

CURRICULUM

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Fostering Growth and Development

The YMCA Family Centers focus on child development and place a high priority on serving the needs of the child, the parent and the family. We use standards set by licensing agencies and guidelines established by national educational organizations to monitor program quality.

The objectives of the Central Florida YMCA Family Centers at the Walt Disney World® Resort align with the broader objectives of the Central Florida YMCA, as well as the specific needs of Walt Disney World Cast families.

CFYMCA Goal: Provide a safe and secure environment that enriches children and family lives.

We allow parents to balance work and family lives with the support of high quality, flexible and affordable child development services.

CFYMCA Goal: Grow Personally: Build self-esteem and self-reliance.

We encourage children to achieve their highest potential through healthy, innovative, educational and fun child development programming.

CFYMCA Goal: Strengthen positive values.

We foster the values of Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility among staff members, children, parents and families.

CFYMCA Goal: Improve personal and family relationships.

We support family growth and learning through the spiritual, physical and mental development of all family members individually and together.

CFYMCA Goal: Appreciate diversity.

We practice diversity by encouraging children to learn about their own backgrounds as well as the backgrounds of others.

CFYMCA Goal: Become better leaders and supporters.

We commit to hire the most qualified professionals, secure the highest level of accreditation for infant and early childhood education, and maintain administrative stability necessary to create and sustain quality child development centers.

CFYMCA Goal: Develop crosscutting programs.

We provide a high-quality curriculum program with special emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood programs. We extend the range of play and learning experiences through an emphasis on outdoor and natural learning environments allowing for healthy development in fresh air and sunlight.

Ensure High Quality Care

The YMCA Family Centers have a responsibility to make sure it provides the highest quality of care possible. The YMCA Family Centers are confident the care it provides is of high quality by committing to the following:

Require training for childcare providers that exceed the basic state standards.

Ensure the quality of staff-to-child interactions.

Meet the developmental needs of the whole person.

True to the Central Florida YMCA mission, teachers direct special attention to children's physical, mental or cognitive, spiritual, and character development.

Provide Developmental Appropriateness

The concept of developmental appropriateness has two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness.

Age appropriateness

Human development research indicates there are universal predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first nine years of life. These predictable changes occur in all domains of development – physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. Knowledge of typical development of children with the age span provides a framework from which caregivers prepare the learning environment and plan appropriate experiences.

Individual appropriateness

Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background. Both curriculum (activities) and adults' interactions with children are responsive to individual differences. Learning in young children is the result of interaction between the child's thoughts and experiences with materials, ideas, and people. These experiences match the child's developing abilities, while also challenging the child's interest and understanding.

Care for Children with Special Needs

The YMCA Family Centers are committed to including as many children with special needs as possible, and to working side-by-side with families and professionals who provide services for these children. We strive to go above and beyond standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in accommodating these children. Our approach toward special needs children is an extension of our philosophy on diversity and inclusiveness.

Provide Appropriate Assessments / Observations

Children are provided periodic assessments to help parents understand where they are developmentally in relationship to other children.

Assessment is an important part of curriculum development. It helps teachers to determine whether the content and structure of the learning activities reach the goals for children. Through assessment, teachers can modify activities, materials, the room arrangement, and their teaching style. Assessment is an organized way of looking at each child's development over time. It helps teachers get to know each child – their interests, feelings, strengths, and needs. Assessment is particularly useful when tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of children new to the program. Parents sign permission for observations to take place. The following assessments may be used.

- Parent Checklist
- Observation Checklist
- The Early Learning Accomplishment Profile
- Developmentally Young Children
 - Birth to 36 months
 - LAP Screen 3
 - LAP Screen 4
 - LAP Screen 5
- Ages and Stages Checklist
- Brigance – for children who may need further assessment
- The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (for children ages 2 through 5 years) – Enhancing Social and Emotional Development – DECA Program promotes resilience in young children through environmental changes.
- Children with more severe or developmental concerns are connected with the PEC (the state and federal funded Preschool Evaluation Center) for further diagnostic screenings.

Use Appropriate Curriculum

- Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers – revised edition
This guide provides quality experiences for infants through age two. The book provides activities and specific ideas for adults to use with the youngest children. Certainly, relationships are the core of any infant and toddler program, however this guide provides a comprehensive curriculum vital to serving this age group.
- Creative Curriculum for Preschool – fourth edition
This guide has undergone many changes to meet the changing needs of children, our society and parents. The focus of this Guide is on helping teachers to observe children more purposefully and to use their observations to plan for each child and the whole group. The Guide clearly shows teachers a variety of approaches to take an active role in children's learning. The content is established to help teachers integrate content into everyday experiences and is appropriate for ages 3 – 5.

- DLM Express will be added to the four- year old curriculum. The Teacher's Guide is complete with activities and books to enhance children's learning. The year is divided into themes with literacy, math focuses.
- Phonemic Awareness in Young Children is a classroom curriculum that helps teacher's monitor and support young children's phonemic awareness. This will be used with 3 – 8 age groups.
- The Letter People
- YMCA School-Age Care Curriculum Framework
- The Complete Daily Curriculum for Early Childhood – over 1200 activities using learning centers on a daily basis.

Other Resources used by the YMCA Family Centers include:

- YMCA Preschool Age Child Care – Second Edition
- YMCA Infant/Toddler Child Care – Second Edition
- Early Learning Environments that Work
- Environment Rating Scales –
 - Infant/Toddler
 - Early Childhood
 - School -Age Care

Provide Flexibility

Back - Up Care is designed for children whose regular childcare arrangements are unavailable (e.g., caregiver is sick or on vacation). Before learning can occur, trust must be established. Children attending Back -Up Care need to feel safe and secure among people who understand what it is like to be a young child in an unfamiliar place. In regular, full-time care, the successful transition takes place in about three weeks. The transition for a new child in back-up care needs to take place in about three minutes! Teachers of children in Back -Up Care in each age group have special rituals to help children make this transition.

