



**Umbrella Family  
and Child Centres  
of Hamilton**

# **Centre Protocols**

## **PRESCHOOL**

## Introduction

Umbrella Family and Child Centres of Hamilton (UFCC) is committed to providing programs that offer the highest quality of early learning and child care for children and families. We aim to create a shared understanding of working towards greater consistency between what we say, what we do, and how we act within our child care centres to provide a means to strengthen the quality of our learning environments.

When we see that children are curious, complex, and capable of learning, we must deliver and provide programs and services that value and build on children's strengths and abilities. As educators, we play a significant role in determining our practices in the classroom. For children, learning occurs all day in all aspects of the program, and we provide equal opportunities for children to demonstrate what they find interesting and what they value.

## How to Use this Guide

UFCC Staff are encouraged to use this guide for continuous support in quality improvement. This resource can be used to guide deliberately planned conversations (e.g., during staff meetings), and staff can reflect on areas of strength and areas for improvement. By building strategies effectively in programs using this guide, the team can drive their own quality advancement and professional learning. Throughout this document, there are questions for reflection and tips to provide a successful quality program provided by UFCC staff in all of our child care sites.

## How Does Learning Happen?



Children learn best when they are actively involved in personal, meaningful activities within their learning environment. How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH), Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, is a professional learning resource for educators and administrators. The four foundations of HDLH are intended to guide program development and implementation. Children learn through play, and Umbrella Family programs reflect this approach through inquiry-based learning.

HDLH pedagogy encourages:

- ✓ A view of the child where children are seen as competent and capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential
- ✓ Goals for children, expectations for programs, and questions for reflection
- ✓ Curriculum centered around four interconnected foundations: belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression.
- ✓ Pedagogical approaches that provide the "how" for working toward goals for children.

Research, Theory, and Practice, these approaches include:

- ✓ Responsive relationships
- ✓ Learning through exploration, play and inquiry
- ✓ Educators as co-learners
- ✓ Environment as the third teacher
- ✓ Pedagogical documentation
- ✓ Reflective practice and collaborative inquiry

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Tips for a purposeful Learning Environment:

The structure of the day provides a balance of child-led and adult-guided experiences which are designed to engage children's natural curiosity and inquiry.

- ✓ Children choose to pursue their own interests (well-being)
  - ✓ Children manipulate open-ended materials (engagement)
  - ✓ Children express what they are discovering (expression)
  - ✓ Educators connect old information to new information (belonging)
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## Setting Up the Environment

### INTENT

The environment is designed to facilitate children's independence, interaction, and exploration. Both indoor and outdoor environments are structured for children's learning and should be inviting and intentionally prepared with materials to ensure children can be independent when entering their spaces.

High-quality programs have adequate space for varied activities and invite children to investigate, learn and create using different and various materials. The environment is recognized as the third teacher, enriched with multiple materials, and designed to provoke the interests of all children. The environment is designed to provide and support play interactions and offer opportunities for inquiry-based learning. For this type of learning to occur, the environment should offer interesting, open-ended materials, and opportunities for all children to explore and learn.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

"Children thrive in indoor and outdoor spaces that invite them to investigate, imagine, think, create, solve problems and make meaning from their experiences - - especially when the spaces contain interesting, complex, open-ended materials that children can use in many different ways."  
(HDLH, pg. 20)

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

Indicators for a successful practice include:

- ✓ Spaces are uncluttered, well organized, and visually appealing
- ✓ Adequate lighting within the classroom, all blinds and or curtains should be opened upon arrival
- ✓ Natural or soft lighting, using windows or lamps
- ✓ Materials in learning centres are well-organized and labelled using words or photos for younger children
- ✓ Chairs are set up at tables (not stacked) when children are present in the program
- ✓ The space is clean and well-maintained
- ✓ Furnishings are safe, comfortable, and accessible for all children
- ✓ Opening procedures are completed before the child's arrival
- ✓ Daily visual schedules posted and implemented
- ✓ Transitional items are in any area of need (ie. cubby area, outdoors)
- ✓ Soft furniture is provided, such as a couch or armchair
- ✓ Nontoxic plants are included in the classroom to support a connection to nature
- ✓ Throw pillows, cushions, rugs, and blankets are provided to create a home-like environment
- ✓ Family photos of the children and staff are found within the space
- ✓ Neutral paint colors promote a home-like and calming environment

Staff are to consider what changes need to be made to best support their engagement in the classroom as well as the children's previous experiences. For children with developmental or physical needs, it is important to speak with the child's family and your supervisor so the centre is aware of the child's particular needs and what support will help them succeed in the classroom.

UFCC staff will check classrooms daily to ensure that all learning areas are set up so that there are enough materials available for children. Ensuring that the supplies and equipment are adequate and notifying the supervisor if materials need to be added or replaced.

## Daily Routine

### INTENT

UFCC staff are to plan a positive learning environment that is intentionally and visibly divided into interest areas which support different types of play and the developmental needs of all children. Materials are carefully chosen and are varied, open-ended, and plentiful, which then are labelled to promote the find-use-return succession. Within the interest areas, the materials are thoughtfully arranged by function and labelled to support children's thinking and intentional play.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

The daily routine provides an emotionally safe and predictable environment supporting the child's well-being.

Educators intentionally limit interruptions and transitions to maintain a calm and seamless day.

- ✓ A natural flow from one activity to another allows time for educators to support the diverse needs and abilities of the children
- ✓ Active learning is embedded in all parts of the daily routine
- ✓ Educators and families work together to support children's seamless transitions between home and child care
- ✓ The daily routine includes time for large and small group activities, individual times, times to meet the children's nutritional needs and indoor and outdoor exploration
- ✓ Staff make it a priority to know each child well. They talk to children, having many friendly and stimulating conversations with them
- ✓ Children are to explore the indoor and outdoor environments and engage in activities to promote specific kinds of learning in all developmental domains:
  - physical
  - social
  - emotional
  - cognitive

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Does your routine allow for extended periods of free play without interruption?
2. Does your routine allow for smooth transitions from one event to another?

