



Ontario Early Years Centres Special Needs Competency Guidelines Toronto Region



OEYC Special Needs Competency Guidelines

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FOREWORD

The Ontario Early Years Special Needs Competency Committee is proud to present the *Special Needs Competency Guidelines* document to the Toronto Region Ontario Early Years Centres. This document has been created to support staff in their endeavors to achieve a welcoming and integrated environment for children with special needs.

This resource has a primary purpose of assisting Board Members, Executive Directors, Managers and all other staff members in fulfilling the requirements of the Early Years Centres vis-à-vis Special Needs.

The Special Needs Competency Committee acknowledges that many Ontario Early Years Centres funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are already meeting or exceeding requirements. For those agencies, the material in this resource may serve to confirm or augment current policies and practices. Other agencies may see this resource as a considerable opportunity to utilize the material to increase their current capacity.

VISION STATEMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Our Ontario Early Years Centre values the development, celebrates the strengths, and respects the uniqueness that each child, parent and caregiver brings to the Centre. We provide welcoming, safe and accessible environments. We are committed to provide all children, parents and caregivers with opportunities to learn, enjoy and participate in their Centre and Satellites, including individuals with special needs.

WE BELIEVE THAT:

- All children and families benefit from being included in all aspects of Ontario Early Years Centres and their Satellite programming.
- All children have the right to quality, play-based, and language rich environments.
- All families have the opportunity to access clinical services and community supports.
- All communities benefit from welcoming and valuing individuals with special needs.
- All Ontario Early Years Centres and their Satellites are instrumental in the development of social networks for all families, especially families living with individuals with special needs.

INTRODUCTION

Why a “Special Needs Competency Guidelines”?

The purpose of the Special Needs Competency Guidelines is to assist organizations to proactively, naturally and seamlessly welcome and integrate every family without exception.

Effective practice is inclusive and breaks down barriers that families living with special needs encounter. To this end, the Special Needs Competency Guidelines was developed as a guide to help reflect on and shape their philosophies, practice and performance related to serving families living with special needs.

This document is designed for easy use and the guidelines are divided into three key sections. They include; Administration, Human Resources and Program.

What do we mean by “Special Needs”?

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) defines individuals with special needs as individuals “who, due to emotional, familial, physical, behavioural, developmental, cognitive, communicative or emotional factors, are at risk of not maximizing their potential. Special needs encompasses children who require support and assistance with daily living, whether formally diagnosed or not, and whether a diagnosis is short term or long term in nature”

Children and families come to us with a wide range of needs which require flexibility and accommodation to ensure successful participation.

Legal Obligations, Government Policy and Ethics

Quality, inclusive and accessible, community-based programs make a significant contribution to meeting the developmental, social and learning needs of children with special needs. These programs also play a pivotal role in family support as well as the early identification process. Equally important are the unique and rich contributions families living with special needs bring to the programs in which they fully participate. Families and OEYCs, through their combined focus on child development, effective parenting and social support, are in a unique position to provide significant benefits to all children, parents and caregivers.

Families who face barriers to our programs often struggle, on a daily basis, to cope with issues they find overwhelming. Prioritizing inclusive practices as our programs and services evolve and resources become further stretched, means adapting what we do and how we do it, as opposed to doing more. Re-framing how we look at inclusion helps us to recognize that over the long-term, inclusive practices strengthen our organizations, and offer benefits to all children, families and staff.

The Ontario Human Rights Code and the City of Toronto's Access and Equity Policy require organizations to be non-discriminatory. Exclusion is never appropriate, whether it is on the basis of race, faith, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

Other guiding principles and legislation:

SpecialLink – the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion outlines six elements that must be present if inclusion is to be a reality in children's programs:

- **Zero reject** – no child is excluded on the basis of level or type of disability
- **Natural proportions** – programs include children with disabilities in approximate proportion to their presence in the population
- **Full participation** – activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children
- **Same range of program options** – parents of children with disabilities have the same options that other parents have (program hours, activities, child care for workshops, etc)
- **Maximum feasible parent participation** – parents are actively encouraged to participate in the program
- **Pro-action for community inclusion** – staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 23, 1.

“States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.”

The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms – 15, (1)

“Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability.”

Canadian Human Rights Act –

Employers and service providers are required to accommodate special needs, including those of people with disabilities, short of undue hardship.