Infants and Toddlers

Infants and Toddlers who attend Back - Up Care will join primary care rooms. This ensures that staff/child ratios are kept as small as possible for young children. Activities for these age groups are simple enough that caregivers are able to assimilate children in Back - Up Care with ease. Most important for pre-verbal children is that communication between parent(s) and caregiver takes place before or at the child's arrival. The caregiver needs immediate information about the child's individual needs, personality, likes and dislikes in order to make a connection with the child and establish comfort for both child and parent(s). At the end of the day, the teacher provides parents with information about the child's day in a format that also serves as a memento of the child's experience.

Pre-Schoolers (Ages 2-5)

Pre-school children attending Back - Up Care will attend a room specifically reserved for Back -Up Care. Pre-school children in Back - Up Care enjoy many elements of the primary care program, but tailored for their needs. Specific curricula based on daily themes are used. Back - Up Care teachers take cues from attending children or may take advantage of special events (e.g., butterflies

hatching from cocoons in the garden) in deciding the theme for the day. Again, Back - Up Care is flexible in order to best serve the children attending that day.

School-Age Children

School age children are given a special orientation to the program and the facility, as well as assigned a “buddy” for the day. School age kids will find some familiar books and games as well as innovative programs. The YMCA Family Center is a special place for school age children to learn, have fun and make new friends.

Parents

Parents using Back - Up Care also need special consideration. Many have never left their child in the care of a non-relative and will need assurances that their child is in safe hands. It is the goal of every teacher to reach out to parents using Back -Up Care and ensure that they gain more than temporary childcare from the experience, but also leave with new knowledge and resources for the future, and a desire for their child to return.

Philosophies of Learning

Blended Approach

No specific curriculum program is superior to another program and no one method works the same for every child, however, any program is superior to no program. The DLM Early Childhood Express will be used with the prekindergarten ages. This “state-of-art” learning program is well researched and designed to meet the needs of all children. The Creative Curriculum will be used to set-up and maintain every classroom. Because children come in different sizes at different times, the YMCA Family Centers maintain an overarching philosophy to meet the needs of every child.

We meet the individual needs of each child by providing:

- Choices
- Variety of experiences (the younger the child the more the variety, the older the child, the more choice)
- Cooperative activities to encourage cooperative learning
- Active involvement in the learning process
- Many outdoor experiences
- Authentic materials
- Small group learning
- Teacher as facilitator or orchestrator
- Multi-age and grade groupings
- Multi-lingual communication
- Home-like atmosphere
- Strong family commitment

Technology Philosophy

Up - to - date technology is a priority and a well-sequenced age appropriate plan will ensure all children experience technology early, meaningfully and positively.

Birth through ages three – computers will not be used with these ages, but primary attention will be paid to “whole” development through social, emotional and physical development. The cognitive mind is forming, yet the fine motor control is not ready to accomplish the skill of keyboarding. Screen time of any sort is limited to no more than one hour per day. Children will not watch television at the YMCA Family Centers.

Ages three to five – Keyboarding is learned easily with this age group. Screen time is limited to pediatric recommendations.

School Age – Children are ready to experience more directly computer simulations. The brain is plastic and can be changed early in the lives of children thus intervention through computer remediation programs. The computer simply does for people what they cannot do for themselves. School age children will have access to computers and programs that support their schoolwork as well as reading and research skills. Cameras are used to help children understand the power of the technological world. Access to various other media such as VCR's, power point presentations, etc. are encouraged, as children grow older. The software is interactive, always previewed and overseen by the instructor and supportive of the strong values proclaimed by the YMCA Family Center. There will be no violent games allowed in the center and Nintendo is not available. Internet usage is monitored and limited to appropriate sites.

Natural Outdoor Play

For most of us, play was an important part of our childhood experience. Children today lead much different lives. New safety concerns as well as a dramatic increase in extracurricular activities has made unstructured outdoor play among children increasingly rare. Today's kids are shuttled back and forth between schools, lessons, sports and scheduled playdates, leaving little or no time for free play in a safe environment.

The YMCA Family Centers provide the time and space children need for outdoor play. While teachers often use the playgrounds for structured activities, this supplements the free-play time every child enjoys outdoors every day.

Playgrounds at the YMCA Family Centers were designed for exploration, imagination and discovery as well as traditional outdoor activities such as swings and slides. The playgrounds, designed by age group, and provide plenty of space for different activities allowing children to use all of their senses. While out in the playgrounds, children can:

- Run, jump, skip, climb, swing and slide

- Ride wheeled toys down pathways
- Sit under shady trees
- Watch caterpillars evolve into butterflies in the butterfly garden
- Plant seeds and watch them grow into seedlings and plants
- Splash around in water tables
- Build sand or mud structures
- Spy on birds
- Blow bubbles
- Draw with chalk
- Smell flowers
- Make noise or enjoy the quiet
- Enjoy a picnic
- Play in small groups, big groups or by themselves
- Get dirty

Conservation and Appreciation for the Natural Environment

As a consequence of spending time outdoors, our children develop an appreciation for the environment. We believe children have great curiosity and interest in the environment and are able to contribute positively to it. Teaching children about the environment promotes appreciation of its importance to their lives and awareness of how they can positively impact it. Providing children opportunities to experience the environment through fun and enriching activities enhances their comfort level and expands their knowledge to create a respectful and caring attitude about living things.

Lessons focusing on the environment and conservation are interspersed throughout the curricula. Field experiences focusing on conservation and the environment will be incorporated as well. As a matter of practice, we minimize waste, re-use and recycle whenever possible. Information about how to protect the environment (e.g., turn off lights, make two-sided copies, recycle bottles and cans) are posted and available for children, staff and parents.

Sports, Physical Fitness & Health Philosophy

Infants need strength and coordination to grow into active toddlers. We will help babies grow through providing opportunities for them to develop the large motor strength and coordination to roll over, sit, crawl, walk, throw a ball, balance, and eventually ride a tricycle. Infants have “tummy time” to develop upper body strength. Caregivers frequently change the baby’s position and play motor games such as “trot a little horsy” and pull to standing. Caregivers do not swing children by the arms.