## Daily Program and Visual Schedules

### INTENT

Daily schedules are posted in the classroom to reflect the outline of the day. Being aware of the day allows for consistency and self-regulation. Parents, staff, supply staff, and visitors should always be aware of, and have access to, the daily schedule. The daily schedule would be an accurate representation and allow for flexibility. Daily schedules are communicated as a framework for how the day is organized.

Visual Schedules are photos showing when the activities, routines, and exploration will occur throughout the day. Visual schedules are posted in a place accessible to children, staff, parents, and visitors and can be easily changed for flexibility of the day.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

A safe environment that offers consistency and continuity as well as graduated support for children's growing independence and capacity for self-care enables children to tackle challenges, learn to persevere, and explore ways to cope with manageable levels of positive stress. (HDLH, pg. 30)

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Alternative schedules will be posted for rainy days or other events to reflect the change in program (ex. Trips, neighborhood walks)
- ✓ Any changes to schedules will be posted as needed
- ✓ Provide consistency in your daily routine
- ✓ Include experiences that meet individual needs
- ✓ Transitions are limited and occur naturally for children
- ✓ Plenty of free-play time to investigate interests
- ✓ Extend teachable moments as a learning opportunity

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. What considerations have been made to ensure the visual schedule is developmentally appropriate and easy for children to understand?
2. How does the visual schedule meet the needs of the children and support their well-being and engagement?
3. How does the visual schedule encourage the children to reflect on what's happening next?

## Supervision and Engagement

### INTENT

Staff are always aware of the location of all the children in care. Staff are to communicate with other staff and supervisors the number of children present at the time of care and working together to ensure the program environment is always supervised. Staff must be balanced throughout the space to ensure equitable supervision of all children's safety.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Head counts are completed without the disruption of daily programming
- ✓ Staff supervision allows children to move independently throughout the learning space provided
- ✓ Staff are moving and scanning around from one experience to another to ensure adequate supervision and monitoring of the needs of the children
- ✓ Staff are to always communicate the location of all children in their group before and after every transition, and periodically throughout the day

### Engagement

- ✓ Engage in developmentally appropriate ways with children and materials in the classroom setting
- ✓ Adequate engagement reflects on limited behaviours
- ✓ Have reciprocal, or back and forth, conversations with children about things that interest them to keep them engaged and to provide learning opportunities
- ✓ Engagement should be happening in all areas of the learning space
- ✓ Introduce new vocabulary during conversations and use it throughout the day. Children who build language skills are better able to express themselves and connect with others
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions to support children's thinking and comprehension skills

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. How do staff position themselves to ensure they can scan the whole environment?
2. How do staff communicate about the location of all children throughout the day?
3. How do staff ensure supervision in the program space?
4. How do you engage with each child in your care?

## Transitions

### INTENT

Staff transition the children at different times of the day. Staff are to be aware of the individual children's abilities and cues to reflect self-regulation and self-help skills. Interactions during transitions are to be positive and engaging for all children and their needs.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Staff will plan and be prepared with transitional activities to support the periods of transitions, songs, finger plays, or any small objects are to be used for children as this will develop self-regulation skills
- ✓ Props and visuals are used to help facilitate smoother transitions throughout the day
- ✓ Staff facilitate transitions based on the individual needs of the children
- ✓ Transitional play materials should be used specifically for transitions
- ✓ Staff provide time and support for transitions
- ✓ Staff provide children with a warning before transitions happen. With young children, staff get down to the child's level to ensure they have heard the warning. Where applicable, programs may benefit from the use of a visual (ie. sand timer/visual timer) to support children in the transition
- ✓ Smooth transitions between daily events are provided. For example, having the materials ready for the next activity before current activity ends
- ✓ Where possible, staff utilize the visual schedule to support with transitions
- ✓ Staff use first/then language and where possible, use first/then visuals to support with transitions

Common transition times during a child's day in care include:

- ✓ Pick-up and drop-off times
- ✓ Meal times
- ✓ Outdoor time
- ✓ Diaper changes and toileting
- ✓ Nap times

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. How much of the day is spent in transitions?
2. How much of the children's individual needs are taken in consideration when planning routines?

## Diapering Routine

### INTENT

Staff are to maintain a healthy and sanitary environment. The diapering and toileting routine should be viewed as a positive learning experience. Diapering is viewed as an opportunity to encourage self-help skills, for example, holding the diaper or washing their hands.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ A visual picture of diapering routine at child's eye level is posted and at children's eye level
- ✓ Real photos depicting children in diapering/toileting routine are not allowed
- ✓ Properly labelled personal bins for each child at arm's reach when diapering or toileting is recommended
- ✓ All diapering materials should be gathered before starting the diaper changing routine
- ✓ Children are given notice, given verbal or non-verbal cues for upcoming diapering schedule

Prepare children for the diaper change:

- ✓ Use a transition warning (verbal, timer, count downs or count ups)
- ✓ Provide choices (who, where, when)
- ✓ Empathize with your child's feelings
- ✓ Provide a transition object
- ✓ Use "first/then" statements
- ✓ Use step by step pictures
- ✓ Encourage your child to be a helper

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Is the diapering area set up that allows staff to maintain and follow the diapering and glove/handwashing procedures correctly?
2. Think about how you engage with children to support spontaneous learning when engaged in diapering routine.

## Meals and Snack Time

### INTENT

Mealtimes are an important part of the day for children, enabling them to build on all areas of their development. Good nutrition and safe practices are the backdrop against which learning takes place. Menus are reviewed seasonally by our nutrition team. Meal and snack times are opportunities to socialize and share nutritious food with other children and staff.

Physical development - Mealtimes give children the opportunity to build on their physical development, strengthening their fine and gross motor skills. As the child grows, they will begin to use their fingers in a pincer grip, gaining better control.

