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OVERVIEW

This handbook is developed for all those involved in the care, education and development of young children in child care centres. It highlights good practices in areas such as physical environment, safety/health/hygiene/nutrition, programme and curriculum, development of child care practitioners, and the administration and management of child care centres.

The handbook reflects current understandings, values, and goals at the time of its publication. This knowledge base is derived from reviewing the literature as well as review by many experienced, knowledgeable early childhood educators. As in any profession, such bases for the guiding principles and practices are expected to be dynamic and changing in response to new knowledge in the field. Given this expectation of change, MCYS will review this handbook periodically to ensure its currency and relevance.

Throughout the handbook, you can feast your eyes on illustrations and photographs selected from a range of contributions by our local child care centres with commendably good practices. Valuable feedback from readers through future exchanges would be incorporated into the revised edition of this handbook.

Early childhood educators play a pivotal role in scaffolding a child's early learning and development in a child care or pre-school setting. The challenge for early childhood educators is to remain life long learners in this growing and changing profession. We hope that this handbook provides insights on good practices that can be incorporated as part of your day-to-day programme in nurturing the young children under your care.
FOREWORD

Quality care is of vital importance to the growth and development of young children who spend a substantial portion of their early years in centre-based care. The increasing trend in young children attending child care centres warrants the need to ensure that provision of child care services meets at least the minimum standards of care and development.

As the child care industry grew over the years, MCYS, through its licensing, monitors and regulates all child care centres through the Child Care Centres Act (Cap 37A) and the Child Care Centres Regulations.

In a move towards improving the standards and quality of child care provisions in Singapore, MCYS designed and implemented a Licensing Instrument in 2001. This is to account for a holistic and comprehensive profile of a child care centre in its various aspects of child care provisions and compliance with licensing requirements.

Beyond maintaining standards required for licensing, this handbook aims to further raise the standards of quality care and serve as a guide for child care centres to move towards best practices.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the early childhood professionals, representatives of child care centres and overseas professionals for their valuable inputs and feedback.

We hope that this handbook would pave the path for our journey together towards best practices and accreditation of child care centres.

Lee Kim Hua
Director
Family Services Division
Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment plays a crucial role in helping to shape the behaviour and development of children. The quality of the environment determines the level of involvement of the children and interaction between adults and children.
Indoor Area

Ventilation

Good ventilation helps to maintain the indoor environment at a comfortable level and can contribute positively to the children’s learning.

- All rooms are well-ventilated by means of windows that can be opened, a working air-conditioning system/coolers or fans
- Exhaust fans are used to provide better ventilation in toilets, diaper changing areas and the kitchen

Rooms with low windows (at children’s eye level) provide children with opportunities to look out and enjoy the view outside.
Lighting

The quality and quantity of light influence the moods and feeling of the children and staff within the environment.

- The lighting effect is enhanced with use of pastel coloured paints on walls
- The room lighting is adjustable with the use of curtains, blinds or dimmer switches
- Having different forms of lighting (such as fluorescent and incandescent lights) allows for a variety of effects on various play areas and activities

Natural light is adequate and complemented by artificial light which allows for a range of lighting conditions.
Noise

Sounds maintained at a comfortable level enhance children’s moods and concentration during learning.

- Noise levels in the classroom are minimised with sound-absorbing materials such as ceiling boards, rubber or foam tile flooring and solid doors

- Space is organised such that areas with similar noise levels are next to each other. For example, the block corner is located next to the dramatic play area but away from the quiet reading corner.

- Where space is a constraint, noisy and quiet activities are scheduled at different times to minimise noise levels

Noisy activities are conducted in multi-purpose areas or outdoors.
Utilisation of Space

• Dividers are used to delineate areas within a classroom into learning centres. They also serve to create paths for smoother traffic flow and organise children within the area.

• These dividers are safe and do not obstruct the view of staff who need to supervise the children.

Traffic paths are created to ease transition between activities.

The layout of the space and placement of materials allow for quiet moments of reflection as well as active physical exploration.
All available space is utilised for interactive learning by the children. This includes partitions, walls and floors.
Facilities for Staff

Comfortable areas are allocated for staff to attend to their personal needs and to interact with each other and parents.

Staff room at a private premises

Staff room at a HDB void deck centre

Creativity is encouraged in the use of space. The provision may include the following:

- adequate storage for personal belongings and resource materials of staff;
- adult-sized furniture and toilets;
- space available for:
  - meetings and conferences;
  - meals/snacks or breaks; and
  - programme planning and administration.
Creating a clean and safe environment is a top priority in child care centres.