Toddlers need the chance to explore the world by providing space to walk both inside and outside. Small climbing structures are important and much verbal encouragement is heard in the centers. Teachers support and encourage children by providing push toys and dexterity games.

Children ages two through five play alone but move to parallel then group play. Activities emphasize exploration, experimentation and a variety of running, tumbling, throwing and catching activities.

School age children create their own games, extend play and use a variety of physical activities to encourage strong fitness.

The adults who supervise the children are expected to “play with” children and may not sit in a chair and observe children while they are playing, they must participate. Adults who prefer sedentary positions will not be apart of the YMCA Family Centers.

Additional programming may become available for parents who would like their children to participate in more advanced activities such as piano, violin, dance, etc. while at the YMCA Family Centers for an additional fee.

Nutrition is utmost in the minds of the Family Center staff and will be carefully adhered to through snacks and meals that meet the USDA guidelines.

Parent Activities

The YMCA Family Centers provide many activities for parents to participate with their children as well as opportunities to gather with other adults. Parent activities will include family picnics, family dinners, parent conferences and parent educational opportunities and seminars.

Curriculum Design

The YMCA Family Centers are set up in a series of learning centers per suite. These centers divide a classroom in such a way as to allow children to make choices, to move freely and independently, and to grow in areas of need. They also give opportunities for a large number of children to learn individually or in smaller groups so that the teacher can take advantage of moments of readiness, keen interest, and desire.

Staff is responsible to invite, guide, and encourage children to explore all the centers. By helping each child find that there are different ways of learning, each child will discover their own best path to learning.

By setting up a series of centers within the classroom, we provide:

- For a child to make choices.
- For discovery and learning through direct personal experiences.
- To build a feeling of self-confidence and competence as a result of learning skills.
- To enlarge children's vocabulary and to develop skills in communicating their ideas.
- For imaginative dramatic play through role-playing.
- To learn, to think, and to problem-solve by using a variety of materials.
- To develop fine and gross motor skills.
- To develop socially by learning to relate to others.

- To share and to be responsible to others as a member of a group.
- To use and care for materials and equipment.
- To complete tasks and to plan group projects.
- To discover and expand the learning of specific information relating to a subject.

Once the learning centers have been prepared for the children, it is the teacher's responsibility to observe the children interacting with the materials and activities. With the observations, the teacher can determine the developmental level of each child and which activities enhance their learning.

In addition to the learning centers, the teachers will also designate a specific amount of time each day for guided lessons. This time includes calendar time, story time, writing time, art activities, music, fingerplays, flannel board stories, games, poetry, and rhythms. Guided group time also includes outdoor time when the children may be organized into a more structured group for large muscle activities, such as circle games exercises, or practicing a motor skill. Also routine times when all the children may be eating, resting, moving in or out of doors together.

Block Building

Block building contributes to children's development in physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and creative areas. Children learn the physical skills of holding, stacking, and balancing the blocks. Arms and hands are strengthened as children take the blocks off the shelves and put them back again. The muscles in their fingers are strengthened as the children pick up smaller items and stand them in place. Balancing the blocks also promotes eye-hand coordination.

In addition, social skills are enhanced in the block area, as children learn about sharing, cooperation, taking turns, and playing cooperatively. Also, their language is expanded through speaking and listening to each other. Building structures of their own design enhances creativity. The block center also promotes cognitive growth, through skills such as categorizing, counting, sorting, and problem solving. Block building promotes a positive feeling within children.

All math concepts begin in the block center with the concept of one unit block. Children begin to add and subtract using blocks in a concrete format.

Art Center

Art is a means of communication and self-expression for children. Art is visual and involves the elements of line, shape, color, and texture rather than words.

It is important to realize that most young children do not begin their art projects with a picture in mind, rather they are manipulating the medium to explore learning. All children go through a similar sequence in the development of drawing skills. They begin with scribbles that are repeated over and over again

until they emerge into shapes. Then eventually, recognizable objects begin to appear.

In order to facilitate the progression in art expression, the art center is filled with diverse media such as crayons, markers, paints, scissors, stamps, play dough, clay, tape, newspaper, magazines, ribbon, chalk, hole punches, and glitter.

Music Center

Like art, music is another medium for children's communication and self-expression. Elements of music that young children are involved with include tone, rhythm, and melody.

Music centers become personal for children as they bring in discs or tapes of music they enjoy. Children explore different musical instruments, to see the cause and effect for each: if you shake the rattle, it makes a noise. The children may also create musical instruments, as beans in a paper towel tube with the ends sealed can become a shaker.

Literature Center

Emergent literacy does not happen through formal teaching, it occurs in environments that are filled with print. A few examples of print are signs, lists, charts, pictures, books, labels, stories, magazines, newspapers, computer programs, and food containers.

There are several activities a teacher can use to help create emergent literacy. Literacy begins when teachers read books to individuals and small groups, when books are available for children to look at on their own, when stories are told orally for children to listen to and to respond to, and when children make up their own stories that are tape recorded or written down.

Writing Center

Research evidence indicates that there is a progression from random scribbling, to controlled scribbling, to the writing of mock letters and words, and finally to real writing as children experiment and mature. At the YMCA Family Centers, we fill the children's environment with examples of writing and reading. We encourage and support the children's attempts at writing. In addition, it is crucial to display the children's writing, so that they can take pride in their accomplishments.

Science/Math Center

The science center is one the best examples of how children learn through self-discovery and investigation. Children, from infancy, are ready to explore their environment through their five senses.

- Sight - Children observe and notice things in their environment. For further exploration, they can use magnifying glasses and binoculars to learn about their environment. What does a lemon look like?
- Sound - Children usually use this sense after sight to explore an object. What sound does a lemon make? Listen carefully.

- Smell - Children use smell all the time to help them identify and discriminate among the things in their world. What does a lemon smell like?
- Taste - Most children want to try most things that are edible. As children mature, however, fewer things go into their mouths. How do different things taste? How does the lemon taste?
- Touch - Children learn a great deal from their sense of touch. How does the object feel? Describe it. How does the lemon feel?

