



YMCA Child Care Policies

Programming Policy

The YMCA is committed to providing children with an opportunity to further their personal development within a responsive and intentional program. Given the diverse nature and requirements of the communities served, programs may differ in terms of daily structure and routine. However, all share a common philosophy, core values and certain key characteristics that facilitate the provision of high quality Child Care.

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Curriculum

YMCA Child Care programs are play based programs that use YMCA Canada Playing to Learn and A Place to Connect Curriculum for Early Learning and School Age Centres, respectively, and the *Alberta Curriculum Framework*. Educators are always prepared to engage children in programming.

Children will be provided with daily opportunities to connect, participate, discover, learn, and have fun while enhancing their cognitive, social, and physical development. Our routines not only promote consistency as children move through their days at a YMCA Child Care, but the planned program remains flexible and responsive to the individual and group needs, interests, and concerns. Choices are utilized in our programs to develop children's independence, leadership skills, and positive decision-making skills, as they foster positive intergenerational relationships and participate in activities that address development in body, mind, and spirit.

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Playing to Learn

At the YMCA we celebrate play as the primary vehicle for learning and development in the early years. Our Educators are trained in the National YMCA Playing to Learn Curriculum, and we utilize the Alberta's Provincial Early Learning and Care Framework: *Flight*, to harness the power of play in these critical years of your child's development. At the YMCA of Northern Alberta children are celebrated as mighty learners and citizens while developing the pro-social and academic skills essential to their school aged years. Our Early Learning centre's programs are built on reflective relationship-based practice, developmentally appropriate and homelike environments, play-based reflective planning developed around the interests of the children in all developmental domains, and documentation of children's play and learning experiences.

A Place to Connect

At our YMCA School Age centres, we strive to create a community where all children have a sense of belonging and can foster positive connections. Through respectful and supportive relationships both within our program and the surrounding community we celebrate the strengths, interests, and ongoing development of children. The children will spend their middle childhood years becoming confident decision makers who can affect change in their communities as they interact with our Educators. The skills that we foster will support them as they form new relationships, experience new communities, and flourish as changemakers and citizens throughout their lives.

Developmental Needs

As per the Early Learning and Child Care Act and Regulation, the following developmental needs of children must be met, promoted and nurtured through the program planning. The Early Learning and Child Care Program Plan provides best practice examples that the YMCA strives to incorporate. To meet these needs, Educators promote the YMC Values of Caring, Respect, Honesty, Responsibility, and Diversity and Social Inclusion.

Mental Needs: need to interact with both peers and adults, explore, observe, know and understand and to develop language and listening skills, engage in a safe positive environment and be confident. To meet these needs, Educators must encourage nurturing and positive relationships, provide children with materials and activities that stimulate their language, listening and observational skills and provide times of the day or activities and/or materials which encourage social development and social interaction.

Emotional Needs: need to feel accepted, respected and secure. Educators are to provide an attentive, safe, structured and connected environment where children can belong and build positive self esteem.



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A place where children's ideas are respected, and children's individuality and independent learning is encouraged. Educators help children learn to cope with frustrations and express emotions appropriately, supporting emotional intelligence.

Spiritual Needs: need for creative self-expression, invention, imagination, discovery and experimentation and to find meaning, purpose, structure and value in their life. To meet these needs, Educators provide open ended materials and focus on process instead of outcome; and think of and accept more than one solution to a problem. The program planning must address and help develop a child's positive self-concept (what the child believes about his/her self; their self image) through accepting and valuing their family and their culture and through providing activities which allow children to be appropriately successful in their endeavors. Each child will be celebrated for their uniqueness, and in consultation with parents/guardians, will have opportunities for spiritual development and growth.

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Physical Needs: need to develop age-appropriate physical skills and to participate in adequate activity, sensory experiences, nutrition, rest and health and safety. To meet these needs, Educators must provide time in the day or activities which develop both gross motor skills through large muscle activities and fine motor skills, including manipulation of small materials and developing perceptual motor skills (i.e. body awareness, directional awareness, sensory development, body development and coordination). Educators will also encourage a safe and healthy environment with appropriate rest and nutrition.

