



Building on *How Does Learning Happen?*

Pedagogical approaches
to reopening licensed
child care

Ensuring children's learning, development and well-being

This resource is designed to assist child care licensees and educators to re-visit [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years \(HDLH\)](#) which outlines the values, foundations and pedagogical approaches for early years settings, as the province reopens child care.

Ensuring children's health and physical well-being is important, but we also know that early years programs play a critical role in supporting their learning, development, and emotional well-being. This document offers some ideas, reflective questions and lessons learned from Emergency Child Care programs that operated during the COVID-19 outbreak.

These ideas, questions and lessons learned may provide some insights to begin thoughtful conversations on how child care and other early years settings ensure healthy physical, social and emotional spaces for children and their families during the stages of reopening and beyond.

"Evidence from diverse fields of study tells us that children grow in programs where adults are caring and responsive. Children succeed in programs that focus on active learning through exploration, play, and inquiry. Children thrive in programs where they and their families are valued as active participants and contributors". (HDLH, p.4).

Program Statement

The program statement supports licensed child care programs in implementing HDLH with goals and approaches to meet requirements set out in regulations (O. Reg 137/15, Section 46). Some of the existing approaches that licensees have included in their program statement may not be feasible during this time due to physical distancing. Licensees are encouraged to have discussions with staff /home child care providers, children and families and non-profit boards as well as their program advisor on new ways to ensure that they can continue to fulfill the goals and approaches in their program statement, while adhering to the new health and safety measures for children and staff/home child care providers.

Planning for opening an Emergency Child Care site, was somewhat overwhelming given all the additional safety precautions that needed to be put into place. For example, we were required to screen families as they arrived in the morning, while we were wearing full PPE [personal protective equipment], asking specific health questions and taking their temperatures. This felt a little contradictory to how child care settings typically operate. Given that our ways of being with children and families are centred around relationships, this felt like a very clinical way to start off our day. Instead, we chose to view this as an opportunity to rethink how to connect with families and we were able to do so in new and creative ways. It was intentional to start each day with a focus on gratitude and mindfulness. This reminds us to give emotional well-being as much energy as the policies and procedures that keep us safe physically.

– Director, London Bridge Child Care Services

Now more than ever, HDLH is a key support for children, families and educators as we recover from the challenges of these difficult times. We know that it is critical to put measures in place to support the immediate health and safety of children, families and educators, however, emotional well-being should be given the same level of care and attention. Neglecting children's need for responsive and caring relationships and for environments that support exploration, play and inquiry can result in significant long-term risks to children's mental health, well-being and capacity to learn.

The values, foundations for learning and pedagogical approaches in HDLH can help to guide discussions on ways to ensure children's emotional well-being and capacity for learning continue to be nurtured.

Below are some questions to consider, along with examples of how programs can incorporate HDLH to guide decision-making in this new context.

How can child care licensees demonstrate how much they value educators as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential?

"Educators are knowledgeable, caring, reflective, and resourceful professionals. They bring diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. They collaborate with others to create engaging environments and experiences to foster children's learning and development. They integrate knowledge from theory, research and practice, their own experience and their understanding of individual children and families they work with." (HDLH, p.7).

Involving educators in planning for reopening right from the beginning, values their expertise and ideas and is critical for a successful reopening. Licensees can acknowledge and address staff/home child care provider concerns and fears, recognize their expertise in planning, their knowledge of the children enrolled, and experience in offering programs that support children's learning, development, health and well-being. Educators who experience being valued contributors will be better able to support children and their families during the re-opening transition.

Licensees can also share feedback with staff/home child care providers to let them know how valuable their work is.

Emergency Child Care offered by Halton Region has been our savior for not only our mental well-being at our workplaces where we work to help others at this difficult time but has also provided an opportunity to our children to maintain their sanity being in the company of others. The experience that our children have been living at the centre is invaluable and we would really like to thank all the staff who are our super-heroes. Not all super heroes wear capes, but they do help raise children, which is the single most difficult thing to do as it really takes a village.

- Parent/Guardian

How can licensees demonstrate that they value families as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential?

Families are composed of individuals who are competent and capable, curious and rich in experience. Families love their children and want the best for them. They are experts on their children. Families bring diverse social, cultural and linguistic perspectives. Families should feel that they belong, are valuable contributors to their children's learning, and deserve to be engaged in a meaningful way." (HDLH, p. 7).