★ All indoor and outdoor equipment and materials allow children to develop their skills safely without risk of injury.

★ Well-organised, clean rooms create an environment which is more pleasant and conducive to learning.

- The use of lamination or formica/other non-toxic materials is preferable for shelves and cabinets for ease of cleaning

Materials and equipment in child care centres are safe, attractive and durable. When purchasing equipment, durability, flexibility and ease of maintenance are considered.
Materials are organised and accessible to children. For example, containers and storage bins on low shelves are labelled with names, symbols, pictures or words to show children where everything belongs. This will help the children to retrieve and clear them, thereby enhancing their self-help skills.
Learning Environment

Learning centres support children’s developmental needs and interests as they interact with the materials, peers and adults within the environment.

A good learning environment has:

- a wide variety of materials and equipment that meets the developmental needs and skills of the children; and

- equipment and materials added or changed periodically to stimulate children’s curiosity and extend their interest by providing elements of surprise, novelty, success and satisfaction.

Varied resources are available to provide children with both concrete and abstract learning experiences.
Open-ended equipment allows children to set their own tasks and create new ways of using the equipment.

Mirrors are used to encourage children to familiarise themselves with various views of their postures.
Aesthetically appealing materials such as wind chimes, scented materials and flowering plants can add colour, variety and life to the learning environment.

Textures, shapes and colours are used with care and thought to provide enjoyment, stimulation and relaxation.
A good learning environment is designed to support diversity; for example, children are introduced to the cultures of the different ethnic groups.

The learning environment reflects and extends the children’s joy and growth.
Outdoor Area

The outdoor area is more than a place where children can exercise their muscles. A well-planned outdoor environment promotes socialisation, cognitive and language development, sensory exploration, creative expression and appreciation of nature.

A wide range of play equipment is available for the children (for example, balls of different sizes, swings, climbing structures, spring riders, multifunctional centres, skipping ropes and tricycles).
Outdoor play equipment is safe and in good repair. Playground facilities are challenging and inviting to sustain children’s play.
• Shady spaces are made available with the use of trees, canopy or umbrellas
• Outdoor storage space is available for portable equipment

A gardening area in an outdoor environment offers children the experience of a natural environment.
Accommodating children with special needs requires careful attention and planning.

Physical adaptations are specially constructed to accommodate children with special needs. These adaptations include ramps and stationary bridges to help disabled children access the indoor classroom and outdoor play equipment.
SAFETY/ HEALTH/ HYGIENE/ NUTRITION

Safety is a key aspect of providing a good environment for children in a child care centre. Adults must be vigilant in their supervision of the children at all times. Good quality child care aims to enhance the physical well-being of children in a safe environment. The centre’s programme enables staff to teach children about health and safety practices.
Safety Measures

- All areas accessible to children are free from hazard at all times
- Extension cords used for power supply are inaccessible and do not pose a potential hazard to the children
- Safety procedures are developed and practised (for example, clear labelling of external/oral medication, display of simple warning signs where potentially dangerous products are stored)
- Glass doors are marked with posters, charts and coloured tape to prevent children from running into them
- Staff anticipate and take precautions to prevent safety problems, by removing dangerous objects from the environment
- Staff discuss safety rules and practices with children regularly

Climbing equipment is placed on soft/cushioned surfaces to prevent injury.
• Parents are provided with information on safety practices, such as the safe storage of potentially dangerous products at home.

Safety gates can help protect children from hazards.

Supervision of Children

• Children are supervised at all times, even while they are sleeping.

• Activity areas are arranged such that children are within the visual range and accessibility of supervising adults.

• Provision is made for safe arrival and departure of all children, which also facilitates parent-staff interaction.

Arrival and departure are frequently the most important and valued communication times for parents and staff.
Fire/Emergency Precautionary Process

• All staff (including non-programme staff):
  → are familiar with the evacuation routes and practise evacuation procedures monthly with the children; and
  → are aware of all regulations pertaining to safety issues mandated by the Ministry

• Written information on medical, emergency and accident procedures is displayed in relevant places

• Appropriate field trips are organised, together with demonstrations/sharing sessions with the relevant experts

First Aid

• All staff (including non-programme staff):
  → are trained in first aid; and
  → maintain current knowledge of health-related, emergency and first aid procedures

• A guide to first aid and emergency care is accessible to staff
Health and Hygiene Practices

- All staff are trained to observe symptoms of common childhood illnesses and adapt health procedures according to individual needs.

- Children’s temperature is monitored as part of the routine health screening procedure.