Social skills - Creating chances for interaction at every opportunity. Mealtimes can be busy, but it is important to allow children to talk to their friends and express themselves. Mealtimes can be used to learn what is socially acceptable, such as saying please and thank you.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Food is always served on dishes and not placed directly on the table
- ✓ Meal and/or snack time are views as a time for conversations and socialization, staff are to encourage meaningful conversations with children to extend their learning
- ✓ Before sitting down at the lunch table, all staff members and children wash their hands
- ✓ Staff can encourage self-help skills like feeding, cleaning hands and face
- ✓ Conversations are unhurried and calm
- ✓ Children are encouraged to feed themselves and some cases serve themselves. It is acceptable to assist hand over hand as needed
- ✓ Adult seating is available and appropriate seating for children
- ✓ Staff are to sit with children and model appropriate behaviour
- ✓ Staff members will ensure that food is served to children using clean serving utensils and engage in practices which reduce the risk of contamination
- ✓ Food should be served family style at the table where possible
- ✓ All uneaten food from children's dishes will be scraped into a container and taken to the kitchen so that it can be discarded properly
- ✓ When a child is finished eating their lunch, they are encouraged to scrape their plate/bowl and put their plate and utensils into a designated bin located in an area where staff members can supervise this task
- ✓ All eating tables will be wiped down and then disinfected before and after each meal

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. How do you engage in conversation during meal/snack time?
2. How are the developmental feeding needs of all children met?
3. How do staff ensure that they are seated at the best location at the table to assist all the children?
4. How do you allocate certain jobs for children during meal/snack tidy up time?

## Cots and Bedding

### INTENT

Staff are to allow flexibility with regards to the routine of the program that supports the cues of the children. Staff are to ensure that there is a smooth transition from activity to lunch time to rest time. Look for patterns in children's sleeping ability, enjoys back being rubbed or child falls asleep on their back.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Each child has their own labelled cot that is hygienically maintained
- ✓ A blanket that is provided from home to cover the children who may want to use one
- ✓ Staff are to provide a smooth transition from one activity to their rest time
- ✓ Staff are to disinfect cots weekly and bedding
- ✓ Flexibility in a child's routine and a space is set up that also promotes resting for non-sleepers
- ✓ Sleep area is monitored, staff are physically supervising the space where children are sleeping
- ✓ Resting environment provides dimmed lighting and soft music or sound machine

## Health and Safety – Hand Washing

### INTENT

The transmission of infection among children and between children and staff can be minimized when established sanitary practices and procedures are followed consistently. Maintaining clean and safe learning environments is a requirement of the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 and Hamilton Public Health as well as a commitment of UFCC.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

#### HAND WASHING AND DISPOSABLE GLOVE USE

- ✓ Hand washing procedures are posted in pictorial and written form at all sinks
- ✓ Children will be supported by staff as they learn these procedures

#### HANDS ARE WASHED WITH SOAP AND WATER WHEN:

- ✓ Entering the classroom
- ✓ Before and after handling food
- ✓ After sneezing, coughing and/or blowing nose (after disposing of tissue)
- ✓ After diapering
- ✓ After using the toilet
- ✓ After applying sunscreen
- ✓ Before and after engaging in sensory play
- ✓ Before and after using disposable gloves to assist a child with toileting
- ✓ After contact with insects and bugs

## DISPOSABLE GLOVES\* ARE USED WHEN

- ✓ Changing a child's diaper after a bowel movement
- ✓ Assisting a child with toileting
- ✓ Cleaning up after body fluids (blood, vomit, urine, or feces)
- ✓ Educators must change gloves between each child

### \*NOTE:

UFCC uses vinyl gloves to reduce the risk of allergic reactions.

If using gloves when applying sunscreen, gloves should be changed between each child.

## Health and Safety – Toys and Play Equipment

### INTENT

Toys are an important and fun part of every child's development. Toys can come with risks too. Choking is a hazard for kids ages 3 or younger because they tend to put objects in their mouths. It's important for staff to monitor the children's toys and supervise when in play.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“A safe environment that offers consistency and continuity as well as graduated support for children's growing independence and capacity for self-care enables children to tackle challenges, learn to persevere, and explore ways to cope with manageable levels of positive stress.”  
(HDLH, pg. 30)

### UMBRELLA EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ All furnishings, equipment and play materials are all in good working and hygienic condition
- ✓ Toys and equipment washing schedule is maintained with proper procedures
- ✓ Transitional toys are washed after use, these materials are used and washed after each use
- ✓ Anything that is a potential hazard to the children and staff is to be removed, such as broken chairs, broken toys, uncovered electrical, or access to cleaning supplies
- ✓ Any materials, or containers that are labelled “keep out of reach of children” are to be removed from children's reach
- ✓ Maintain a healthy washing procedure. That is soiled items, objects that are dirty, sneezed on, or mouthed, are to be cleaned and disinfected
- ✓ When buying toys, look for sturdy and well-made ones that include the manufacturer's contact information
- ✓ Read and follow all age labels and safety messages. Toys for older children may have small parts or other hazards that make them unsafe for younger children
- ✓ Keep small toys out of the reach of children under three years of age, as these are choking hazards for children who still put non-food items into their mouths
- ✓ Repair or throw away broken toys. Check often for loose or broken pieces or sharp edges that could harm children

## Quality Relationships and Interactions

### INTENT

The educator's role is to provide consistent care in a way that maximizes the potential for learning for children's care routines, and observations. This allows a strong, secure attachment to develop between the child and the educator.