Science centers are set up based upon topics that are of interest to the children. A few examples of topics are children's food, clothing, their shadows, dogs, cats, trees, grass, frogs, the sun, and rain. The cognitive concepts that are most appropriate for preschool children to investigate involve the properties of objects (their shape, size, color, texture, sound and odor); the actions of objects (how they move, react, balance, stand up, grow, and eat); and likeness and differences among objects. Preschool children need not be so concerned about "why" things are the way they are, but rather "how" they look, act, and interact.

In math, the particular areas that preschool children need to learn involve four areas:

Classification: the ability to sort out one thing from another on the basis of its characteristics. The child learns to discriminate visually among various shapes, sizes, and colors, and then learns to compare one object with another, discovering that some things are alike and others are different.

One-to-one correspondence: the ability to match objects that belong together. For example, the yellow cap goes with the yellow marker and the brown cap goes on the brown marker. The napkin on the table goes with the plate. If there are four plates, there should be four napkins.

Seriation: the ability to order objects by size, texture, taste, color, and sound, in ascending and descending order.

Counting: the ability to name numbers in a fixed sequence and applies it to an object at a time, arriving at a total. The children need to know the names of the numbers and the order of numbers and then apply one number to one object when they count (one-to-correspondence).

Dramatic Play Center

Dramatic play is one of the most complex kinds of play that young children engage in - and perhaps the most important. In dramatic play, children use pretending to investigate their world. For example:

Social Development

Cooperation

Social roles

Values such as honesty, service, loyalty, and truthfulness

How to gain entrance into a group

How to be a leader

How to negotiate

How to deal with people you disagree with

Cognitive Growth

Concepts such as work, play, order, time
Concepts of travel and transportation
Concepts of illness, doctors, and emergencies
Roles of families and workers
Problem solving
Planning

Language Development

How to carry on a conversation
How to speak as a different character
Meanings and uses of new words
How to express feelings in words
Use of words as a substitute for actions

Emotional Development

Positive self-concept
How to express strong feelings in acceptable ways
How to control negative tendencies
How to deal with conflict
How to understand the emotions of others

Physical Development

Mastering certain motor skills (running, jumping, climbing)

Creative Development

Divergent thinking
New ideas, plots, and characters

Large Motor Center

Running, jumping, climbing, and skipping are all activities associated with children. Growing bodies need physical exercise in order to develop properly. It is our responsibility to provide opportunities for each child to practice his/her motor development. With different activities and equipment we provide opportunities for walking, running, galloping, jumping, hopping, leaping, crawling, creeping, balancing, bending, climbing, creative movement, throwing, catching, and riding.

Outdoor Learning Center

Children will be outside every day, usually twice a day. The outdoor environment is designed as a learning center as well as a place to develop large and small muscles. Each play area is designed with the specific age child in mind.

A play environment includes the traditional playground with a larger play space that adds other play opportunities and reinforces safety and community ownership of the space. The play environment includes a garden and butterfly areas.

The maintenance of the outdoor learning environments is scheduled regularly. Safety is always the first goal for children and parents and the outdoor environments are maintained in a safe manner with regular checklist provided.

Curriculum Planning

Planning for the entire year is established while weekly lesson plans and activities are documented by the Center Director.

It is important for parents to know what to expect and when to expect it so the planning includes parent activities and notifications. Teacher Newsletters for ages two and up are required, while caregivers write-in the children's diaries daily while they are infants and toddlers.

The age group determines the planning mode. For instance, the prekindergarten teachers may use the computer for documenting their planning. Computers are available for all caregivers/teachers, but the age will determine the resource.

Themes

Long range planning includes themes that are developmentally appropriate for the specific age. Children must be able to understand the concepts and the required skills must be within their level of comprehension. The listed themes are guidelines for planning curriculum and teachers are encouraged to add and expand on the themes listed below.

August

- My Family
- Five Senses
- Body Awareness

September

- Fall
- Labor Day
- Transportation
- Yom Kippur
- Jobs people have

October

- Community Helpers
- Columbus Day
- Halloween
- Octoberfest
- Rosh Hashanah
- Fire Safety
- WDW Anniversary

November

- Native Americans
- Animals
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving

December

- Winter
- Weather
- Hanukkah
- Christmas
- Kwanza

January
 Seasons
 Martin Luther King Jr. Day
 Chinese New Year
 New Year

February
 Valentine's Day
 President's Day
 Friendship
 Feelings
 Dental Health

March
 Health and Nutrition
 St. Patrick's Day
 Easter

April
 Spring
 Nature
 Growing Things
 Farm Life
 Japanese Cherry Festival

May
 Families
 Nature – birds and insects
 Mother's Day
 Cinco de Mayo

June
 Cultures
 Water Safety
 Summer
 Father's Day

July
 Oceans and Seashores
 America
 Independence Day

Room Arrangement

The physical space and how it is arranged determine how children function, move and learn in the YMCA Family Centers. The way the room is set-up determines room flow and provides opportunities for children to explore, discover and grow. The arrangement of furniture involves children in the environment. The outside environment is just as important as the indoor environment and great care has been taken to establish well thought-out areas for learning, moving and growing.

The interest areas or centers are well stocked with a variety of materials to keep children interested and help them learn. Storage is vital to the program since many materials will not be available at all times, but will be brought out for special occasions.

In setting up the room:

- Establish traffic patterns.
- Consider noise.
- Clearly define areas that need protection.
- Decide which areas need tables.
- Identify storage areas.
- Ensure a locking area is available for first aid kit.
- Identify area for caregiver materials.
- Think about activities that are affected by floor coverings.
- Place interest areas near needed resources.
- Make sure you have no blind spots.
- Label the equipment and areas.
- Make sure space is adapted to children with special needs.
- Include home touches – a lamp, pictures of family.
- Add a variety of textures.
- Provide quiet spaces.
- Use the natural light.
- Make sure the parent area is ready with notes for parents.
- Allocate space for children's displays so their work is displayed.
- Designate group area probably on the area rug.
- Draw the floor plan and place each item before getting started.