Schedule

Each program has a visible and constant routine that is familiar to Educators, families and children. The schedule is posted for parent/guardians. Schedules are open-ended to allow flexibility to meet the individual needs of the children in the program. The daily routine includes active and quiet times, time with friends and time to play alone. Many opportunities are given to children to interact individually or as part of a group. YMCA programs offer interest based activities in the following areas: arts, crafts, music and movement, science, blocks and construction/manipulatives, literacy and numeracy, community and culture, sensory, technology, character and asset building, core values, dramatic, risky and outdoor play.

Non-school days in School Age Care will be enhanced with fieldtrips/outings, special visitors, workshops/courses or events and/or additional programmed activity times.

Outdoor play is a mandatory part of our daily programming, weather permitting.

Programming and Child Involvement

Various activities are offered each day, depending on the emergent and stated interests of the group. Each program's planning allows for children to experience both independent and Educator directed activities in both large and small groups. Planning is flexible to allow for spontaneous activity to develop.

Educators will work to ensure that toys, equipment and planned activities are available to the children that reflect their ages, interests and abilities. This will be based upon observations as well as the stated preferences of the children.

Each program has an established means of allowing their children to be involved in programming which also gives Educators an understanding of the children's current interests, ideas and strengths. For example, observations, daily conversations, surveys, programming clubs, and/or suggestion boxes.



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All children are given leadership opportunities in programs.

Educators will work with the children in each component of their care to develop a set of behaviour expectations for inside and outside of the program. These will be linked directly to the YMCA's core values and how they relate to behaviour practices and relationship building.

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All Educators need to prepare a program list of things they would need for programming. This will give the Director time to collect the lists and purchase the materials they will need for their planning.

Outdoor Programming

As a result of current trends in physical activity and outdoor play which show increases in sedentary behaviour and decreases in unstructured physical activity in indoor and outdoor environments the YMCA of Northern Alberta prioritizes outdoor play experiences in our child care locations. Educators and children will participate in extended periods of all-weather outdoor play based on children's interest and developmental needs while building environmental stewardship and celebrating the wonder of the natural world. By focusing on these play experiences as well as engaging in community exploration the YMCA will promote a joy of outdoor play, physical literacy and health, and healthy risk taking that will follow them into their later school aged and adult lives.

Documentation of Programming

Programming is documented for each component of the program by Educators with prominent involvement from the children – directly or through observation. Accurate documentation of observations and weekly plans is kept to maintain consistency and allow for emergent interests to be identified. Four weeks of programming are posted. In addition, photos and videos will be used to document programming.

Gross Motor Activity and Healthy Habits

Each program will offer a compulsory daily component of gross motor activity, to promote a healthy lifestyle for those in our care. Children will experience gross motor activity outdoors for a minimum 45 minutes in School Age Care on school days and 2 hours in Infant, Toddler, Preschool, Kinder Care (and School Age Care on non school days), weather permitting.

Children will have the opportunity to experience both competitive and co-operative games in an outside or gym environment.

Portable sports and recreational equipment will be available to the group during the gross motor component. This equipment will facilitate physical activity that promotes both group and independent play.

All School Age Programs incorporate a weekly physical literacy component to their gross motor play. This is documented on their weekly programming sheet.

Educators will encourage healthy habits, including personal hygiene and handwashing, physical activity, and mindfulness activities to decrease stress and anxiety.



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Sensory Experiences

At the YMCA, we encourage sensory play for all age groups. Sensory play stimulates all a child's senses and enables the child to learn about and make sense of their world. Examples of sensory play can include, light tables, water tables, playdough, sand tables, art activities, nature play and cooking/baking activities. Sensory play supports fine motor development as well as all other areas of development.

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Homework

Homework is available as a choice for School Aged children except during Gross Motor Activity. Educators can aid children as per ratio requirements, but cannot offer tutoring. The YMCA cannot provide electronics for virtual learning and may not have access to Wi-Fi.

