety.
2. Children have **emotional** needs for a loving, consistent, stable environment.
3. Children have **social** needs for positive relationships with adults and other children.
4. Children have **intellectual** needs for interesting, stimulating activities.

In a child care program, staff are responsible for ensuring that the child's four basic needs are met through careful program design and staff interaction.

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

In addition to the basic needs mentioned above, some children may be said to have “special needs” due to any one or several of a number of handicaps, which may include:

1. Physical disability (orthopedic and/or neurological impairments).
2. Mental retardation (e.g. Down’s Syndrome).
3. Visual Impairments (blind or partially blind).
4. Hearing impairments (deaf or partially deaf).
5. Speech and/or language problems.
6. Emotional disturbances (includes behaviour problems, autism, etc.).
7. Hyperactivity.
8. Perceptual problems.

In general, a “special needs” child is one who needs extra help in attaining the usual developmental goals.

Parents in this situation should discuss program content at length with the supervisor of the centre. If your child has a special need, then the program should respond in a special way to that need.

A parent of a special needs child should ask (in addition to the rest of the questions in the Guide):

1. How will my child be assessed? (If a formal assessment has not already been done).
2. How will your program reflect my child’s needs?
3. How will you measure his/her progress?
4. Will my child participate in the same activities as the rest of the children?

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

The Child Care Subsidy Program assists families with the cost of licensed child care. This program is administered through the five regional authorities.

Subsidies are available when, in the judgment of the regional office, a family's need for child care services is valid. The amount of subsidy depends on the results of a sliding scale come test. Full and partial subsidies are available.

For additional information on the Child Care Subsidy Program, parents should contact the Regional Day Care Coordinator at their nearest regional office:

West Prince Region
P. O. Box 8
O'Leary, PE COB IVO
859-8800

East Prince Region
237 Water Street
Summerside, PE C1N IB4
888-8111

Queens Region
P. O. Box 2000, 161 St. Peter's Road
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8
368-5330

Southern Kings Region
P. O. Box 1500

Montague, PE COA IRO
838-6182

Eastern Kings Region
P. O. Box 550
Souris, PE COA 2BO
687-7055

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CHILD CARE PROGRAM

When you visit a child care program, keep in mind some of the following characteristics and decide whether they are indicative of the centre you are in:

1. Warm, loving staff who ensure that all the children receive sufficient attention to meet their needs.
2. Disciplinary policies which accentuate the positive aspects of children's behaviour, ensure that the children are treated fairly, and respect their rights and opinions.
3. A relaxed, warm, loving and "home-like" environment.
4. A variety of equipment that meets the children's needs and suits their different stages of development.
5. Flexible daily programming that takes into consideration the needs of the children and displays a general purpose or direction.
6. An atmosphere of mutual trust, concern, and respect among staff and children.
7. Bright, attractive, cozy indoor areas with adequate space allocated for both group and individual activities.
8. Clean, safe, attractive outdoor play areas that are available for daily use.

REGULATIONS

The following are specific things which are regulated by the Child Care Facilities Act and which parents should expect to see when they visit any licensed centre:

1. Current license displayed for parents. Any conditions will be outlined on the license.
2. Explanation of centre's policies regarding fees, hours of operation, sick days, vacation, storm days, etc.
3. Physical space is clean, safe, and readily accessible to the children.
4. Indoor play equipment and furniture which is safe, appropriate to the ages of the children and in compliance with the Hazardous Products Act (Canada).
5. Clean washrooms.
6. Animals may be present but only with written guidelines from a public health officer.
7. No smoking in presence of children.
8. No hot beverages (coffee, tea, etc.) near children.
9. No smoking in the presence of children.
10. Staff who are familiar with emergency procedures.
11. Fire drills practised once a month.
12. Telephone in working order.
13. Emergency telephone numbers posted (fire, doctor, etc.).
14. Complete first aid kit on premises.
15. Staff with first aid training.
16. Back-up staff immediately available when only one staff is required to be on duty

17. Nutritional meals and snacks.
18. Menus posted for parents' information.
19. Administrative details (registration, receipts, etc.) handled in an organized and efficient manner.
20. Individual washcloths, toothbrushes, blankets, and resting mats for children in full day program.
21. Behaviour management policies, written out and available to parents, which indicate a positive approach to discipline.
22. Daily program schedule which includes but is not limited to:
 - group and individual activities
 - activities designed to enhance emotional, social, cognitive, and development
 - active and quiet play
23. Program staff who are at least 18 years old.
24. No child is ever left unsupervised.
25. Supervisor and at least one staff person have early childhood training.

Copies of the Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act are available from Early Childhood Services, Department of Health and Social Services.

DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS/ACTIVITIES AND EQUIPMENT

The following is a list of some basic equipment and activities that should be part of an early childhood program. The activities are grouped according to the type of development that would be encouraged or enhanced by their use. The examples given are brief and general and are not meant to limit the scope of an early childhood program. For more detailed information, discuss the program's activities with the supervisor.