Positive interactions between staff, children and families provide a strong sense of belonging. Staff continue to role model appropriate social skills throughout the day to provide a positive and welcoming environment that allows children to develop relationship skills with staff and children.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

"Traditionally, educators have found that much of their communication with children involves directing them – giving instructions, telling children what to do, and correcting their behaviour – rather than really connecting with them in a meaningful way. However, an approach that emphasizes listening, responding to, and building on child-initiated communication and conversation can be a more effective way to promote children's language acquisition and their development of social skills, empathetic understanding, and ability to pay attention."  
(HDLH pg. 41)

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Engage and play with children at the children's eye level as play partners
- ✓ Invite children to participate in planning their learning experiences
- ✓ Promote children's areas of confidence by creating a designated space to show their work at a level they can view and reflect on it

Strategies to guide children's behaviour include:

- ✓ Redirection
- ✓ Logical and natural consequences
- ✓ Setting limits
- ✓ Modelling
- ✓ Providing choices
- ✓ Anticipating conflict
- ✓ Approaching calmly, stopping any hurtful actions
- ✓ Acknowledging children's feelings
- ✓ Gathering information
- ✓ Restate the problem
- ✓ Focusing on connecting before correcting or redirecting

## Nurturing for Independence

### INTENT

Staff are engaged throughout the day in children's learning through verbal and non-verbal cues. Children develop their way of thinking to make choices throughout the day. They see the materials available, and are able to make a choice. Staff are to support and encourage these meaningful choices, individual needs, and children's independence.

## INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“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.” (HDLH pg. 35)

## UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Children are provided with choices of materials based on their interests and needs
- ✓ Staff are to respond to children's interests to allow for independence
- ✓ Staff organize learning and play materials so children can easily find and tidy up
- ✓ Staff think about the flow of their materials throughout the classroom and place similar materials together

Staff ensure storage bins and baskets are lightweight so children can access the materials independently

## The Curriculum Program Plan

## INTENT

The Curriculum Program Plan is a tool used by educators to ensure quality programming for all children. Educators are to promote on-going learning opportunities and developmental growth for all children using the four foundations of How Does Learning Happen?.

## UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Staff are required to plan, observe, and document the interests and developmental goals of children into the program plan
- ✓ The program plan is posted in a place that is accessible to all staff, parents, and visitors
- ✓ Staff can reach out to services for external support to supplement their own knowledge and abilities in providing a quality program – ASCY-Lynwood, Community Living Hamilton, Ron Joyce, and Umbrella's Program Excellence Team
- ✓ The program plan will show evidence of formal programming time given to staff
- ✓ Supervisors will review program plans weekly
- ✓ Programming is reflective of indoor and outdoor learning experiences

The following learning areas are planned for and/or documented:

- ✓ Art
- ✓ Block and Construction
- ✓ Language and Literacy
- ✓ Dramatic Play
- ✓ Science and Nature
- ✓ Manipulation and Math
- ✓ Gross Motor
- ✓ Outdoor Exploration
- ✓ Indoor Inquiry Provocations
- ✓ Loose Parts

## Provocations

### INTENT

Offering items of wonder in the learning environment invites children's exploration and engagement using provocations. Staff are to observe children during learning experiences and assist them in developing knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Using intentional pedagogical activities encourages children to learn based on their individual learning preferences and focuses on the goals of development in cognitive, social, and emotional well-being.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“deliberate and thoughtful decisions made by the teacher to extend the ideas of the children. Teachers provide materials, media, and general direction as needed, but the children take the ideas where they want. This allows children to develop skills of creativity, inventiveness and flexibility in thinking, planning and reflecting.”

— Journey into Early Childhood

#### Quantity and Quality of Materials

It is important to always be reflective about how much or how little staff are providing in terms of materials. When there are too many choices, children can become overwhelmed; and when there are too few, it can limit what children can do and create.

How many is too many?

All the areas in the classroom have intentional provocations or invitations, some may be simpler than others. Start simple and give opportunities for the children to explore and expand.

When to change a provocation?

Listening to the children while they play and interact with the materials will guide you as an educator to know when it may be time to change a provocation. Educators should not change things based on time, rather based on the children's interests and level of engagement.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

- ✓ Consider the placement of your provocations
- ✓ Think about the concepts the children are currently exploring
- ✓ Think about how a provocation might help extend or focus children's play
- ✓ Provocations are to be a guide and an inspiration for how children can engage and reflect with certain materials or spaces

#### PROVOCATIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- ✓ Pictures: Pictures of children's interests can help extend the exploration of certain concepts and use pictures of real items as much as possible
- ✓ An Event or Experience: A field trip or a nature walk outdoors. You can take pictures during an event and display them later
- ✓ Books: Add related books to children's current interests around the room
- ✓ Physical Items of Interest: Add provocations supporting what children already know about their world

## INTENT

Staff document and reflect on pedagogy through a variety of means, written observations, photos, and parent communication app. Displays should reflect equity, diversity, knowledge, interests, and experiences of the children in your learning environment. To maintain children's engagement in play and learning, you will need to rotate materials regularly, so children have the chance to use different kinds of materials.

## INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“Making children's thinking, ideas, and learning visible: a form of ‘listening’”

-Rinaldi

## UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

When displaying pictures, remember to hang or offer many photos at children's eye level to reinforce that they are valued members of the classroom space.

What kind of things you might document? Consider children's:

- ✓ Understanding and misunderstandings
- ✓ Prior knowledge
- ✓ Children's theories about the world – how do things work?
- ✓ Connections and strategies

Pedagogical Documentation can include, but is not limited to:

- ✓ Drawings or attempts of writing
- ✓ Children's constructions
- ✓ Video and/or audio recordings
- ✓ Samples of children's languages
- ✓ Photos
- ✓ Learning stories based on the children's interests, their level of development, and communication
- ✓ Children's conversations or interactions

Documentation for Staff: Documenting can help to plan for future experiences and get to know the children so that planning can scaffold their learning through life experiences.

Documentation for Children: When children see that their work is valued enough to be displayed, they take pride in their learning experiences, and seeing it documented can lead to new discoveries for children and staff.

Documentation for Parents/Guardians: Documentation serves as a guide to educate parents and guardians about what children are learning and how their learning takes place.

## Indoor Inquiry Environment

### INTENT

The indoor learning space is organized and inviting. Materials in each learning area reflect all children's needs and abilities. The diversity of children and staff is reflected naturally throughout the program environment, and staff are to accommodate the learning space for all children with physical disabilities. Staff are to use their programming time to prepare materials needed for the planned learning experiences and set up the program space based on the interests of all children.