Inclusion and Diversity

The YMCA is an inclusive and diverse charitable organization, therefore we welcome children of all backgrounds and family circumstances to our programs.

The YMCA makes a deliberate effort to create supportive, socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments, routines, transitions, programming and activities that are accessible, relieve stress and meet the needs of all children. YMCA Child Care programs recognize and celebrate differences and unique abilities.

Inclusion is ensuring active and meaningful participation of every child in the program, regardless of physical, cognitive, developmental, behavioural, social or emotional need. Educators will demonstrate positive attitudes when making program changes to accommodate all the children. Educators enable children to understand one another better by using materials like books, puzzles and toys, which address a full range of diversity (e.g. age, ability, culture, ethnicity, family composition, gender). Programmed activities are open ended and can be adapted to meet all children's exceptionalities. Directors and Educators ensure that children can express and share these qualities within their peer group. Educators will promote peer interactions, relationship building and play so all children are successful in the program.

The Child Care Program is responsive to individual needs and will work in partnership with families and children (and relevant stakeholders, when necessary) to allow for the success for all children in our programs. When it is recognized that children require additional support, steps will be taken, with family assistance, to foster this success. These steps may include, but are not limited to:

- Inclusive Child Care and Family Supports for Children with Disabilities
- Collaborative Agreements and Individualized Program Plans
- Educators being aware of individual children's goals as indicated in the Collaborative agreements and IPPs and fulfilling these during play experiences with peers
- Educators will understand their role in regards to the children's individual success
- Educators will attend relevant professional development and training
- Parent/Guardian/Teacher/YMCA meetings
- Parent/Guardian/YMCA Educator open communication (in person, email and/or phone)
- Partnerships with External Agencies for resources for children and families
- Sharing explanations of children's needs to Educators, children and families, without disclosing personal information, to foster understanding, appreciation, acceptance and respect of individual differences



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- Assessing, adjusting and preparing environments, routines, transitions, programming, equipment and activities to foster success
- Transfer Plan will be developed if a child moves between programs

To demonstrate the diversity in our programs, we may display children's work, celebrate and recognize culturally significant holidays and provide opportunities for children and families to share their abilities. Upon registration parent/guardians are asked to share with us about their child and family's heritage (familial, cultural, and spiritual), so we can incorporate it into our program.

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Family Involvement and Events

At the YMCA we strongly believe that Child Care must be a shared responsibility between parents/guardians and Child Care Educators. Programs will host special events throughout the year and families are encouraged to participate. Opportunities are available for families to volunteer in various components of the program. Parents or guardians may be able to enter the program, where space and leasing partners allow.

Community Involvement

Children will be given the opportunity to identify activities to support within the local and global community. Educators will work with the group to determine the nature of the program's involvement with that organization and ensure that it is framed within the Time, Treasure, Talent and Trust statement.

Off site excursions

Off-site excursions are an important part of our programming as they provide children with the opportunity to take an active role in differing areas of our community. Suitable opportunities are identified based upon the community in which the program is located and the children's interests.

As with other aspects of the planning process, children will have the opportunity to suggest fieldtrip destinations and activities to engage in off site. There may be different off-site activities planned to meet the different developmental needs of the children. Therefore, not every group of children will be able to participate in every off-site activity.

Off site excursions within area boundaries are spontaneous and will vary as weather and seasons permit. A permission form is included in the registration package.

A permission form will be available in advance of the excursion informing families of the location, address, method of transportation, phone number, supervision arrangements with respect to the activity, and departure and return times and requiring a signature. The permission form must be completed and signed by the parent/guardian to ensure children's participation. All permission forms must accompany the program on the off-site excursion.

The YMCA will give minimum one week notice for out of boundary, off site excursion. If parent/guardians choose not to send their children on field trips planned to meet the developmental needs of their cohort, they are required to make alternate arrangements for care. The YMCA is not able to provide care for children who do not attend field trips.