- 1. Large Muscle (Gross Motor) Control:**
 - large blocks
 - climber
 - slide
 - balance beam
 - wood-working
 - sandbox

- 2. Small Muscle (Fine Motor) Control:**
 - screwdriver (wrist control)
 - squeezing, pouring
 - nuts and bolts
 - handling tiny objects

- 3. Musical Experiences:**
 - rhythm instructions
 - group songs, finger plays, dancing
 - record player
 - piano, guitar, autoharp, etc.

- 4. Art Experiences:**
 - easel
 - cutting and pasting
 - fingerprint
 - clay
 - crayons
 - collage

5. **Science experiences:**
 - scales
 - magnets
 - pets, plants
 - sink and float
 - animal study

6. **Language Development:**
 - classifying
 - opposite concepts
 - activities to increase vocabulary
 - rhyming exercise
 - stories
 - reading corner
 - letter recognition by shape and sound

7. **Reasoning Skills (Beginning Math Concepts):**
 - sorting beads, buttons, etc.
 - grading by size (blocks, etc.)
 - memory games
 - counting
 - puzzles, matching and sorting shapes
 - pegboards
 - later - number recognition, once child understands concept of quantity

8. **Socialization and Dramatic Play:**
 - housekeeping corner
 - dress-up
 - group activities
 - puppets

9. **Sensory Experiences:**
 - hot-cold
 - smelling exercises
 - tasting exercises
 - listening exercises
 - touching exercises
 - colour

10. Self-Concept:

- group activities
- weighing and measuring children
- family concepts
- good interaction with sensitive adult staff

Many activities/pieces of equipment overlap in their categories; e.g. clay could be art experience, also enhances fine motor control, could be sensory experience, etc.

It is extremely important to remember that a different type of program (day care or kindergarten or nursery school) does not eliminate the need for stimulation in any area of development. For example, a 4 1/2 or 5 year-old in a kindergarten passes through the same stages of development and experiences the same developmental needs as a 4 1/2 or 5 year-old in a day care centre, and vice versa. Any program which stresses one aspect of development to the exclusion of others is not meeting the needs of the whole child.

QUESTIONS PARENTS SHOULD ASK THE SUPERVISOR

Once you have narrowed down your choice to those centres which are conveniently located and are open early and/or late enough, it is strongly advised that you contact the supervisor and arrange for a visit to the program while the children are present.

When you arrive, observe the children in the centre. Do they look happy and involved? Are they moving freely about, choosing their own activities? Is there enough equipment about to challenge their interests?

Talk to the supervisor. The following are some questions/concerns you may wish to discuss:

A. All Programs:

1. How do you handle discipline?
2. Are children ever isolated for disciplinary reasons?
3. Do you spank children?
4. What if my child becomes sick during the day?
5. What if my child becomes seriously injured?
6. What happens if I am late to pick up my child?
7. What do you do in the vent of a snowstorm? How does that affect billing?
8. Does my child need to bring anything (slippers, washcloth, blanket, change of clothes, etc.)?
9. How many children do you have in each age group? How many children attend on an average day?
10. How many adults are present with those children? Are all adults actively involved, or are some cooking, typing, etc.?
11. What are your rates? How am I expected to pay (monthly, weekly, etc.)? When and how often do you revise your rates?

12. To what extent are parents involved at your centre? Do you have a newsletter? Do you have parent meetings?
13. What kind of a building are you in? Are you on first or second floor? Are you in the basement? Do children use stairs during the day?
14. Do children play outside? Summer and winter? What kind of an outdoor play area do you have? Are you close to the road? Is the play area fenced in? Do you have outdoor play equipment? What kinds?
15. Is your program geared to individual or group activities? What would you do if my child didn't want to join the group?
16. Describe your daily schedule of activities?
17. My child is _____years old. What would he/she be doing all day?
18. Do the children go on field trips? What staff/child ratio do you have on field trips?

B. Day Care Programs (full-day):

1 to 18 as above.

19. What if my child doesn't like or refuses to eat the meal you are serving? Do you offer an alternative?
20. Are children allowed a rest period? Is it mandatory? Do the children sleep? Do they have to? How long is the rest period?

HELPING OUR CHILD ADJUST

Now that your child is about to start a pre-school program (day care, kindergarten, or nursery/play-school), it will be a new experience not only for your child but for you as well. Aside from the fact that you and your child will be separated for part or most of the day, you may also notice some behavioural changes in your child as he adjusts to a new daily schedule. These changes are fairly common - many parents notice the same changes when their child begins Grade 1.