Teachers will use the Environment Rating Scale for their specified age group before they begin. There are three Scales:

- Infant/Toddler
- Early Childhood
- School Age

Daily Routine

The daily routines and schedule that create a sense of order for staff and children help children to know what to expect next. The assurance that their environment is predictable and familiar is very important to young children.

Lead teachers provide the following:

Establish, document and post a daily routine and daily schedule.

Each age group has its own special needs and timetable. The YMCA Family Centers accommodate each age group and flexible schedule with variations of:

- Arrivals
- Breakfast
- Stories, songs
- Child planning, work, do, review
- Clean up time
- Outdoor Learning Area
- Center/Activity Time
- Small Group Time
- Large Group Time
- Rest/Quiet Time

- Lunch
- Outdoor time
- Transition to home
- (Afternoon/Evening groups will receive a variation of the above schedule including appropriate meals, snacks and activities.)

Creating Community

Susan Kovalik tells us “Learning takes a backseat until relationships have been developed in the classroom.” This is true for all ages and in all situations. Much time is spent to develop and ensure continual strong relationships. The positive social climate helps children feel good about them. Time and attention are paid to developing relationships with each child and among adults.

Transitions

Fingerplays, songs, chants and rhymes are used as children transition from one routine to another. This helps children move easily from one idea to another while maintaining strong relationships.

Ideas to ensure smooth transitions:

Always warn children ahead of time that it is time to change in five minutes so they have the opportunity to get ready for a change.

Your voice is a musical instrument and carries much power.

Never yell at children

Speak softly and children will quiet down.

Give children clear directions and tell them what you want them to do.

Never give more than two directions at one time.

Use a signal, such as a chime to indicate clean-up time.

Assign children certain jobs. Change these jobs weekly.

INFANTS (birth to 12 months)

Infants are totally dependent on adults to meet their needs. For healthy development, infants need a close relationship with a single caregiver. Babies need a substitute parent as a caregiver when the parent is not available. Babies need the same caregivers every day since they cannot adjust easily to new people.

Attachment begins when an infant has eye contact with the mother during feeding and the quality of future attachments can be traced to this experience. Children learn to attend by being “attended to”. Infants can attend to an activity they choose (think of a baby playing with their hands for the first time) for up to 12 minutes. Attention increases with age.

Infants feel safe when they are safe. They require safe, predictable, intimate settings – in their homes and childcare settings. The Family Center serves as a “home away from home” for infants. Changes take place far more rapidly in infancy than during any other period in life. The importance of nutrition is paramount in babies. During infancy, as at every other age, all areas of development – cognitive, social, emotional, and physical – are intertwined.

Very young children are especially vulnerable to adversity because they are less able to cope actively with discomfort or stress. Loud noises and voices can create stress in babies and must be kept at a minimum.

Characteristics

Infancy is a period of rapid physical and mental changes requiring flexible, responsive, and stable caregivers. Infants can't tolerate much discomfort, nor can they wait long for their needs and wants to be met.

Newborns enter the world ready for social contact. During the first nine months they learn to distinguish friends from strangers. They initiate social interactions. They make sounds and movements that communicate pleasure, surprise, anger, disappointment, anxiety, and other feelings. They develop expectations about people's behavior based on how parents and others treat them. They thrive on frequent, responsive eye contact. They delight in hearing language and other sounds. Babies beam or calm themselves when adults hold them close.

Freedom to move about safely is vital for infants who are beginning to crawl or walk. While they continue to need warmth and individual attention, infants move at their own pace away from and back to the security of a loving adult.

Babies' first human relationships are formed through the routines of infant care, including diapering, feeding, bathing, and comforting. An adequate number of staff members are vital to fulfilling these functions with unhurried compassion and communication.

Through relaxed and sensitive social interaction with caregivers, infants develop the feeling of trust and competence that are essential to the development of self-esteem.

Infants need to be respected as individuals, with care provided to fit their tempos and developmental progress. The trusted caregiver is a base from which mobile infants feel confident to explore and play to further their motor, language, social, and intellectual growth.

Infants respond to touch and are very aware of the world around them. Caregivers must touch and hold infants. Babies make contact with their physical surroundings in organized ways, and they are greatly aware of not only temperature and textures but also the organization and appearance (colors, textures, etc.) of their environment. Creating a rich environment for infants enhances learning.

Curriculum

Activities geared toward the individual developmental level of each child; including: floor play, mirror play, manipulatives, outdoor time, music, social play, and individual time with caregivers. Fingerplays and singing to a child are important language experiences. Infants need to be held and massaged.

Curriculum Ideas follow:

- Rub smooth satin on the child's cheek
- Tickle the baby's lips with a soft piece of terry cloth.
- Hold a favorite toy in front of a baby and encourage him/her to reach for it.
- Suspend a favorite toy above the baby with elastic so he/she can look at it, reach out and bat it, and watch it moves.
- Place a mirror above the child in the crib.
- Lay the baby in a variety of surfaces during feeding, changing, rest or play.
- Provide toys with different kinds of surfaces such as plastic, cloth, furry, soft and smooth.
- Stimulate the baby to hear by tying a bell to his bootie or around his wrist, putting a rattle in his hand, setting a rustling paper near his ear or playing a variety of music.
- Babble with infants saying, mmmmma, pppa, bbaaa, ffoo so the child hears them easily.
- Say the baby's name over and over again. Use their name with a sing song voice.
- Smile and talk as you hold the baby.
- Place a bright patterned sheet on the baby's crib so they can trace the patterns with their eyes.

The lead teacher and director will be responsible for ensuring each infant has a variety of the above activities provided daily. Feeding and napping occur according to each child's own schedule. Caregivers are expected to know a variety of songs and fingerplays to play with infants. Resources are available to increase each caregivers supply of transition type activities.

Evaluation

Observation is the key element of evaluation especially with infants. The Early LAP will be administered and parents conference with the caregiver. Also, the caregiver will provide written notes each day in the child's notebook about how long they slept, what they ate and their general mood of the day.

TODDLERS (12 to 24 months)

Toddlers need care that is uniquely suited to their developmental stages. Toddlers need individualized, sensitive, and responsive care from a primary caregiver. The relationship between caregiver and toddler is the key element to quality care in a program for toddlers. Activities or curriculum play a much less critical part in quality care at this age level.