Our UFCC sites require all early learning to reflect quality child care by providing a stimulating environment that invites children to engage in several activities and encourages them to explore various materials.

Staff are encouraged to develop a classroom indoors and outdoors so that every part of the room environment has a purpose, with all necessary materials and resources on hand, displayed and organized to facilitate children's work. The classroom is the third teacher.

Preschool children need rich opportunities to investigate, explore, and enjoy places that engage all the child's senses and allow movement.

The relationship between children and responsive, respectful caregivers provides the encouragement needed to explore the environment.

The learning environment should offer several choices of appropriate toys, objects, and activities for preschoolers to develop socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically.

### UMBRELLA'S EXPECTATIONS

The learning environment is designed to promote participation and peer interaction. These areas are open and accessible throughout the day:

- ✓ Arts
- ✓ Block and Construction
- ✓ Language and Literacy
- ✓ Dramatic Play
- ✓ Science and Nature
- ✓ Manipulation and Math
- ✓ Gross Motor
- ✓ Outdoor Exploration
- ✓ Indoor Inquiry Provocations
- ✓ Loose Parts

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. How is the learning space set up in a way that invites and encourages children to explore the materials provided?
2. Are play materials open-ended and do they allow children to explore without limits?
3. How do staff organize the materials in each learning centre to support the curiosity of each child?
4. How are the learning centres laid out to provide space for children to master self-regulation in their play?

Art materials that are freely accessible to children support them in making choices, interacting with various materials, learning, and be creativity. The process of working with the materials is more important than what is produced. This is called process over product.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“Optimal conditions for learning occur when we are fully engaged. For children, this happens in play that evolves from the child’s natural curiosity – active play that allows children to explore with their bodies, minds, and senses, stimulating them to ask questions, test theories, solve problems, engage in creative thinking, and make meaning of the world around them. These investigations through play fuse intellect and feeling to help children make connections and develop the capacity for higher-order thinking.”  
(HDL, pg. 35)

#### Tips for Providing More Process-Focused (Open-Ended) Art Experiences:

- ✓ Provide a variety of materials and allow the child to lead the art experience
- ✓ Let children use more paint
- ✓ Provide time for children to carry out their explorations and learning interest
- ✓ Comment on what you see: “Look at all the lines you painted”
- ✓ Say YES to children’s ideas
- ✓ Offer new and interesting materials
- ✓ Take art materials outside in the natural light
- ✓ Remember that it’s children’s art, no teacher corrections

✓ DO's	✗ DON'T's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Processed focus art</li> <li>✓ There are no step-by-step instructions or samples for the children to follow</li> <li>✓ There is no right or wrong way to explore and create</li> <li>✓ Focus on the experience and on exploration of techniques and materials</li> <li>✓ The art is entirely the children’s own</li> <li>✓ No pre-cut shapes</li> <li>✓ The art experience is a child’s choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Product focused (think- crafts)</li> <li>✗ Children have instructions to follow</li> <li>✗ The staff created a sample for children to copy</li> <li>✗ The children’s finished art all looks very similar</li> <li>✗ Educators might “fix mistakes”</li> <li>✗ The whole class of children took part in an art activity at the same time</li> <li>✗ Children were asked to sit down and do this, it was not an option</li> </ul>

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

### \*Note:

Three or more art materials include diverse skin tones.

Three or more drawing tools are accessible for independent use.

Permanent sensory equipment accessible in the art area.

#### Writing Materials:

- ☐ crayons
- ☐ pencil crayons
- ☐ pencils (thick)
- ☐ markers (different tips)

#### Paints:

- ☐ tempera paints
- ☐ variety of paint brushes
- ☐ paint smocks

#### Creative Materials:

- ☐ glue (sticks, liquid)
- ☐ variety of tape
- ☐ stapler and staples
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ clay
- ☐ sculpting/pottery tools
- ☐ creative mats (tables)
- ☐ easel

#### Beautiful Junk:

- ☐ cardboard and boxes
- ☐ odds and ends

#### Paper:

- ☐ newsprint
- ☐ construction
- ☐ manila
- ☐ white (computer paper)
- ☐ finger paint

#### Collage Materials:

- ☐ magazines
- ☐ scrap paper and fabric

#### Music and Movement:

- ☐ dance props (scarves, etc.)
- ☐ musical instruments (ex. rhythm sticks, tambourines wrist bells, triangles, shakers, drums etc.)
- ☐ music books, sheet music
- ☐ no radio

## Optional Materials to Consider

#### Writing Materials:

- ☐ pens
- ☐ erasers
- ☐ chalk and oil pastels
- ☐ water colour pencils
- ☐ water colour paints

#### Paints:

- ☐ non-toxic acrylic paints
- ☐ paint cups with lids

- painting tools (sponges or textured wands)

#### Creative Materials:

- glue wands/paddles
- hot glue gun and sticks
- melt-a-beads and iron
- hole punchers
- plasticine
- popsicle sticks (variety)
- gimp
- paper plates and bags
- pipe cleaners
- textured paper
- tissue paper
- origami

#### Other:

- art books/pictures – not books that tell the children how to draw, but instead showcase painting and sculptures by various artists (Picasso, Van Gogh, etc.).

#### Dance Prop Ideas:

- scarves and ribbon wands
- belly dancing shirts
- retractable fans

### Block Area

Block play needs a reasonable space large enough for 4 or 5 children to build together or individually. Students develop gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination when they make or play with toys. Perceptions of size, weight, and shape are also developing as well as language skills. They also create plans and follow through on their ideas. Students also can work cooperatively with others.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“As children engage in various forms of social play and are supported to recognize the varied capabilities and characteristics of other children, they learn to get along with others; to negotiate, collaborate, and communicate; and to care for others.”  
(HDLH, pg. 24)

Block area provides hands-on ways to build:

- ✓ Imagination/creativity
- ✓ Math skills
- ✓ Motor skills
- ✓ Problem-solving skills.
- ✓ Science skills
- ✓ Social skills

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Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Blocks and construction materials are available for rotation
  - ✓ Include up to three block materials
  - ✓ Provide space to keep working on projects
  - ✓ Construction accessories are provided, such as lego, play people, farmhouses, and animals
  - ✓ Train sets are an excellent material to add for exploration with the blocks
-

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

### \*Note:

Three or more developmentally appropriate blocks and construction materials are accessible.  
Three or more developmentally appropriate accessories are available.