Scoring

The Special Needs Competency Guidelines have an easy scoring system to help you clearly identify where your programs and practices meet, do not meet, or exceed the nineteen guidelines in the three areas.

- When a guideline is not met, no points are earned. No partial points are to be given for almost meeting the guideline. A plan, including a timeframe, then needs to be outlined for meeting the guideline.
- When a guideline is met completely, 1 point is earned. A plan, including a timeframe, should be outlined for exceeding the guideline.
- When a guideline is met as well as clearly exceeded according to the definition in the “exceeds” column, 2 points are earned. No partial points are to be given for almost exceeding the guideline.

There are thirty-eight potential points. Organizations and their staff do not win or lose at this activity. Honest reflection will be important in helping organizations and programs identify their areas of strength and struggle, so that families “win” by ultimately receiving the most responsive, most inclusive service.

OEYC Special Needs Competency Guidelines

Administration

This section of the Special Needs Criteria Checklist addresses policy, planning & evaluation issues. It recognizes that program & service practices reflect underlying organizational philosophies, values, and intentions. It asks the questions:

- What are the values of this organization, its board and management?
- What does this organization do to ensure the accessibility of its planning & evaluation processes?
- How does this organization recognize the authority of the special needs communities to define inclusion and access?

Administration

Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
1. The OEYC vision statement commits to the inclusion of individuals with special needs*.	No evidence of inclusion in the vision statement	The OEYC vision statement commits to the inclusion of individuals with special needs*	The vision statement is translated into relevant languages		
2. OEYC service plan is inclusive of individuals with special needs and describes an action plan with a time frame for achievement.	No evidence of inclusion in service plan	OEYC service plan is inclusive of individuals with special needs and describes an action plan with a time frame for achievement	Staff time and resources are committed to actualizing the service plan		
3. The OEYC has a comprehensive* inclusion policy and procedures are posted.	No evidence of a comprehensive policy	The OEYC has a comprehensive inclusion policy and procedures are posted	Policy is reviewed every two years with participation of special needs community members and organizations to make recommendations		
4. Supports* are in place to ensure that people with special needs and/or their family members actively participate in the planning and evaluation of services.	No supports for participation	Supports* are in place to ensure that people with special needs and/or their family members actively participate in the planning and evaluation of services	People with special needs and/or their family members have the supports* to take a leadership role in planning and evaluation of services		
5. Planning and evaluation of services to promote inclusion involves specialized organizations* and/or professional representation.	No representation from sector	Planning and evaluation of services to promote inclusion involves specialized organizations and professional representation	Assigns a target of 20% representation from the sector		

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Administration Continued					
Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
6. The OEYC has procedures that address incidents, complaints and concerns regarding inclusion which are documented and summarized to appropriate bodies* annually.	Procedure not in place	The OEYC has procedures that address incidents, complaints and concerns regarding inclusion which are documented and summarized to appropriate bodies* annually	The summary is used for service planning		
7. Individual with special needs and/or their family members participate in the planning and evaluation of services	No involvement	Individual with special needs and/or their family members participate in the planning and evaluation of services	Families from the special needs community participates in providing community education and advocacy		
			Total Score		
<p>*Special needs: requiring extra supports/program modification/space modification.</p> <p>*Comprehensive: with specific reference to special needs across all areas including administration, Human Resources and programming.</p> <p>*Supports: child care, transportation, translation, meeting times/locations are convenient/accessible.</p> <p>*Specialized organization: an organization with a specific mandate to provide specialized services to people with special needs.</p> <p>*Appropriate bodies: this will vary by riding and by organization. Definition could include: riding table; lead organization's board of directors; advisory committee.</p> <p>*Evaluation: processes and mechanisms that test the effectiveness of services/programs</p>					

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Human Resources

This section addresses organizational policies and practices specifically relating to Human Resource issues. It is based on the premise that the cultivation of a diverse board, staff and volunteer team that is reflective of the community is in itself an inclusive practice that supports accessibility. It asks the questions:

- What are this organization’s employment practices? Is this an accessible workplace?
- How does this employer accommodate the special needs of employees with respect to balancing their roles and responsibilities as staff, parents, and family members?
- Does staff recruitment, training and evaluation reflect inclusive values & practices? Are inclusive values and practices embedded in all training?
- Are voices from the special needs communities heard in information sharing sessions, program advisory meetings, and staff training sessions?

