WORKING TOGETHER: Family Support Programs
Acknowledgements

Family Support programs continually seek to improve their practice by reflecting on what they do and how they do it (“Guiding Principles of Family Support”).

The Family Support Working Together document was developed by Family Support practitioners from a variety of programs within the field of Family Support led by The Best Start Implementation Committee: Family Support Workgroup, as a companion document to the education and child care sector Working Together documents that are guiding collaborative practice in the early years.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the Family Support practitioners from across Toronto who attended the June 2007 workshop and contributed to the development of this Family Support Working Together document.

Members of the Working Group:
Hawa Ashna Marie Bamford Julie Burdon Dolores Cascone Joanne Davis
Pat Evans Karen Guthrie Catherine Moher Joanne Murrell Karen Petursson
Eva Smerdon Fidelia Torres Joanne Wilson Roxana Zuleta Ruth Sischy

Contributing Organizations:

Toronto District School Board
FSIO
FRP Canada
Ontario Early Years Centres
Toronto Catholic District School Board
Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)
Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)
Working Together: Family Support Programs

The Working Together Guide for Family Support Programs came about as part of the work of the Best Start Implementation Steering Committee’s efforts to enhance coordination and integration of community services for children 0 to 6 years and their families.

In the Spring of 2007, Toronto’s Best Start Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) led the development and distribution of a Best Start Survey to assess the level of collaboration among the three core early childhood services: child care, kindergarten and family supports.

Survey results indicated that the sectors are at the beginning of a partnership journey and just starting the process of collaboration initiatives between early childhood services.

In June 2007 the ISC Family Support Workgroup pulled together practitioners from all family support sectors in Toronto to discuss ways of strengthening partnerships and enhancing collaboration with kindergarten and child care. The group used a common template of integration themes that the school boards and the City of Toronto were using to develop similar Working Together Guides for kindergarten and child care. (See Resources section for information on how to get copies)

The result of the June 2007 meeting is the Working Together Guide for Family Support Programs. It provides practical ideas for working with our partners in child care and kindergarten as well as outlining the role of the family support practitioner in strengthening collaboration and integration.

This guide for family support practitioners is designed to assist you in starting on the road to working collaboratively with local schools and child care programs, and has been developed following the framework of the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.
What are Family Support Programs?

Family support programs are community-based organizations working with children, families and caregivers to enhance strengths, build capacities and promote healthy development.

Family support programs include
- Ontario Early Years Centres (Funded by the Province of Ontario)
- Family Resource Programs (Funded by the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario)
- Parenting & Family Literacy Centres (operated in Toronto by the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board and funded by the Province of Ontario.)
- Community Action Programs for Children (CAPC) (Funded through The Public Health Agency of Canada, with a focus on health promotion)
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs (CPNP) (Funded through The Public Health Agency of Canada, in partnership with Toronto Public Health and local hospitals with a focus on health promotion for at-risk pregnant women)

Other organizations also run family support programs including Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Public Libraries.

Family support programs deliver a range of services, guided by The Guiding Principles of Family Support that focus on building supportive relationships, facilitating growth, respecting diversity and furthering community development.

(www.frp.ca/_data/global/images/resources/guiding-e.pdf)

- Family support programs vary depending on their size, mandate and resources. Services are flexible, accessible and offered in an informal atmosphere. These services may be provided in partnership with other groups. Services may include:
  * child development
  * parent and caregiver support
  * family literacy/numeracy
  * employment assistance
  * parent education
  * multilingual
  * counselling and mediation
  * referrals to other resources
  * promotion of health and safety
  * Early Identification
  * child development
  * parent and caregiver support
  * family literacy/numeracy
  * employment assistance
  * parent education
  * multilingual
  * counselling and mediation
  * referrals to other resources
  * promotion of health and safety
  * Early Identification
  * early learning and care
  * community development
  * food and nutrition support
  * educational upgrading
  * peer contact and mutual support
  * toy and book lending
  * play-based programs
  * drop-in programs
  * community outreach
  * Resources for parents (eg. books, dvd’s, pamphlets)

Source: Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada): www.frp.ca
Family support programs function through three linked objectives. The foremost of these is their focus on children. Family support programs across Ontario hope to improve young children’s overall healthy development with an emphasis on promoting nurturing parent/caregiver-child relationships, physical and emotional family well-being, good nutrition, safety and social connections. The focus on healthy child development leads inevitably to a focus on community and the development of a social world within which children have the opportunity to flourish. Improving caregivers’ social networks enables increased community participation, as well as increased access to knowledge and community resources. This ultimately leads to empowerment and is the most effective way to create a community that supports healthy child development.