#### Building Materials:

- ☐ blocks of various shapes, sizes and types (large and small, homemade and commercial)
- ☐ unit blocks (wooden or plastic including shapes such as rectangles, squares, triangles and cylinders)
- ☐ large hollow blocks (wooden, plastic or cardboard)
- ☐ accessories (toy people, cars, road signs, pylons, train set/trains, wooden logs/natural materials, animals, multicultural dolls)
- ☐ a variety should be available so that block accessories can be rotated

#### Educators should also consider:

- ☐ lego
- ☐ a bin of material/fabric (natural colours – browns, greens, blues to represent different land markings)
- ☐ loose parts, such as tubes, hoses and plastic pipes

### Optional Materials to Consider

#### Woodworking Materials:

- ☐ soft wood
- ☐ hammers
- ☐ screw drivers
- ☐ measuring tapes
- ☐ safety goggles and gloves
- ☐ nails, screws and bolts
- ☐ sand paper
- ☐ wood glue

#### Other:

- ☐ items to authenticate the block area (hard hats, tool belts, plain/graph paper with pencils and clipboards, cones, blueprints, photos of buildings, architectural books, road signs, maps, cones)

## Book Area

The book area should be loaded with books, a rug, and some comfortable cushions nearby for gathering. The staff would read books, sing songs, and talk about the children's day. Books, magazines, and other quiet materials should be provided for children to explore on their own or in groups. Adding the opportunity for children to discover letters, words, picture books, and storybooks makes learning more enjoyable. A low light lamp and a net canopy for this area create a cozy atmosphere. This is a quiet space to position away from the louder play areas, like in a dramatic play or block area.

## INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“Programs can best support emerging literacy skills by providing open-ended materials that foster imagination and symbolic play, including signs, symbols, and props that support print awareness in authentic contexts; by encouraging children to engage in play with words and sounds in song and rhyme; and by offering numerous opportunities for children to share books and stories.”  
(HDLH, pg. 42)

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Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Rotate books
  - ✓ Developmentally appropriate books
  - ✓ Book accessories like puppets, stuffed animals, magnetic boards and play people
  - ✓ Books are incorporated into other learning centres throughout the learning centres and outdoor exploration space
  - ✓ Books are always to support the inquiry interest of the children
  - ✓ Homemade books are available
  - ✓ Photo albums
  - ✓ Photo documentation
  - ✓ Include books for disabilities
  - ✓ Include books for inclusive practice
- 

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

\*Note

Books reflect three or more topics.

Three or more books contain real images of people and/or objects.

Three or more books which include diverse people/cultures are available.

Two or more developmentally appropriate books for each child enrolled are accessible.

### Books:

- ❑ various types representing children's interests
- ❑ various types representing many cultures
- ❑ books in different languages
- ❑ books that fulfil a broad range of ages (young preschoolers may need board books while older may be ready for long stories)
- ❑ books based on fantasy, factual information, stories about people, animals, and nature/science (at least 20 books for a group of 16)
- ❑ felt board stories
- ❑ puppets
- ❑ flannel boards and pieces
- ❑ finger puppets
- ❑ stuffed animals
- ❑ magnetic boards and pieces
- ❑ play people

Avoid: commercialized books (ie: tv characters), books that encourage inappropriate lessons, poor body image, or overtly conform to gender norms

### Storage, furnishing, space:

- ❑ low bookshelf (front covers of books displayed)
- ❑ combination of comfortable seating (adult armchair, large and small pillows, covered mattress, child-sized couch, chairs, rug)

## Language and Literacy

Language and literacy centres should be set up to encourage the child to explore letters independently. Puzzles, letter tiles, sorting games, and other fun learning tools can also be incorporated. All our writing tools are stored on this shelving unit; pens, paper, envelopes, sticky notes, journals, list pads, magnetic letters, small blackboards and whiteboards are all accessible for the children to use as they wish at the writing table.

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### Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Labelling items around the classroom
  - ✓ Home-made literacy books
  - ✓ Language and literacy are incorporated through keyboards, number blocks, letters and number stencils, alphabet, and word-building opportunities
- 

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

### \*Note

Three or more writing materials are accessible.

Two or more language and literacy toys, puzzles are available.

Language and literacy opportunities are integrated into other areas.

Any labelling in other languages should reflect the commonly spoken languages of the families and/or staff in the centre.

Activities:

- ☐ picture card games
- ☐ pictures
- ☐ small figures, stuffed animals (must have 8 for a group of 16 children) and animals that encourage communication
- ☐ rhyming games

Reading Materials:

- ☐ magazines that represent travel, food, garden, sports, etc.
- ☐ national geographic kids
- ☐ newspapers (old & new)

Other:

- ☐ blankets & pillows
- ☐ couch or comfortable chairs
- ☐ items to authenticate the communication area (clocks, receipt books, notebooks, letterheads)
- ☐ magnetic letters and board
- ☐ puzzles with letters

## Dramatic Play

The dramatic play area allows children to use their imaginations and "try on" various roles from their world. Through play, children try to make sense of the events happening around them and deal with the emotions surrounding them. Social skills grow as children choose roles in the "play" of the day, whether playing house, school, or restaurant.

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Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Dramatic play includes real home-like items incorporated into daily space
  - ✓ Accessories support and reflect the diversity of people and cultures accessible to children
  - ✓ Do not use containers clearly labelled "Keep out of reach of children"
  - ✓ Mirrors should always be free of obstruction and at children's level
  - ✓ Literacy and numeracy materials should be reflected in dramatic play to enhance play
  - ✓ Allow children to create props and add them to the centre for expression and exploration
  - ✓ Consider replacing play food with loose parts to encourage broader, more imaginative play
  - ✓ Consider allowing children to experiment with various dress up clothes, being mindful not to promote gender roles or domestic duties for female students
  - ✓ Avoid themes in dramatic play, such as turning the entire play area into a shop or restaurant. Allow the children to direct this play
- 

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

\*Note:

Three or more items that include real items that are developmentally appropriate.

