

Physical Distancing in Child Care Settings - COVID-19

Policy Statement

Toronto Early Learning & Child Care Services (TELCCS) is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for children, families and employees. TELCCS will take every reasonable precaution to prevent the risk of communicable diseases within all our locations.

Purpose

To ensure that all employees are aware of and adhere to the directive established by Toronto Public Health (TPH), and Children's Services regarding physical distancing in the child care environment at TELCCS locations.

Application

This policy applies to all employees, students, community members and any others persons engaged in business with TELCCS.

Definition

Physical distancing means keeping our distance from one another by staying at least 2 metres (or 6 feet) away from others, as much as possible. This means making changes in everyday routines and activities in order to minimize contact with others. Physical distancing is sometimes referred to as Social Distancing. Physical distancing must not compromise supervision or child safety.

Procedures

By making a conscious effort to keep a physical distance between each other, we can slow the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing is proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak. Everyone has a role to play. This means making changes in everyday routines in order to minimize close contact with others.

The concept of physical distancing is new to everyone, especially the children, and we need constant messaging in various ways to act as reminders. Help younger children learn about physical distancing and less physical contact by creating games that include basic principles such as "two arm lengths apart". Regularly remind children to keep "Hands to yourself".

Suggestions for physical distancing in a child care setting

General

- When planning staff shifts, strive to minimize the number of different staff that interact with the same children throughout the day. Stagger break and lunch times, so that physical distancing can occur in staff rooms.
- Encourage children to greet each other using non-physical gestures (for example, wave or nod or a verbal "Hello"). Close greetings must not occur (for example, hugs, handshakes).

Entrance / Screening Area

- Use visual and physical barriers to increase the physical distance between staff and families/staff as they approach the screening area. This may include tape markings, pylons, flags, posters and tables/chairs blocking walking paths
- Use visual markings to increase physical distancing while families/staff are waiting outside of the centre for screening/pick up of child

Hallways

- Hallway seating areas should be limited to enforce distancing. Where chairs are not removable place caution tape or notices to not allow use of the seat
- Limit any casual interactions that normally occur at work
- Schedule transitions for each room at different times so that more than one group is not using the hallways at the same time
- Designate walking pathways for staircases, such as arrows identifying "up" and "down"

Staff Areas

- Determine and post occupancy limits inside break rooms and lunch areas
- Remove excess chairs to limit occupancy at any one time
- Where couches exist only one staff may use the couch at a time
- Post reminders to staff to try to walk outside during their breaks to get fresh air and a break from the work environment
- Where possible open windows in rooms to increase fresh air intake

Program Rooms

- Position play areas to increase distancing and to create purposeful movement either toward or away from specific areas.
- Room arrangements should be fluid. Adjust to what is observed with the children's movements once the programs start and adjust to continually create flow of movement and play areas away from each other. Also, consider the use of visual guides/aids (for example, different coloured tape) to help encourage the direction or flow of movement.
- Organize children into smaller groups and spread children out to minimize direct physical contact.
- Use different room configurations
 - Separate the tables
 - Remove excess chairs
 - Markings on tables, such as tape marking play areas or to divide a large table
 - Have specific chairs / seating for each child
- Set up environments to reduce the number of children in a group, for example, set up 2 or 3 areas for colouring or doing crafts.
- Use plastic coverings or push shelving units together to block access as applicable.
- Remove toys that encourage group play in close proximity or increase the likelihood of physical contact.

- Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children and staff.
- Select enough items only for the limited children in the room
- Ensure physical distancing while children are dressing and in cubby area
- Encouraging outdoor play can support physical distancing
 - Stagger outdoor play when possible
- During outdoor play or indoor gross motor play, significantly reduce the number of play items available and ensure that play areas are set up with physical distancing in mind.
- Encourage children to practice physical distancing while playing.

Rest time

- Position sleeping cots for maximum distancing (2m/6ft)
 - Adjust room layout for wake play time for daytime naps in order to achieve appropriate distancing of cots (particularly in small rooms).
 - Attempt to place barriers between cots where 2m/6ft is not achievable
 - Children must be placed in a sleeping arrangement where they are distanced and head to toe or toe to toe
 - It may be useful to place an identifier on the cot to indicate where the child's head/pillow should be placed.
- Cribs should be arranged such that open rails are not close to other open rails even if on a diagonal

Mealtime

- If necessary, stagger snack or meal time to allow spacing between children during meals
- All food items should be handed out by staff to encourage physical distancing between children.
- Ensure that staff and children practice hand hygiene before and after meal times and snacks.

Policy and Procedure Review

This policy and procedure will be reviewed and signed off by all employees before commencing employment/unpaid placement in a TELCCS location, and at any time where a change is made.

Revised: June 22, 2020