Off site excursions take place in all weather conditions and children should be prepared accordingly.



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Educators will use the field trip checklist on all off site excursions and refer to the Rapid Response Plan in the Health, Safety and Wellness Policy if a child or employee should become unwell while off site.

The YMCA will follow provincial masking laws if using public transit.

Transitions

Programs will work to ensure that transitions between different components of the program, such as gross motor and children's choice, are minimal in both time and disruption. Educators will allow those children who are ready to progress to the next activity to do so in a supervised small group. Educators will be prepared prior to the transition and be mindful of the needs of the children in their care.

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Mixed Age Groups

Some YMCA Child Care programs offer flexible, mixed age groups to support choice and accessibility for families and to reduce the impact of change and transition for children.

Indoor/Outdoor Environment

The rooms at the YMCA are arranged to meet the diverse needs of the children in the program. Our indoor space is arranged so that a variety of quiet, messy and noisy activities can occur simultaneously, supporting small groups and the emergent curriculum approach to play. We provide sufficient quantity and variety of developmentally appropriate materials and equipment, including recyclable materials, for the children that is either available on shelves or provided by an Educator. Natural materials will be brought into and used in the indoor environment. Items may include rocks, shells, pinecones, branches, leaves, snow, dirt, plants and animals. All equipment and materials are inspected to be sure they are safe and in good repair.

The YMCA provides a safe outdoor environment for physical activity and for children to explore nature. We always provide a variety of outdoor equipment which is available to children. Children 3 years and older will be permitted to access community and school playgrounds.

In YMCA Early Learning Child Care centres, most of our play spaces are securely enclosed on all sides. All entrances to and exits from the outdoor play space that do not lead into the interior of the program premises are always kept closed while children are using the outdoor play space.

YMCA School Age Child Care centres make use of the playground structures provided by the school or community. These play structures are built in compliance with Provincial standards. Educators will inspect these sites daily for broken equipment or materials which may injure a child and inform the school or city if repairs or clean up are needed.

Children will have the opportunity to engage with their natural surroundings. For example, through exploration of their outdoor environment ravines, forests, gardening and community walks.

Items from Home

We recommend personal items from home (i.e. hats, mitts, jackets, blankets, cups, bottles etc), be labeled with children's names to prevent cross contamination.

Each program has developed guidelines surrounding toys from home as we recognize that comfort items are important to children and families. Any items brought from home are the responsibility of the child and not the program and should not be used by anyone other than the child.



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Pets and animals

The YMCA will allow pets and animals in our program with permission of the lessor. Children and Educators will wash their hands after touching pets.

Technology

Electronics are incorporated into the programming and the YMCA provides electronics for the children's use. Screen time and playing sedentary devices is monitored and limited. Photos and videos of children can only be captured on YMCA electronic devices with family permission.

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YMCA is not responsible for any lost or damaged personal electronic devices. Cameras, cell phone, gaming devices, iPads and iPods (any portable electronics) from home are usually prohibited from use by children at all YMCA Child Care programs as these items are a distraction during program. These items must be kept in children's backpacks and not to be used in programs. During special activities children may be invited to bring electronics from home.

The internet has become an important learning tool for children and it is important to teach and role model responsible usage to the children in our program. At some programs, the internet is available for children to use as an information resource. Children may choose to use the internet to research a school project, assist with YMCA activities or program planning, playing approved games or videos. Educators will monitor children closely during any online activity.

- Videos, apps and games available may only be rated G, C or E
 - As many apps or online videos are not rated, as per the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) (<http://theesa.ca/>) games or videos that contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humour, blood and gore, simulated gambling, and/or use of strong language or other inappropriate content are considered a rating of T or higher and will not be allowed in programs.
- Games or videos with a rating of Mature, Adult, PG, PG-13 or R are not allowed in our Child Care programs.

All children are informed about the expectations surrounding computer use. Any child who violates the above surrounding social media or online video viewing, will have privileges revoked.