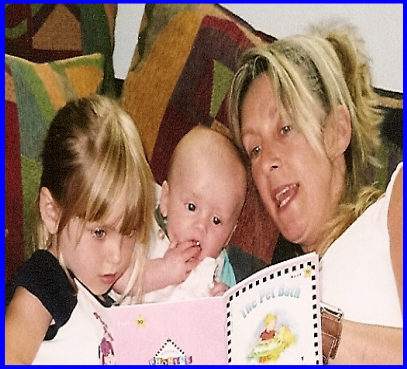


Ontario Early Years St. Catharines

Participant Handbook



Ontario Early Years Centres
A Place for Parents And Their Children.



Centres de la petite enfance
Un endroit pour les parents et leurs enfants.



YMCA of Niagara
We build strong kids,
strong families, strong communities.

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A place for:

Children (birth to age 6) to:

- Play and learn with their parents/caregivers
- Explore and experience activities to stimulate brain development
- Interact and play with other children

Parents/Families/Caregivers:

- Drop in with your child to participate in play-based learning activities
- Interact with your child and program facilitators
- Attend workshops and learn parenting tips
- Meet other parents and caregivers
- Borrow resources from the Resource Room/Library
- Learn about and be referred to other Early Years Services in our community





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strong families, strong communities.

Mission Statement:

The YMCA of Niagara is a charity, open to all, providing leadership and opportunities for people and their community to grow in spirit, mind, and body.

YMCA of Niagara has a long history of community involvement and development within the Niagara Region. Supporting children and families is a strength of the organization. In 2002, the YMCA of Niagara was selected to be the Lead Agency for the Ontario Early Years Centre in the St. Catharines riding. Funding for Ontario Early Years Programs is made available through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

To find out more about YMCA of Niagara please contact:

360 Niagara Street
St. Catharines, ON L2M 4W1
Phone: 905-646-9622

Web site: www.ymcaofniagara.org

Joining Us

Our Staff: All program facilitators are qualified Early Years Professionals committed to offering high quality programs. Supervisors of the program have years of experience in child development, program planning, curriculum development, and working with families. In addition, our facilitators have received training in Quality Child Care Niagara (QCCN) initiatives which support professionals in the use of using standardized screening tools and planning programs to maximize children's developmental learning opportunities. Our caring, supportive staff possess a strong understanding of community supports and of other early learning service providers in Niagara.

Registration: Registration is required for the use of our services. It is important for us to understand the children and families that we serve in order to plan appropriately. This registration information also assists us in communicating with you about special events and allows you to borrow resource materials. Advance registration (in person or by phone) is required for the specific workshops and field trips described in our monthly newsletter.

Sign In: Please ensure that you and your child sign in upon arrival (printing both first and last names) and check for special events that are posted.

Parent/Caregiver Expectations: We offer this handbook to ensure that every visit to our OEYC is enjoyable and to answer questions that you may have about our programs and services. We hope that you gain a full awareness of the opportunities available at our centres and understand how the program facilitators are able to support you in your visits. Our OEYC's are a great partnering between early years professionals, parents and caregivers who all work together to provide meaningful experiences to young children.



Our Program:

Interactive Play and Learn Program

Play is how children learn.

Our service is based on this fundamental principle. We encourage, support, promote and nurture the opportunity for children to learn through a stimulating environment with guidance and encouragement from caring adults.

We believe that it is critical to offer opportunities for:

- Communication, language and literacy development
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Personal, emotional, and social development
- Physical development and movement
- Artistic and creative development

It is never too early to focus on your child's readiness for kindergarten.

For this reason, our programs are developmentally structured to align with the kindergarten curriculum.

What does our program look like? Each location is unique, however:

- Each site has an Interactive Play and Learn program that sets the stage for developmental learning.
- Each site has learning centres which promote opportunities for growth, development and fun.
- Each area of our program is structured to promote children's intellectual development.

All activities within the program are designed to meet the developmental and educational needs of children from birth to six years of age and their parents/caregivers.

Benefits of Our Learning Centres:



Our program is arranged in learning centres with a daily program of activities which will foster child development.

Language, literacy and numeracy skill development opportunities have been incorporated into every aspect of the program.

We believe in the importance of repetition in children's learning and play. By repeating activities, children have opportunities to master new skills, use experimentation to determine outcomes and to acquire confidence in their abilities.

Creative Art: This area encourages children's natural creativity. It offers opportunities for the development of pre-reading skills, pre-math skills, and hand-eye coordination through the use of a variety of materials, tools and objects. Children need to develop skills in drawing, painting, cutting and gluing. We recognize the importance of the creative process rather than the end product. Adult made sample crafts are **not** encouraged. We believe that children need to have opportunities to explore their own creative potential.