Characteristics

Although toddlers are increasingly able to sit for and share adult attention, they need constant vigilance to insure their safety as they explore the environment. Toddlers are never left alone.

Toddlers need continuous support and interaction with caregivers as they learn to play, socialize with children and adults, and discover their world through self-initiated investigation.

Toddlers need assistance in developing important independence skills such as toileting, feeding, and dressing.

Frequent verbal communication, during which caregivers provide labels, is essential for a toddler's language development. Having fun with language is the prerequisite skill for learning to read and the caregiver cannot begin too early to play with language. Singing silly songs and playing silly games delights toddlers while they mimic the teacher behavior.

Children learn to feed themselves and food remains a very important part of a child's daily routine. Toddlers also acquire food habits and attitudes that will influence their eating patterns throughout life.

Children learn to dress themselves. They take clothes off more easily than put them on. Wearing shoes does not allow the haptic nerve to develop. When children are in a safe indoor environment going barefooted is encouraged.

Teeth - While eight teeth at one year is average, there is great individual variation. Timing may even run in families. By the third birthday, however, most children have a full set of twenty baby teeth. The quality of the teeth is influenced by the diet. The diet of the mother during pregnancy and of the infant during the first two years lay the foundation for a lifetime of good or poor teeth. Milk is especially beneficial.

Curriculum

The environment is key to all learning. Structuring the environment so toddlers can thrive on exploration and creativity is designed through room arrangement. Children enjoy fantasy, when props are selected to encourage productive play. When their needs have been met appropriately as infants, toddlers are more capable of and experienced in making choices and implementing their own ideas.

Unstructured materials for art, music, dance, and dramatic play enable toddlers to enjoy the process of creating their own ideas and solving their own problems. They are entering a new phase of mental activity. The younger the child the more the variety, the older the child, the more the choice. A variety of activities, experiences and materials need to be available to toddlers to maximize learning.

Caregivers will be expected to know a variety of fingerplays, rhymes and songs they can use spontaneously with toddlers. A variety of resources will be available to help caregivers with this task.

Evaluation

The Early LAP will be provided with a follow-up consultation with parents. Ages and Stages Checklist may also be useful so parents can compare their child's

growth with others of the same age. Although no two children are alike and parents are discouraged from comparing children even within the same family, it is important to know milestones your child will be experiencing. Standardized checklist help parents understand what to expect next as well as understand that all children go through similar stages at similar times. When parents struggle with children's behavior it's helpful to know that other parents experience similar feelings.

TWO YEAR OLDS

Each child needs to develop a sense of autonomy, the sense of being a separate, independent self, which comes from being treated as an important individual and being allowed increasing opportunities for freedom. The "no" of toddlers and twos is an assertion of autonomy that leads to freely saying "yes" and developing the power to control bodies and feelings. Only when children feel a sense of personal power ("I can affect things"), are they ready to move to the next critical task of realizing a sense of competence ("I can achieve things"); and step out into the wider world as active learners and problem-solvers.

Characteristics

The child's first three years are critical for the development of the brain and language. During this period, the child's life experiences play a fundamental role in the hard-wiring of the brain, laying the foundation for all intellectual and emotional development to follow. From birth, babies are marvelous learners, immediately investigating the sights, sounds, and feel of the world.

Speech and motor skills have improved, eliminating much of the frustration toddlers feel in communicating. They express love freely and distressed outbursts are less frequent and intense. Two-year-olds become more outgoing, friendly and less self-centered.

You have heard of the "terrible two's" but most children never experience this distress. Temper tantrums are common between eighteen months and two and one half years of age because they are frustrated and angry with their lack of communication. They may kick, scream, pound or hold their breath. Ignoring the tantrum is best.

Curriculum

The Two Year Old Curriculum grows with each child. The curriculum provides equipment and offer activities that are developmentally appropriate. Staff expectations of each child are based on the child's development. Staff will encourage independence in children, and foster positive self-image.

Elements of two-year-old curriculum:

- Develop social skills
- Assist toddlers in social interaction
- Provide opportunities for sharing, caring and helping
- Projects
- Circle time

- Develop Cognitive Skills
- Reading books and telling stories
- Singing
- Manipulatives
- Flannel boards
- Sand and water play
- Problem solving
- Develop physical skills
- Space and time will be provided for running, jumping, balancing, climbing and riding
- Parades, activity songs, obstacle courses
- Fine motor skills such as stacking, puzzles, lacing, and rings
- Children go outside each day
- Art/Multicultural
- Painting
- Dramatic play
- Crafts
- Puppet shows

Most two year olds are ready to be potty trained. Staff will talk and work with families to encourage continuity of practice for children.

Evaluation

Evaluation continues during these important early years using the Early LAP with follow-up with parents. At this stage, children will not utilize the daily notebook, but parents will receive weekly newsletters of activities form the caregiver.

THREE YEAR OLDS

The program is designed to provide children with positive, stimulating experiences, which strengthen the child. All activities are designed to meet each child's social, physical, and intellectual growth. The program targets the same developmental principles and encourages active exploration in every field.

Characteristics

Children are eager to learn dressing skills. Self-dressing is encouraged.

Most children are potty trained by the time they are three. If not, this must occur. The YMCA Family Centers staff will work with the parents to ensure potty training takes place in a timely a manner. Although children will have some accidents, they should be potty trained to participate in the prekindergarten programs.

Children learn to play together in a group after engaging in solitary and parallel play.

Three years olds are more physically able to perform tasks so they do not get as frustrated. They express their emotions openly.

Children may show fear of high places, strangers, loud noises, the dark, animals, thunder and lightning. Your reaction to their fear helps determine the severity of their fear.

Empathy, sympathy and conscience are developed at this age. Emotional development, as all development is circular and moves through cycles. Three-year-olds are often eager to please and want to do things right.