In this process of community building, family support programs use a variety of strategies to improve outcomes for children and families. Establishing and maintaining partnerships with a variety of community sectors such as health, education, social services, business, and most importantly with neighbourhood families is a proven strategy of highest priority for family support programs.
The Guiding Principles of Family Support

In their efforts to work collaboratively toward an integrated approach of education, care and family support, those working in a variety of family support programs such as Family Resource Programs (FRPs), Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs), Parenting and Family Literacy Centres and Community Action Programs for Children/Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CAPC/CPNP) have adopted a set of Guiding Principles. These Guiding Principles enable those in this sector to share a common vision and set of values that influence and direct our practice as we strive to support families and their children. The Guiding Principles constantly affirm the work of all those who work with families and provide practitioners in a variety of sectors with a common framework even when our programs may be substantially different from community to community across the province.

The Guiding Principles of Family Support

1. Family support programs are open to all families, recognizing that all families deserve support.
2. Family support programs complement existing services, build networks and linkages, and advocate for policies, services and systems that support families’ abilities to raise healthy children.
3. Family support programs work in partnership with families and communities to meet expressed needs.
4. Family support programs focus on the promotion of wellness and use a prevention approach in their work.
5. Family support programs work to increase opportunities and to strengthen individuals, families and communities.
6. Family support programs operate from an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of families’ lives.
7. Family support programs value and encourage mutual assistance and peer support.
8. Family support programs affirm parenting to be a life-long learning process.
9. Family support programs value the voluntary nature of participation in their services.
10. Family support programs promote relationships based on equality and respect for diversity.
11. Family support programs advocate non-violence to ensure safety and security for all family members.
12. Family support programs continually seek to improve their practice by reflecting on what they do and how they do it.