Three or more accessories that reflect cultural diversity.

Three or more accessories that encourage role-playing.

Dress Up Clothes:

- ☐ hats
- ☐ purses
- ☐ shoes
- ☐ ties
- ☐ items representing various cultures
- ☐ items representing various community helpers

Props:

- ☐ dolls representing different races, genders, cultures, ages and abilities
- ☐ doll clothing, diapers, bibs, blankets and bottles
- ☐ kitchen utensils/dishes (forks, spoons, plates, cups, bowls, pots and pans, mixing spoons, spatula, whisk, oven mitts, measuring spoons and cups)
- ✓ loose parts to represent play food (corks, buttons, old bottle caps etc).

Optional Materials to Consider

Dress Up Clothes:

- ☐ costumes
- ☐ clothing hooks for cart or clothing rack to hang items

Other:

- ☐ tent building accessories (blankets, sheets)
- ☐ small toys that children can pretend with (small dolls, people, trucks, animals)
- ☐ cookbooks
- ☐ puppets
- ☐ pictures stories/books

Science and Nature

Science focuses on S.T.E.M., a curriculum that incorporates fun in science. S.T.E.M. is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, and math. Children love collecting treasures they find in nature. Indoor and outdoor nature table gives a home to these collections. Staff are to allow children to experience natural objects in indoor or outdoor learning environments.

INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“Science is the process that takes us from confusion to understanding.”  
-Brian Greene

EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

\*Note:

Three or more developmentally appropriate science and nature equipment and/or materials that are accessible.

Natural Materials:

- ☐ tree bark
- ☐ pine cones
- ☐ rocks
- ☐ sea shells
- ☐ different types of seeds or bulbs
- ☐ twigs

Other:

- ☐ plants
- ☐ magnifying glasses
- ☐ magnets
- ☐ measuring tools
- ☐ science books/pictures
- ☐ indoor garden
- ☐ outdoor garden
- ☐ nature/science games (nature matching cards, nature sequence cards)

Optional Materials to Consider

Natural Materials:

- ☐ tree stumps and discs
- ☐ soil
- ☐ branches
- ☐ various leaves
- ☐ mulch
- ☐ stones, pebbles, gems
- ☐ bird's nest
- ☐ bee's nest
- ☐ scent jars
- ☐ labelled containers with different materials (dirt, wheat, seeds)
- ☐ plants and seed pods

Other:

- ☐ insects
- ☐ bug catchers
- ☐ bug nets
- ☐ measuring tools
- ☐ microscope/periscopes
- ☐ marble works or tubes and marbles
- ☐ light table (using items that are transparent such as glass stones, transparent pattern blocks or to create shadows)
- ☐ items to authenticate the science area (small scale, flashlights, sectioned containers, various sized containers, authentic books, notebook to record and document, mirrors and test tubes)

Sensory

Sensory tables are large tubs or containers set up and filled with scoopable material, such as sand, rice, or water. Children will have different tools to scoop up the material and other small toys added to play with, depending on the interest or provocation. Sensory tables help children with hands-on exploration of items. Sensory experiences are embedded in all play areas in the classroom.

## Water and Sand Play - DAILY

### EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

\*Note:

Three or more developmentally appropriate sensory equipment and/or materials that are accessible.

#### Materials/Equipment

- ☐ sand boxes, sand pits (outdoors), various types of sand/water tables such as dishpans, plastic bins, tubs, buckets, sinks
- ☐ water sprinkler, hose
- ☐ sand or sand substitute (modelling sand, play pellets)
- ☐ waterproof aprons or smocks

#### Sand/water toys:

- ☐ measuring cups/spoons, variety of containers/pails, plastic bottles
- ☐ shovels, scoops, molds
- ☐ pumps, siphons, sand/waterwheels
- ☐ sponges, small water droppers, spray bottles, turkey basters
- ☐ funnels, plastic tubes, pipes
- ☐ trowels, rakes, sand scrapers, sifters
- ☐ things that sink or float
- ☐ nature items such as shells, pieces of wood, rocks

#### Dramatic play toys:

- ☐ animals, dinosaurs, sea creatures, small people
- ☐ small and large trucks and cars, diggers, boats
- ☐ kitchen utensils – spoons with and without strainer holes, eggbeaters, tongs, pots, pans, muffin tins, whisks

#### Storage/space:

- ☐ shelf under water/sand table
- ☐ easy to clean flooring.

### Optional Materials to Consider

MESSY PLAY				
sand	water	clay	ice	dirt
slime	legos	flour	ribbon	fish gravel
leaves	sticks	mulch	magnets	rice
corn	tinsel	pumpkins	rocks	pinecones
flowers	flower petals	weeds	coffee beans	chickpeas
	real fruit	cut up paper	goop	kinetic sand
pom poms	soapy water	cotton balls	loom bands	shaving soap bars
plastic grass	lacing items	shredded paper	hole punches	small blocks
water beads	real dough beans	jurassic sand	cooked noodles	uncooked noodles
huge sponge with soap	shaving cream	marshmallows and toothpicks	oobleck (corn starch and water)	flour and baby oil
paper plates	paper strips	various strings, ribbon, and yarn	straws	popcorn (string it)
patterns to cut	paper and hole punches	grass or flower clippings	leaves	pom poms
tissue paper	streamers	paper shredder paper	pictures from magazines	dry oatmeal
playdough	cut straws	snow		

## Manipulation and Math

Math learning opportunities can happen in all play areas.