Fine Motor: The fine motor area encourages cognitive development including the ability to think and solve problems using such toys as puzzles, number and matching games and other manipulatives.

Gross Motor: Gross motor activities allow the opportunity to develop large muscle skills like jumping, running and throwing.

*Limited availability in some sites due to space restrictions.

Blocks: Children can role play, explore, create and demolish in this area.

Science Centre: This area offers the opportunity to explore and discover the environment. In addition, special science experiments and activities are planned for every location.



Literacy: Literacy activities are found throughout the entire program. The literacy centre offers the opportunity to read books alone, or with other children and/or adults.

Circle: The coming together of individuals to participate in circle encourages communication, literacy and social skills. Circle time generally includes theme related songs, interactive stories, finger plays and discussion making it a valuable learning experience. If you and your child choose not to participate, we ask that you enjoy a quiet activity in another area so that others will not be disturbed.

Dramatic Play: Children can explore their world through role playing in a safe, non-judgmental setting.

Snack: Snack time is an opportunity for children to learn social skills and to try new foods. Prior to having snack, all children and adults are asked to wash their hands. The time at which snack is available varies by centre. **Children are invited to enjoy one serving of snack and one beverage.** Please be aware that our Mobile program sites do not offer snack due to facility issues. Food brought from home may be enjoyed at the snack tables in the centre. **All of our OEYC St. Catharines sites are nut aware** which means we ask that all participants refrain from bringing any nuts or nut products into our centres.

Sensory Centre: Using all of their senses, children have the opportunity to touch, experiment and manipulate a variety of materials encouraging children's natural inquisitiveness.

Computers: Most sites provide computers with age appropriate educational games, and some offer access to the Internet. Depending on demand, computer use may be limited. Program facilitators at the site can offer further information regarding computer usage and suggest appropriate websites for children.

Workshops: Each site offers various workshops. These programs focus on specific learning concepts and are designed to provide opportunities for adults and children to play, learn and enjoy positive interactive experiences. Parent education and children's workshops are described in detail in our monthly newsletter as well as in our sign up areas at each site. To register for a workshop, please call the centre where the session is going to be offered. Some sessions are limited in size due to space requirements. Registration for workshops can begin on the first (business) day of the month. Child care is available during some adult workshops.

Special Events: From time to time special events such as field trips are offered. Specific learning activities will be planned for each field trip. Parents/caregivers are responsible for their own transportation to the field trip location. Please refer to your calendar for upcoming events.

Working Together: Parents, Caregivers and OEYC Program Facilitators

You are responsible for the children in your care at all times. In order to ensure the safety of the children and a positive experience for all, parents and caregivers need to remain in reasonable proximity to their children. This is particularly important in our centres where we have multiple rooms available for play. Should you leave the room for any reason, please ensure that you have passed your children's care responsibility on to another participant or ask staff for assistance.

You are responsible to tidy up any materials that you or the children in your care use. We appreciate your assistance in maintaining the environment in a healthy, safe and tidy manner. If you find equipment that is not clean or in good repair, please report it to staff immediately.

Guidelines and expectations for equipment and learning centres use are posted throughout the program. Please read the information posted in each area to ensure you understand the purpose and value of each learning centre.

Occasionally an older child may wish to visit the centre with his/her younger sibling. These older children are welcome to play, and also act as helpers and positive role models in the program. Please remember that our equipment and resources are geared to the 0-6 year old age group and some may not be appropriate for the older children to use, particularly our riding toys.

Please leave valuables in your vehicle or at home. We cannot accept any responsibility for lost or stolen items.

The OEYC creates opportunities for face to face interactions for both children and adults. For this reason, ***we encourage you to limit cell phone/Blackberry use to emergencies.***

Students: From time to time, we offer educational opportunities for students to learn skills in child development. Student's pictures will be posted on the notice board and they will wear name tags identifying themselves.



Adult Role in Children's Learning & Play

At all times, adults have a critical role in children's play. We believe that adults should always:

- Value children's play and speak with children about their play.
- Participate in your child's play as much as possible. When adults engage in children's play, children receive the message that play is valuable and that they are important. This increases a child's overall self-esteem and self-concept.
- Recognize that children's play with their peers and adults increases a child's level of trust and their sense of belonging.
- Create a playful atmosphere. Provide materials that are developmentally and age appropriate for children to explore.
- When play appears to be stuck, unproductive or dangerous, please intervene appropriately to redirect the child or offer a new prop or experience.
- During play, always follow the child's lead. Let them be the director or leader of their play. This increases creative thinking, communication skills and supports their developing leadership skills.