Social-Emotional

Three-year-olds begin to interact with other children in cooperative play. They are beginning to realize that other people are “real” as well as have feelings and rights. They are developing social skills; they are friendly and giving. Special friendships with other children are common, and three-year-olds love to play with adults and to show adults what they have learned. Three-year-olds learn patience – how to wait a short time for something they want.

Physical

Three-year-olds are more sure on their feet than two-year-olds and are capable of a variety of movements: They can jump, run smoothly, walk alone up and down stairs, throw small balls overhand, put on clothing such as pants and socks, and copy a straight line. Three-year-olds often like to “dance” and to make funny, creative movements. This is a good time to introduce “creative movement.”

Language

Most three-year-olds can say what they want to say; some may be “late talkers” who make up for lost ground by the time they are three and a half years old. Three-year-olds begin talking more to other children; this is one reason that friendships and social relationships develop. Sometimes three-year-olds stutter or mispronounce words; it is best not to interrupt, correct, or supply the words. These problems often clear up by themselves with a year. As with four and five year-olds, three-year-olds often like you to read to them.

Music, Art, and Science

Many three-year-olds can carry simple tunes and enjoy singing. They can enjoy a range of art activities, including finger painting, brush painting, coloring and scribbling, pasting, gluing, printing, and cutting. Rather than telling them what to draw or to make, show them how to use materials and let them create.

Three-year-olds usually have difficulty understanding abstract concepts; science activities should focus in what they can see and touch: animals, nature, and, to a certain degree, weather.

Curriculum

The teacher uses these concepts to provide a program including:

- Fine Motor Control
 - Beading, stringing, buttoning, fastening
- Concepts

- Time Concepts
- Spatial concepts
- Quantitative Concepts (non-numerical)
- Language
 - Language is used consistently in every activity in the classroom every day all day.
 - Encourage verbal interaction with adults and other children.
 - Provide opportunities for children to read stories for enjoyment and to encourage future good reading habits.
- Math
 - Numbers, comparison, sequencing, and sets
- Painting, sand and water play, cooking, plants, learning about the world, and different customs.
- Gross Motor skills

Evaluation

The Early LAP is completed with this age group and children move to the LAP-3, a screen for three-year-olds. Parents will be contacted about the ongoing developmental profile.

FOUR YEAR OLDS

Four-year-olds are usually bursting with enthusiasm and eagerness; they like to be adventurous, silly, fun, and bold. They are interested in super-heroes, monsters, and dinosaurs; they have creative, and often violent, imaginations. Above all, they love to express their energy in creative and playful ways; they love to have fun.

Characteristics

Social-Emotional

Four-year-olds can be boisterous, boastful, and outgoing. Four-year-olds can share and negotiate; they do not feel the need to protect possession as much as younger children. Four-year-olds are often very social; most of their play is with others, rather than solitary. Teachers should encourage four-year-olds' propensity for imagination and dramatic play.

Children's emotions can run to extremes; they feel things intensely, and express those feelings with intensity. They may experiment with swear words and name-calling. Children repeat what they have heard and act out what has happened to them.

Physical

Most four-year-olds can run fast, climb, hop, and jump. Most can pedal a tricycle, unbutton and button large buttons, and wash and dry their hands. A playground, which includes both a climber and a space to run, is invaluable. Four-year-olds often enjoy activities that allow them to use their muscles, such as circle games and playing catch. Fine motor activities – games that use many little pieces – are also popular.

Language

Four-year-olds are usually not at a loss for words! They direct most of their talk to other children, rather than to adults. They are, however, good at asking adults for help. They can hold conversations for 20 to 30 minutes when speaking with other children, and they also greatly enjoy holding one-on-one conversations with their favorite adults.

Four-year-olds can be just as silly with language as they are in their play. They often exaggerate, and ask “Why?” They like adventurous books about monsters and giants, which might be too scary for 4-year-olds. They enjoy stories that are told without the use of pictures.

Music, Art, and Science

Most 4-year-olds like to sing a variety of songs, but they especially like silly songs. They also like to dance to music, and they enjoy the loud noises of rhythm instruments. In art, many four-year-olds are beginning to draw things that look like something, rather than just scribbling. Their drawings often lead to wild stories in which they explain their sketches. They enjoy a range of art projects.

In science, four-year-olds usually do not want to deal with abstract concepts, but they do want to know what is real and what is not real. They may want to know what is inside a rock, or what “dead” means when they see a dead animal. Dinosaurs are a favorite subject for four-year olds.

FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

Five-year-olds tend to be calmer than four-year-olds. Five-year-olds love to be read to and talked to, just like three and four-year-olds and they like to learn. They are spontaneous, creative, and fun loving.

Social-Emotional

Five-year-olds like to talk about their ideas. They can sometimes go through difficult times and behave inappropriately, but this usually does not last long if you treat them with patience and understanding. Short “time-outs” can be effective when five year olds need to calm themselves down.

Five-year-olds are often more controlled and poised in their movements. Many can catch large balls, balance on one foot for five seconds, hop on one foot, alternate feet going upstairs, button and zip clothing, and care for themselves in the bathroom. Some can begin to print letters on lined paper; most enjoy making lines, letters, and drawings. Many five-year-olds also enjoy using manipulatives that help them to practice their eye-hand coordination.

Music, Art, and Science

Most five-year-olds enjoy music activities, including singing and dancing. Art, too, is very popular, and they often provide stories to accompany their drawings and paintings. Five-year-olds tend to have a greater desire to make something recognizable when doing art-related activities. Expose children to a variety of art materials and processes.

Curriculum

Deciding what young children will do during their day to encourage experimentation, innovation is called the curriculum. Curriculum development is neither simple nor quick nor is it standard for all children. The chosen learning opportunities must meet the goals established by the YMCA Family Center. Interest areas offer opportunities for teachers to teach contents as children explore materials. The interest areas are the primary setting in which children learn.

The Creative Curriculum is a well-researched and established guide for teachers to use with this age group. The High Scope Curriculum is also used especially in determining room arrangement and daily routine.

Evaluation

The LAP Screen for 4 and 5 will be continued with this group. All children participating in the prekindergarten program will be administered a pre and post readiness checklist to determine their readiness to begin kindergarten.