Licensees can ensure child care staff, home visitors and home child care providers have opportunities to discuss how they can engage with families as co-learners prior to reopening. In addition to informing parents of the new health and safety protocols, licensees can invite parents to share their ideas, questions, concerns and hopes for their child as they return to care. Offering opportunities for telephone/online discussions with families can support a smoother transition and ease parent fears. During drop-off time, "screening for symptoms" can also provide an opportunity to check in with families on an ongoing basis.

We were very apprehensive about parents not being permitted to come into the centre, however, the staff found effective ways to use electronic communication with families (notes/photos etc.) so not seeing their child's teacher face to face was not an issue at all; in fact we have received so much positive feedback from families that they feel very involved and informed about what is happening at the centre even though they have not set foot indoors!

- Emergency Child Care Operator in Kingston

How can educators engage in responsive relationships with children and support their emotional well-being and sense of belonging while also following protocols for physical distancing and toy and equipment usage?

"Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, which affect virtually all aspects of their development." Fostering good relationships with children and their families is the single most important priority for educators in early years programs. Families develop trust, confidence, and a sense of belonging in programs that value the centrality of the family to the health and well-being of children. In high-quality programs, the aim is to strive to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships among educators and families, and to view families as important contributors with unique knowledge, experiences, and strengths. Children's sense of belonging and feelings of security are also strengthened when they have opportunities to make and explore connections between home and the early childhood program." (HDLH p. 24-25)

Positive, responsive relationships between educators and children are critical for emotional well-being for all children. With the new operational guidance protocols in place related to physical distancing and other public health measures, some educators may be concerned about spending all of their time directing and correcting children, rather than connecting through meaningful interactions. In addition, helping children and families feel welcome each morning at arrival time, which can already be a difficult emotional time of transition, is so important.

The new requirements for entry to the program and daily health screening can provide an opportunity to connect with families and children on a social level as well. Having a brief chat with each family at the start of the day may help educators to learn more about the unique characteristics and experiences of each child and family – children's latest interests and discoveries, what brings them joy; their relationships with others and the environment around them. This type of check-in can help put children and families at ease and foster a sense of belonging in the program. In addition, educators may be able to learn more about each child and family to integrate into daily experiences for children.

"First and foremost, your focus will be on re-establishing relationships with the children in your program. They have been away from us for a considerable amount of time and might be apprehensive about coming back into care."

- YMCA Greater Toronto

"Once the children and staff were screened and in their 'pods' (classrooms), they were treated as family units and were able to interact just as we do with our own families within households."

- Emergency Child Care Operator in Huron County

"The staff have made our kids feel so loved and cared for. My kids told me that they "hope COVID never ends because they never want to leave the child care." They love all the arts, crafts and activities that they get to do and appreciate how the staff tailor it all to weave in their interests."

- Parent and frontline health care worker at a London Emergency Child Care program

How can educators and licensees ensure the environment, experiences and pedagogical approaches value children as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential? How can educators be co-learners with children?

When the schedule allows for long periods of uninterrupted play, with fewer transitions, children are calmer and more engaged. When the environment supports children's growing autonomy and independence, challenging behaviours are reduced and educators can focus more fully on observing, interacting, and extending children's learning and development in meaningful ways. (HLDH, p. 20)

When children initiate experiences, generate ideas, plan, problem-solve, make meaningful choices, and act spontaneously through play, they are more likely to be happy and get along well with others, to have lower levels of stress, and to be attentive and motivated to learn. When children are fully engaged, they develop dispositions and skills for lifelong learning that are important for success in school and beyond. (HDLH, p.35)

"Emergency child care has made us see that children are not only capable and competent but extremely resilient. We have had to make many operational changes to feel safe during this time. Everyone, children, parents and staff are unique in what they need to feel safe. Accommodating this and speaking openly and honestly with each other will be key to reopening."

"While practicing physical distancing can be impossible to maintain at all times, we have each outlined our process, collaborated together to come up with what we will promise each other for each other's safety. Our processes and procedures change frequently. We are constantly evaluating for effectiveness. It sure has been great hearing children in the building. Seeing children's smiling faces makes all the difference."

- ECE Manager, Education; Chippewas of Rama First Nation

"Although our spaces are minimalized and somewhat "bare" the spaces are still set up with provocations for the children. We space them out for social distancing and set it up so that there is more of the same activity. The importance of observations for provocation is even more purposeful as there is not a lot in the environments, so the things in the spaces are very purposeful."

- RECE, Thunder Bay

Resources

[*Think, Feel, Act. Lessons from Research about Young Children \(2013\). Research briefs and videos*](#) from the Ministry of Education website.

[*How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years \(2014\)*](#)

[*Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak – Child Care Re-Opening \(2020\)*](#)