The following are some typical reactions of children beginning pre-school programs:

1. At first your child will be very excited with the anticipation of the first day. Children handle this in different ways but, in general, if you show a calm, relaxed, and positive attitude toward your child's first day, your child will respond in the same way.
2. For the first few weeks, your child will probably be very excited by the newness of it all - new friends, new adults, a new place to go, new activities, etc. When he arrives home, he will need time to wind down (just as adults do). He has had a very stimulating day and you may find him unable to settle into your normal family routines. This is a natural reaction and generally lasts only a few weeks. You may want to adjust your routine to compensate for this - maybe a short walk after supper. On the other hand, a child who is usually loud and boisterous may seem quite subdued after a day in an early childhood centre. It's possible that the centre's activities provide an outlet for some of his excess energies.
3. Your child has been used to having mommy or daddy all day - now he doesn't see you for a long stretch every day. You may find your child demanding more of your time at home now, and needing lots of attention (and using positive or negative behaviour to get it). Try planning a special activity for the two or three of you. If you have heavy demands on your time, try including your child in your activities (setting the table, drying dishes, folding laundry, etc.).

4. Most of your child's energy is being used up during the day. His ability to cope with new and exciting things has been stretched to its limits. Things at home should remain as familiar as possible.
5. Different programs will emphasize different kinds of activities, and some programs may change daily. In general, if your child has spent a quiet day (painting, stories, music, etc.), you may find him loopy and boisterous at home; if your child has spent most of the day playing with large blocks, climbing, running, etc., you may find him quiet at home.
6. Children tend to try out behaviour they see in other children. Your child may suddenly exhibit some kind of new (and probably unacceptable) behaviour some day. This is perfectly natural, a normal part of growing up. It is very important for you to be consistent in your reactions to this new behaviour. Generally, each new tactic will pass after a short time. If unacceptable behaviour persists, or gets worse, talk to the director of your child care centre.
7. Most parents, when they pick up their child, will ask, "What did you do at day care/kindergarten/nursery school today?" and the universal comment of children seems to be, "Nothing!". You might want to ask instead, "Did you have a good day?". In his own way your child will tell you everything (well, almost everything) that he did. You might want to ask staff to keep you up to date on words of new songs, etc. so that you can share some of your child's new experiences with him.
8. Be prepared for the fact that you are no longer the "one and only" adult in your child's life. Most children develop a great love and adoration for their pre-school teachers. You may find your child wants everything done the way his teacher does it (pants must be tucked inside boots, or must be pulled down over boots, as the case may be). Most of your child's preferences will be insignificant but, if one or more really bother you, talk to the staff at the centre.

Forewarned is forearmed, as they say. You may notice your child behaving in one of the above ways, or in a way not mentioned, or you may notice no change at all. Whatever your child's reaction, if you can help your child's adjustment to a child care program, you will help to make his whole experience a happy one.

ONGOING RESPONSIBILITY

Once you have made your choice and your child is registered, your responsibility is to regularly evaluate your choice:

1. Is your child happy? Is he/she eager to go in the morning, or after 2-3 weeks does he/she still cry and cling to you at the door?
2. Do you feel comfortable with the staff? Are they friendly, open to your concerns and comments?
3. Discuss any problems you are having with the director of the program. Evaluate your child's progress with him/her regularly..
4. Try to make regular visits to the program to speak with the staff and observe your child in his/her daily activities.
5. Be wary of any program that is not receptive to visits by the parents or that does not provide information on policies and programming.

If you have a problem or concern, and you have discussed it with the supervisor of your centre but are still not satisfied, then your next step is to contact the Child Care Facilities Board.

Your concern may or may not be a violation of one of the Regulations of the Child Care Facilities Act. If it isn't and you feel the situation is serious enough, then you may need to look for another centre. If you come to this decision, explain your reasons to the supervisor. Don't feel bad about it. This is your child, and you have the right and responsibility to make the decision. With all the different children, families, etc. using child care facilities, it would be impossible for any one centre to please everybody all the time.

If, however, your concern is a violation of regulation, the Child Care Facilities Board will become involved and will deal directly with the supervisor of your centre.

Although the Child Care Facilities Board generally deals with licensed centres, parents who have a concern with an unlicensed arrangement may also receive help from the Child Care Facilities board. In many cases, the number of children present may be in violation of the Child Care Facilities Act, and the home may actually need to be licensed. In cases of a serious nature, the Child Care Facilities Board may refer the parent to the appropriate person/agency to deal with the problem.

HOW TO FIND A LICENSED CENTRE

“A Directory of Licensed Child Care Programs”, distributed by Health and Community Services Agency, lists and gives brief information about each licensed centre on Prince Edward Island.

The Directory is revised annually and lists all types of child care programs.

Copies of the Directory are available at the regional authorities (list on page 9), doctors’ offices, public health nurses, or by contacting:

Early Childhood Services
Department of Health & Social Services
P. O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8
Telephone: 368-6130