

Best practices for a healthy child care facility

This article explores the creation of a parent-run cooperative day care and focuses on how we have worked to create an environmentally healthy child care facility. It also exemplifies the results of on-the-ground community building.

Finding appropriate child care for my children – 3 years and 9 months - was a challenge that many other parents in my community shared. As I was heading back to work part-time, I was looking for ways that I could balance a stimulating work life while maintaining a close relationship with my children. I figured that I would only have children this age once and I could work for the rest of my adult life.

Based on a cooperative child care model that my eldest son had been a part of, a group of parents came together with the goal of creating our own co-operative, parent-run day-care. After much discussion, we agreed to build our “Garden” based on the following principles:

1. Providing a safe and loving home-like environment that was an extension our attachment parenting approach.
2. Providing the best possible diet for our children – organic, vegetarian, balanced and diverse.
3. Take a precautionary approach to creating a safe and healthy environment that was free from chemicals, pesticides or other potential toxics.
4. Focus on accommodating special needs whether they be dietary, health or behavioural.
5. Provide a stimulating, creative and child-led play space that provided the children with the best possible start in life.
6. Ensure that the cooperative was working not only for the children but for the parents as well. It needed to be flexible and accommodating in recognition of our need to balance our careers as well as our children.

Naturally, our goal was to provide the building blocks for the development of healthy children from every perspective. We implemented a model that is really quite simple:

1. We have a maximum of 6 children in the co-operative, ages 1-4 years. This enables us to fit within the Ontario home-care legislation and it is about as much as we can handle.
2. Each parent does a volunteer day for each child and we have hired a child-care provider with ECE certification. This means that we have a 3:1 ratio of children to adults. Our hours are 8:30 – 5:30. Our ‘teacher’ works 4 days per week leaving 1 day a week with 2 parents. This keeps our costs down to about half of a regular day care facility.
3. We have transformed a rental unit in one of our homes into a day care for the children. This is their permanent space. It is equipped with a kitchen, bathroom, separate quiet space and of course lots and lots of toys.

Each family has additional responsibilities in the actual running of the facility such as: finance, administration, materials, food and cleaning.

Creating a healthy space is an important guiding principle for the ‘Garden.’ Although there is much debate about what is harmful and what is safe in our environment, as parents we feel that we need to take every measure possible to implement a precautionary approach in everything that we do. Why take an unnecessary risk when there are viable and convenient alternatives?

Food

Our first commitment is to organic and vegetarian foods. 100% organic is not completely attainable, but we estimate that we are about 80% organic with all the dry goods, fruits, vegetables, milk products and snack foods organic. The elimination of meat from our meal plans means that we are able to avoid many of the food

preparation concerns that other day cares may face.

We have a couple of children with serious dairy allergies. We are able to accommodate this by providing a full range of milk-substitutes such as rice milk, soy cheese and dairy-free alternatives that can be easily pick-up from the health food store in our neighbourhood.

Recycling

We recycle everything that we can: all paper products, cans and glass go into our regular city pick-up. Even the abandoned artwork finds its way into the paper recycling box. It is the responsibility of the parent on duty the day before the recycling pick-up to take the recycling out to the curb side.

Given the age of the children, we also recycle our disposable diapers. There is a company called 'Small Planet' that picks-up our diapers every two weeks. We compost the food waste when possible, but given the chaos of a day at the 'Garden' this isn't always possible.

Indoor

Two of our children suffer from asthma. Given this, we have a strong focus on eliminating any potential allergens. We have a rigorous daily cleaning regime, but have eliminated all chemical cleaners, opting instead for natural cleaning products such as tea tree oil and lavender as disinfectants, vinegar and water for surfaces and natural floor and dish cleaners. We either create our own cleaners or buy them from our local health food store.

Additionally, we have an air purifier running in the room the children sleep and occasionally use aromatherapy with eucalyptus when the cold season arrives. We have also implemented a strict hand washing policy to try to minimize the germs.

Outdoor

The first challenge of the outdoor space was safety. It was paramount that we enclosed the space. Although a little expensive, we made a decision to install cedar fencing around the property. This ensured that we eliminated all pressure-treated wood contamination.

Naturally, we don't use pesticides on the lawn - never did - but now we are also trying to teach the kids how to garden in the yard. They are also experimenting with tasting different herbs and vegetables that are already growing in the garden organically.

Implementing these environmental practices took considerable thought as we built our day care, but now that it is up and running and the systems are in place, it runs very smoothly. We don't think much about it anymore, but we do have the comfort of mind knowing that we have taken every reasonable step to give our children the healthiest environment possible in their early years.

Author: Tonya Surman

Copied from: <http://commons.ca/articles/fulltext.shtml?x=400>

Article downloaded from page [eioba.com](http://www.eioba.com)