Human Resources

Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
1. A plan exists to use the skills, knowledge and insights of parents/caregivers in information sessions and/or professional development on topics related to special needs	No plan exists	A plan exists to encourage parents/caregivers to participate in information sessions and/or professional development on topics related to special needs	A plan exists and parents/caregivers deliver 10% of OEYC information sessions annually		
2. The performance appraisal system addresses staff competence around issues of inclusion at all levels of the OEYC	The performance appraisal system does not address staff competence around issues of inclusion	The performance appraisal system addresses staff competence around issues of inclusion at all levels of the OEYC	Meets indicator at all levels of the organization		

OEYC Special Needs Competency Guidelines

Human Resources Continued					
Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
3. OEYC designates funding for professional development that incorporates inclusive principles and practices for all OEYC staff and volunteers.	OEYC has no designated funding for professional development that incorporates inclusive principles and practices, for all OEYC staff and volunteers	OEYC designates funding for professional development that incorporates inclusive principles and practices for all OEYC staff and volunteers	A best-practices approach to inclusion/special needs is imbedded in all professional development and is mandatory for all levels of the organization		
4. Human Resource policies allow flexibility* to staff caring for family members who require extra supports.	Human Resource policies are not flexible for a staff member whose family members require extra supports	Human Resource policies allow flexibility* to staff caring for family members who require extra supports	The organization demonstrates a willingness and commitment to negotiate arrangements based on individual staff needs		
5. Human Resource policy provides accommodation for staff who require extra supports	Human Resource policy does not provide accommodation for staff who require extra supports	Human Resource policy provides accommodation for staff who require extra supports	Human Resource policy provides accommodation for staff who require extra supports in all satellites		
6. The OEYC is a physically accessible* workplace.	The OEYC is not a physically accessible workplace	The OEYC is a physically accessible* workplace	The OEYC is a universally accessible* workplace		
			Total Score		
<p>*Flexibility: Human Resource policy commits to the organization working with the employee to allow them to balance both personal/family and work obligations.</p> <p>*Physically Accessible: Building, washroom, workspace and equipment are adapted to provide access to employees using wheelchairs, walkers standing braces, and employees with motoric issues. Adaptations may include ramps, widened doorways, touch screens and head switches for computers.</p> <p>*Universal access: Universal design principles are part of a concept of design, right from the beginning, that embodies characteristics that make a physical environment accessible to all people. Hallways are wide enough for wheelchairs, bathrooms are accessible, and kitchen countertops are reachable. At its best, universal design is so well done that adaptations are invisible There is no ramp because the threshold of the building is at ground level. The field of universal design is opening up rapidly, as a large proportion of our adult population ages - and wants to remain active and independent. As universal design applies to equipment and materials, items such as door handles, kitchen utensils (such as "Good Grips"), pens and pencils, forks and spoons and hairbrushes are designed so that people with motoric issues and other issues can use everyday items and fully participate in routines and activities. (adapted from SpecialLink Inclusion Practices and Profile and Principles Scale, 2005 final workshop edition)</p>					

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Program

The Program section of this document addresses service and program delivery. It recognizes that space, activities, the habits, behaviour and attitudes of staff and program participants impact the actual experiences of families and children in our programs. It asks the questions:

- Is serving children with special needs the responsibility of the entire staff team or just the specialist?
- How are opportunities for the success of every child built into programs?
- How is the larger group involved in the inclusion of families living with special needs?
- Does program planning reflect the needs of typical children only, or all children?

Program

Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
1. All early learning activities allow for accommodations* and adaptations* to meet the extra needs of participants.	Few early learning activities allow for accommodations and adaptations to meet the extra needs of participants	All early learning activities allow for accommodations* and adaptations* to meet the extra needs of participants	Facilitates involvement of parents/caregivers in the adaptation of programs and services		
2. All OEYC staff actively respond to the needs of participants and make accommodations* and program adaptations* as required.	OEYC staff are aware of and acknowledge the special needs of participants, but no adaptation evident	All OEYC staff actively respond to the needs of participants and make accommodations* and program adaptations* as required	Has a process for engaging parents & caregivers around accommodations* & adaptations*		
3. Existence of a range of material (including written & symbolic materials, books, parent resources, posters, forms, displays, toys , videos) that represent people of diverse abilities.	Resources reflect typical abilities only	Existence of a range of material (including written & symbolic materials, books, parenting resources, posters, forms, displays, toys , videos) that reflect people of diverse abilities	Families are involved in the process of selecting and updating resources. The OEYC allocates a percentage of its program budget to the purchase of materials reflecting people of diverse abilities		
4. The OEYC site / satellite is physically accessible.	The site is not physically accessible	The OEYC site / satellite is physically accessible	Learning activity areas are physically acceptable and other barriers to full participation are addressed		