- Staff meet regularly to discuss health issues and consult parents on health matters.

- Parents are notified immediately when their child is sick/injured in the centre. When needed, medical attention is sought immediately.

- The centre conducts regular health screening for children’s visual and dental care.

A sick bay is available for the unwell child to rest in comfort until the arrival of the parents.

The centre works with health care professionals in the community to ensure that the health needs of children are addressed.
Children’s personal effects such as toothbrushes, mugs and mattresses/stack cots are maintained individually.
• Regular cleaning of the environment and equipment is necessary to prevent the spread of infection

• Staff and children follow the recommended hand washing procedures to reduce the risk of disease transmission in the centre

How should you wash your hands?

• Wet hands
• Apply soap to hands
• Lather thoroughly all surfaces of hands, between fingers and up to the wrist, as well as the back and front of hands, and tips of fingers and thumbs. Rub hands together for 15 seconds.
• Rinse hands under running water
• Dry hands with disposable paper towel or single-use towel
• Discard used towel in a trash bin lined with a plastic bag
• When assisting a child in handwashing, either hold the child or have the child stand on a safety step at a height that the child’s hands can hang freely under running water.

Signs are displayed to remind staff and children of hand washing procedures.
Times to Wash Hands

Staff

- when they arrive at the centre
- before they prepare/serve food or feed a child
- after they change diapers, clean up or wipe the nose of a child
- after contact with blood or other body fluids
- after they have been to the toilet, either with a child or by themselves
- after handling pets, pet cages or other pet objects
- after outdoor activities (e.g. playing with children in the sandpit)
- before applying or giving medication/ointment to self or a child
- before going home

Children

- when they arrive at the centre
- before they eat or drink
- after they use the toilet
- after they come into contact with a child who may be sick
- after having their diapers changed
- after playing on the playground
- after handling pets, pet cages or other pet objects
- before going home
Menu Planning and Serving of Food

- Meals provided are varied, balanced and nutritious. The use of processed food is also minimised.

- Children are given opportunities to try different types of food varying in taste, texture and style of cooking.

- The centre respects the dietary requirements of different religious/cultural groups and individual child’s food allergy.

Cultural diversity is considered in menu planning.

Attractive and appealing food can stimulate appetite and interest children in trying different types of food.
• Meals and snacks are served as scheduled but individual needs are accommodated with respect to quantity and timing

Adults interact with children during meals and provide a model of good eating habits for children.

• Meal times are pleasant activities where conversation is encouraged and independence fostered

• The menu is changed periodically to provide variety and is adapted to accommodate festive celebrations

Sharing of Nutritional Information with Parents

• Details of food eaten are provided to parents of infants and toddlers at the end of the day and to parents of older children as appropriate

• Information on nutrition, age appropriate diet and food handling is provided to parents

• The centre is open to parents’ suggestions and inputs on menu planning

• Parents’ awareness on the importance of nutrition is increased through various activities (for example, songs/skits by children and display of exhibits on food and nutrition)
A centre’s philosophy is a clear written statement of its policies, aims, values and beliefs on children’s development, care and education. It also reflects the centre’s commitment to centre-family collaboration and staff development.
Centre’s Philosophy

The philosophy statement of a centre highlights:

- its beliefs and values in providing for children’s development, care and education;

- the importance of an environment which supports meaningful learning with inclusion of children with special needs;

- the provision of a safe and healthy environment for children and staff;

- the importance of appropriate curriculum goals for current and future needs of children within the community;

- the promotion of staff development, professionalism and good centre management; and

- the building of sound interpersonal relationships among staff, children, families and community partners with an emphasis on promoting inter-generational bonding and multi-culturalism.

The centre’s philosophy is displayed on the parents’ bulletin board.
The centre’s philosophy is constantly reviewed to keep pace with emerging trends in early childhood care and education.

**A Sample of a Good Philosophy**

We have a commitment to provide quality service which fosters an attitude of mutual respect, open relationship and support between staff, children, families and management.

Children from the various ethnic backgrounds and their family members will be encouraged to be involved in the service according to their needs, interest and opportunities.

We believe that children need to be treated as individuals and feel safe and secure, with opportunities for learning through play, interacting with others, and being involved in making decisions.

We ensure and encourage the provision of a safe, secure, hygienic and positive environment for staff, families and children.

We aim to integrate children with additional needs into our service/programme.

We encourage all staff to work effectively as a team, continually updating their skills, knowledge and interest through formal and informal development.

We aim to develop and maintain strong links within the local community by acknowledging and incorporating the resources available.