Program Facilitator Role in Children's Learning and Play

OEYC staff are responsible to facilitate opportunities for you to interact with your children. We will:

- Provide leadership and direction to the program.
- Manage the program in accordance to YMCA of Niagara and Ministry of Children and Youth Services guidelines, policies and procedures.
- Develop programs that serve the needs of participants.
- Act as a support and resource for families.

Opportunities to Become More Involved in the OEYC

Program Advisory Committee: The Program Advisory Committee is made up of participants of the OEYC program, representatives of agencies/organizations and community participants. Committee members assist the Coordinator in identifying local issues and gathering information, and are liaisons with each of the St. Catharines sites.

Suggestions: We are always open to suggestions that will enhance our program. You are encouraged to let us know if we are meeting your needs. Comment cards are available for you to record your thoughts and suggestions. Although there is no requirement to sign your comment card, we appreciate knowing where ideas and suggestions originate. This enables us to follow up with you.

Evaluation: In order to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our participants, we conduct surveys/evaluations of our services on a regular basis. We ask that you take a few minutes to participate. However, should you wish to discuss any aspect of our program, please feel free to speak to staff. We welcome discussion.



Resources for Parents and Caregivers

Resource Lending Library: Each site has a wealth of resources: books, videos, DVD's, information sheets, brochures and pamphlets. Some materials are available for you to keep and others are available for borrowing for a two week period. Literacy backpacks are also available for you to enjoy with your child. Our Thorold and Bunting Road locations offer Toy Lending services as well. For more information about available resources, please speak to the staff.

Workshops: Parent education sessions are offered on a regular basis. You are invited to participate in any session that is offered at an Ontario Early Years Centre. Pre-registration is required, so please contact the centre where the session is offered directly to reserve your space. Registration begins on the first (business) day of the month.



Health and Safety

Allergies: All Ontario Early Years Centres within the St. Catharines riding are “*Nut Aware*”. For the safety of our participants, it is imperative that all food items brought to the site are nut free.

Diapering: An area for changing diapers is available as per Ministry of Health regulations. Please remember to disinfect the change table before and after each use with the disinfectant solution provided. Soiled diapers must be placed in a plastic bag. Please follow directions for the disposal of diapers at your site. Gloves are available.

Toys: Toys and equipment are disinfected on a regular basis. In the event that a child mouths a toy, please place this item in the container provided for toy disinfecting.

Medication and Illness: Please do not bring medication to the site. Children and/or adults who are ill should refrain from attending the program in order to protect the health of other participants and our program facilitators.

Accidents: Should an accident occur, the staff is required to complete documentation regarding the incident. You will be asked to review and sign the document which will then be forwarded to the Coordinator for review. A first aid kit is available at all locations.

Adult Refreshments: Coffee and tea are available for you to enjoy as you participate with your children. Due to safety concerns, hot beverages are only to be served in non-spillable cups with lockable lids. The staff would be happy to make these cups available to you.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures: Please read and follow the evacuation procedures which are posted on site to ensure you are knowledgeable regarding safe evacuation for your children and yourself. Fire and evacuation drills take place on a monthly basis.

Closures: The centre may be closed due to inclement weather. Closures will be announced on local radio stations and on the YMCA of Niagara website. Please call the OEYC, or the Walker Family YMCA Branch (905)934-9622 if you are uncertain. Occasionally, conflicting events in our shared facilities also take place. We strive to provide advance notice for any closure through our monthly newsletter, emails and signage at our centres.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Confidentiality: All staff, students, and volunteers are required to sign confidentiality forms. The YMCA of Niagara and the Ontario Early Years Centre, St. Catharines is dedicated to respecting the confidentiality of program participants, and staff. As a participant of the OEYC, please respect your agreement to hold confidential all information learned by you in the course of your participations, even after you are no longer a participant.

Ontario Early Years Centres, St. Catharines

Locations:

25 YMCA Drive, Walker Family YMCA
469 Grantham Avenue, Grantham Mennonite Brethren Church
234 Bunting Road, Regional Services Building
15 Pine Street South, Thorold, Trinity United Church

**Mobile Locations are available
within St. Catharines.**

Call the Main Site for a location in your area.



To Contact Us:

Ontario Early Years Centre, St. Catharines

Main Site

25 YMCA Drive, Walker Family YMCA

St. Catharines

L2N 7P9

905-938-9392

Web site: www.ontarioearlyyears.ca

or

<http://ymcaofniagara.org/kids/earlyyears.html>

or

Email: tcosco@ymcaofniagara.ca