- ✓ recognize shapes, colors, and textures
  - ✓ pattern recognition
  - ✓ develop hand-eye coordination
  - ✓ follow directions.
  - ✓ practice problem solving
- 

Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Support items for cognitive development, such as counting, puzzles, and cause-and-effect toys
  - ✓ Support fine motor development of lacing beads and sewing/lacing items
  - ✓ Cognitive experience allows children to enhance their concepts and knowledge in math skills, such as counting, number recognition, and measuring
-

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

### \*Note

Three or more different types of cognitive and manipulative materials are accessible.

Two complete toys for each child enrolled.

#### Activities and Materials:

- ☐ small objects to count (stones, marbles, shells)
- ☐ balance scales and weights
- ☐ rulers
- ☐ number puzzles
- ☐ magnetic numbers and board
- ☐ geometric shapes (parquetry/pattern blocks, hexagons, triangles, squares, circles)
- ☐ puzzle with graduated sizes or different shapes
- ☐ nested cups that require size recognition
- ☐ size and shape toys
- ☐ games/concepts (same/different, matching, classifying, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence, spatial relationships, cause and effect, sorting games)

#### Other:

- ☐ water with tools (funnels, water wheel, clear tubes, cups of various sizes, eye droppers, syringes, sponges)
- ☐ sand with tools (funnels, shovels, pails, small rakes, sifter, trucks, natural materials)
- ☐ play dough with tools (cookie cutters, cutting items, rolling pins, moulders)

### Optional Materials to Consider

#### Activities and Materials:

- ☐ dice
- ☐ geoboards and elastics
- ☐ games (Chutes and Ladders, matching, memory)
- ☐ puzzles
- ☐ clothing pins (for picking up objects)
- ☐ cups for stacking, counting and organizing colours
- ☐ generic materials (big beads with string, sewing boards with laces)
- ☐ sink/float objects
- ☐ eye droppers with ice cube trays (for sorting or dropping coloured water/mixing colours or mixing different liquids such as oil)
- ☐ measuring tapes

## Loose Parts

Natural loose parts can be found all around us. Loose parts come from the earth and can change from season to season. Finding natural loose parts can be an experience and provide children with a sense of exploration.

### INSPIRING PEDAGOGY

“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”  
(Nicholson 1972)

Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ The benefits of loose parts allow children to take the lead and create their designs and structures
- ✓ Loose parts offer a significant advantage in stimulating creativity, supporting constructional thinking, and enhancing spatial awareness
- ✓ Adding additional things like water, earth/soil, sand, gravel, and mud can greatly enhance loose parts play outdoors
- ✓ Sand, grass, water, rocks, and gardens are ways to incorporate nature in the playgrounds and can provide the same benefits for children as using the natural space provided
- ✓ Loose parts for letter practice
- ✓ Take loose parts outside; use loose parts for math, art, and sensory play

### List of Loose Parts

Natural Objects	Pops of Colour	Metallic and Reflective Objects	Soft and Flexible Objects	Household Objects
leaves twigs shells stones pinecones flowers clothespins tile samples cardboard tubes wine corks cork tiles natural loofah large wood buttons wicker or rope woven hot pads bamboo products wood-handled brushes wood rings wood balls	bangle bracelets large buttons silicone muffin liners paint sample cards shower curtain rings hair curlers pet toys plastic eggs sensory balls	tin cans metal utensils measuring spoons, cups metal jar lid rings glass stones locks cookie cutters keys on key ring	scarves felt place mats ribbons potholders handkerchiefs fabric squares doilies knotted rope hacky sacks sponges plastic loofahs	empty picture frames pump bottles plastic containers phone cases coasters empty spice jars dip bowls measuring cups, spoons funnels flour sifters chip clips flameless tea light candles

wood candlestick holders				
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## Outdoor Environment

Children need time and space to explore environments that allow them to engage in critical thinking and understand concepts that are unfamiliar to them. Outdoor environments allow children to investigate insects, explore plants and trees to see how they grow.

“A growing body of research suggests that connecting to the natural world contributes to children’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellbeing. Providing daily opportunities to explore, care for and interact with the natural world helps to strengthen these connections.”  
(HDLH, pg. 21)

### Tips for a purposeful learning environment:

- ✓ Outdoor exploration also promotes mathematical learning. Children can count rocks, sort leaves, or identify patterns
- ✓ When playing outdoors, the possibilities for learning are endless
- ✓ Consider children’s interests in the indoor environment and transfer them outside to help make the learning experiences more enticing—even when the weather is not warm and sunny, bring your indoor learning inquiry outside
- ✓ Gardening strengthens emotional and interpersonal skills. Children learn responsibility, patience, and working collaboratively.

## EXPECTED MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

### \*Note

Three or more types of play equipment, toys and materials are accessible to the children.  
Play equipment, toys and materials are all adapted to children’s needs.

### Materials/Equipment -Stationary equipment:

- ☐ climbing equipment
- ☐ low balancing equipment

### Portable equipment:

- ☐ balls (variety of sizes and textures)
- ☐ sports equipment (child-size basketball hoop, plastic bats, hockey sticks)
- ☐ wheel toys (wagons, push/ pull toys, scooters)
- ☐ riding toys (variety of sizes with and without pedals)
- ☐ tumbling mats
- ☐ jump ropes
- ☐ velcro mis and balls
- ☐ bean bags, targets/containers
- ☐ hula hoops
- ☐ ring toss game
- ☐ scoops and ball set
- ☐ hula hoops

- ☐ hockey sticks and ball
- ☐ badminton rackets and birdie
- ☐ parachute
- ☐ chalk
- ☐ clipboards and paper
- ☐ writing materials
- ☐ mud kitchen accessories
- ☐ playdough
- ☐ balance pads/beams
- ☐ parachutes
- ☐ tunnels
- ☐ large blocks (indoors and outdoors)
- ☐ loose materials such as big cardboard boxes, blankets, wood pieces

Outdoor Equipment and Supplies to Take on a Walk or Hike:

- ☐ cell phone or walkie talkie for emergency use
- ☐ medical authorization for all children
- ☐ first aid kit
- ☐ epi-pens and any other emergency medication