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Program Continued					
Indicator	0 Does not meet	1 Meets	2 Exceeds	Score	Action Plan
5. Collaboration and *demonstrated linkages and referrals to specialized organizations and programs.	No collaboration or demonstrated linkages	Collaboration and demonstrated linkages and referrals to special needs agencies	Sustains ongoing collaboration with special needs agencies to ensure successful linkages		
6. The OEYC program accepts and integrates* every child (birth to six years) and their family.	The OEYC occasionally turns away or implements conditions for the attendance of children and adults due to their behaviour or their disabilities	The OEYC program accepts and integrates* every child (birth to six years) and their family	The OEYC actively involves* all children and their families in meeting the program's inclusion responsibilities		
			Total Score		
<p>*Accommodations: practices meeting the support requirements of an individual to enable her/his participation (i.e. picture symbols for one child).</p> <p>*Adaptations: modifying the program or activity to allow all children to participate (i.e. picture symbols for the whole group).</p> <p>*Other barriers: sensory barriers such as excessive noise, high or low lighting, scents, room temperature.</p> <p>*Integrates: individuals with extra support needs participate in all aspects of the program.</p> <p>*Actively involves: facilitate play between children; parent education; facilitating peer support and social inclusion.</p> <p>* Demonstrated linkages: From OEYC Achieving Cultural Competence Document</p>					

OEYC Special Needs Guidelines Score Sheet

Administration	Item #	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
	1	0	1	2
	2			
	3			
	4			
	5			
	6			
	7			
Total				

Administration Total

Human Resources	Item #	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
	1	0	1	2
	2			
	3			
	4			
	5			
	6			
	Total			

H. R. Total

Program	Item #	Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
	1	0	1	2
	2			
	3			
	4			
	5			
	6			
	Total			

Program Total

Total Score

Achieving Special Needs Competence Goal and Action Plan Sheet

Year:
Centre:
Agency:
OEYC Manager:

Criteria Section	Criteria/Goal Plan/Follow up
Administration	
Human Resources	
Program	

Additional Comments

Signatures
OEYC Manager:

Board:	Ministry Consultant/Liaison:
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References:

Cultural Competency Guidelines for Service Provision and Administration of OEYC Programs. Toronto Network of Early Years Centres, 2004.

Policy Development Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Programs. The City of Toronto, 2007. Inclusion:

SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Practices Profile and Principles Scale SpecialLink, The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion, 2005. .

Resources:

Including Children With Special Needs, A Guide for Family Resource Programs The Macaulay Child Development Centre, 2001

Autism Spectrum Disorders - Chantal Sicile-Kira The Berkley Publishing Group, 2004

The Out-of-Sync Child; Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder - Carol Stock Kranowitz The Berkley Publishing Group, 1998

More Than Words; Helping Parents Promote Communication and Social Skills in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder - Fern Sussman The Hanen Centre, 1999

Children Diagnosed with Autism: What to Expect and Where to Get Help Autism Society of Ontario, 2007

Community Living Toronto: Connectability www.connectability.ca
Findhelp Information Services 211 Toronto 211 www.211Toronto.ca
CityKids 416-920-6543 www.mothercraft.ca
Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services 416-338-8255 www.tpsls.on.ca
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario 416-229-1681 www.ldatd.on.ca
Hospital for Sick Children Helpline Motherisk Program 416-813-6780 www.motherisk.org
Geneva Centre for Autism 416-322-7877 www.autism.net
CNIB 416-486-2500 www.cnib.ca
Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf 416-449-9651 www.bobrumball.org
Red Flags Guide, Early Identification in Toronto www.toronto.ca/health/earlychilddevelopment/index.htm
Resources at a Glance www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/sn_resources.pdf



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