SCHOOL AGE

Children move from concrete, literal learners to more abstract thinkers as they mature. The curriculum provided for school age children reinforces the programs they are experiencing in school. Technology is a large portion of the activities provided to enhance this age group.

SIX- AND SEVEN YEAR OLDS

Six and Seven year olds:

Are very active;
Give more thought to how the body is used so is less apt to hurt them;
Are boisterous and enjoy horsing around;
Are less responsive to adult requests, but still want to please;
Are sensitive and easily embarrassed;
Are awkward at small muscle tasks, but will work hard at them;
Enjoy friends, but will often play alone;
Hate losing and may "bend" the rules; and
Tend to exaggerate

Six and Seven year olds like or need:

Multi-ethnic activities that strengthen their sense of self and foster pride in their cultural heritage and broaden their knowledge of the world;
Science activities that encourage exploration, discovery, and an understanding of cause and effect;
Team games, which encourage group participation and sportsmanship;
Performing arts activities such as playwriting or puppet shows that allow them to become actively involved and also become aware of story lines and plots;
Nutrition and health activities that help them understand how the body functions and how nutrition affects physical health;

Cooking activities that help them understand how food gets from the farm to their kitchen tables, and to learn measuring, science, and cooking techniques;
Art and craft activities that use a wide variety of art media;
Make-believe and dramatic play activities;
Repetition of enjoyable experience (routines are important);
To explore and examine by taking things apart and putting them together again;
To collect and sort things (shells, baseball cards, rocks, etc.);
To tell and hear stories; and
To produce finished products.

EIGHT AND NINE YEAR OLDS

Eight and Nine year olds:

Are very active;
May be arrogant;
Have fewer fears;
Are sensitive about being told what to do;
Are more perceptive of the responses of others;
Are more selective in their choice of friends;
Dislike playing alone (boys often form gangs);
Can make decisions;
Are embarrassed by public praise;
React strongly to things they feel are unfair;
Are beginning to be reasonable;
Show sex differences increasingly in play;
Are more cooperative when included in making plans;
Understand right and wrong and are trying to develop standards of acceptable behavior;
Have longer interest spans;
Have a growing awareness of others and their desires;
Are willing to share;
Feel that close friendships are important; and
Are concerned about obeying rules.

Eight and Nine year olds like or need:

To actively participate in sports and clinics;
To participate in clubs and hobbies;
To participate in student government or other forms of self-government;
To work on social studies projects that broadens their knowledge of the world;
To exercise and improve physical fitness;
Games with clear and specific rules;
Competitive team games (relays, dodge ball, street games);
Performing arts;
Instructional activities in dance or instrumental music;
Activities that involve manual dexterity and fine muscle coordination, such as carpentry, macramé, jewelry making, ceramics, and other fine arts;
Rough play (boys frequently have fist fights);
To swap or trade articles;
To hear or read fairy tales;

To know about the distant past;
To improve their skills and competencies;
Group games and activities involving others;
To be involved in activities with friends (it's often more important who they are with than what they are doing); and
To identify with their own sex and age group.

TEN TO TWELVE YEAR OLDS

Ten to Twelve year olds:

Are comfortable about their bodies;
Are capable of pursuing a project spanning a long time period;
Have a strong self-concept;
Are sensitive to the fairness of adults;
Desire to be cooperative with adults;
Need encouragement and opportunity to pursue a special interest;
Tend to be organized, competitive, and adventurous, sometimes putting themselves at risk;
Are gaining more strength and proficiency in gross motor activities (especially boys);
Are going through a period of pronounced individual differences (they are maturing at rapid and increasingly different rates);
Girls may be taller than boys and show superiority over boys in fine motor activity;
Are very becoming interested in the opposite sex; and
Show a good deal of self-doubt.

Ten to Twelve year olds like or need:

Opportunities for community service;
To form theatrical or performing arts companies;
To identify themselves with special clothing or hats;
To do graphics and calligraphy;
To set up and operate a photography lab;
To set up a junior business, store, carnival, or other enterprise;
To type or work with computers;
To learn and practice First Aid;
Activities that focus on general information about the world;
Activities that center on personal hygiene; to participate in the active operation of the center:
Repairing and making equipment
Assisting in center activities
Preparing and distributing a newsletter
Creating and maintaining a library or hands-on science center, or other learning centers
To create music or dance studios;
Activities in journalism and printing;
To collect: stickers, baseball cards, almost anything;
Almost anything to do with science;

To feel that they are growing and becoming more responsible, different from younger children;
Activities that are skillful, bold, and daring;
To join organized groups;
To rush around and keep busy;
To be read to by an adult, with a strong preference for mystery and adventure stories; and
To discuss thoughts and ideas, including topics such as sexual awareness, drug and child abuse, and other issues.

Curriculum

Age room will use the YMCA School-Age Care Curriculum Framework designed by YMCA of the USA. Eight content areas are covered including:

- Arts and Humanities
- Character Development
- Health, Wellness and Fitness
- Homework Support
- Literacy, Science and Technology
- Service-Learning
- Social Competence and Conflict Resolution

The Program objectives are:

- Grow personally – build self-esteem and self –reliance.
- Build character – behave according to the YMCA values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility.
- Improve personal and family relationships – learn to care about, communicate with, and cooperate with family and friends.
- Appreciate diversity – respect people of different ages, abilities, incomes, races, religions, cultures, and beliefs.
- Become better leaders and supporter of others – learn the give and take necessary to work toward the common good.
- Develop specific skills – acquire new knowledge and ways to grow in spirit, mind, and body.
- Have fun and enjoy life.

Evaluation

Daily and weekly plans will be provided using the activity area approach. Self-evaluations by students are available. More extensive literacy evaluation may be provided for children who require more help.

WEBSITE

The YMCA Family Centers at Walt Disney World® Resort has a website wherein parents can sign-up, register and communicate with staff. The parent page provides many appropriate activities they can provide at home. A calendar of activities is available so parents will know ahead of time what is going on each day at the YMCA Family Center. The website will also provide parents with announcements and family friendly information.