Source: [see pg.2]
## Working Together Framework for Family Support Programs

### Getting Started: on the Road to Collaboration

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<th>Program Component</th>
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| **COMMUNICATION** | • Introduce self/staff to school and child care staff, and establish a rapport  
• Meet with the other sectors and find commonalities between programs  
• Invite representatives from school boards and child care to community network tables  
• Look for opportunities to work together  
• Promote parent participation in all Early Years programs  | • Establish a communication plan to share information, newsletters, events, etc.  
• Meet together to describe a day in the life of a child care worker, a teacher and a family support practitioner  
• Work towards common language messages  
• Work together towards common goals/objectives, common philosophies and definitions eg. school readiness  
• Develop protocols to share information through newsletters, bulletin boards and community outreach  
• Develop protocols to share space  | • Monitor communication strategies to ensure ongoing sharing of information to staff and parents  
• Develop joint communication plans by forming committees to develop materials for distribution  
• Develop a joint Early Years planning committee in every community  
• Advocate jointly on the importance of the Early Years |
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| CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH | • Become familiar with the role of the principal, kindergarten teachers and child care staff  
• Introduce family support guiding principles to school and child care and review family support role within the early years curriculum  
• Identify common language that can be used by all partners  
• Introduce core requirements of funders in family support sector i.e., municipal, provincial, and federal | • Visit partners’ space  
• Arrange cross sector tours/visits to observe different Early Years programs  
• Establish “Open Door” policy to programs for local partners  
• Meet with kindergarten and child care teachers to identify common goals/strategies eg. supporting children’s transition into kindergarten  
• Deliver presentations to stakeholders e.g., school advisory councils and child care boards | • Identify commonalties and develop shared philosophy, goals, including common language between programs  
• Identify community needs and gaps (use Early Development Instrument (EDI), Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) and other available tools) and develop common strategies and goals to address needs and gaps  
• Use Early Learning Framework (ELECT) and Kindergarten Program to guide common planning  
• Develop co-facilitated programs (school readiness, family workshops)  
• Develop joint protocols for identifying common goals for individual children and families using common language |
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| **PROGRAM AND ACTIVITIES** | • Familiarize yourself with partner programs (schools and child care) availability/schedules to enable staff to meet together  
• Build relationships with other early years staff  
• Identify current early years programs/services and community networks  
• Participate on community networks to ensure collaborative planning  
• Review relevant stakeholder documents such as Toronto Operating Criteria and Kindergarten Program | • Facilitate informal discussion opportunities  
• Talk to program staff to plan for school entry  
• Share and review partners’ early learning programs to ensure common understanding of programs  
• Cross promote and refer to early years services  
• Invite kindergarten and child care staff to attend programs for planned special events e.g. Early Literacy Specialist | • Schedule regular meetings  
• Evaluate/assess community needs/gaps in schools, child care and FSPs  
• Jointly plan and collaborate to create learning environments that support children and families  
• Jointly plan and collaborate to create workshops for parents reflective of local needs  
• Co-facilitate programs and events with partners |
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| BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE | • Familiarize yourself with school’s code of conduct, school-wide social/emotional programs and homework policy. Familiarize yourself with child care policies and practices  
• Understand expectations and get to know what behaviour guidance strategies child care and schools are using, for example, The Incredible Years  
• Introduce partners to the family support guiding principles, especially those that promote non-violence and relationships based on equality and respect | • Review and discuss partners’ behaviour guidance and related protocols, e.g., Code of Conduct, Behaviour Guidance Policy, Child Abuse Reporting etc.  
• Talk with staff working directly with children about their behaviour guidance strategies  
• Provide collaborative workshops about behavior guidance across sectors | • Develop a common behaviour guidance approach based on common language, common approaches, best practices and legislative requirements among partner organizations  
• Provide joint professional development in behaviour guidance for the entire early years team |
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| KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION | • Become familiar with kindergarten registration dates and process  
• Meet with school staff and principal to identify registration process  
• Review relevant documents published by the TCDSB or TDSB on transition into kindergarten  
• Encourage families to visit other programs to get the children ready for school entry  
• Identify supportive services in the community including services in other languages | • Approach school and child care to identify opportunities for joint kindergarten registration and transition process  
• Establish dates and plan kindergarten registration process together  
• Use kindergarten registration as an opportunity to promote early learning services and programs  
• Add relevant materials to kindergarten registration packages | • Evaluate joint kindergarten registration and transition process and recommend strategies to improve process in subsequent years  
• Invite all service providers to kindergarten information night  
• Use kindergarten registration as an opportunity to build trust at all levels-parents and service providers  
• Work together with others to put together kindergarten bag and organize evening to share |
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| CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS    | • Be aware of early learning monitoring tools and data that are used by the school and child care and ensure that information is shared with staff  
  • Share information with families regarding monitoring tools and data collection undertaken in schools and child care  
  • Create and distribute promotional materials on schools and child care to families and community networks | • Discuss child development and progress using tools like ELECT, Nipissing, EDI, TPSL checklist etc  
  • Invite child care program and kindergarten teacher to bring children to programs for a visit  
  • Visit kindergarten programs with families  
  • Attend open houses to gather more information about school and how they support families and children  
  • Set up a booth/table at school registration to promote awareness of FSP and strengthen relationship between schools, child care, and FSPs | • Share community and school data to inform common program goals for all early years programs  
  • Develop common protocols to ensure smooth transitions from program to program to meet individual needs of children with no disruption in service delivery  
  • Share joint professional development opportunities with the school, FSP and child care in relation to monitoring tools  
  • Establish common standards between FSP, child care and schools to support children’s development, including confidentiality agreements and information-sharing guidelines for early childhood programs  
  • Establish common protocols and communication strategies in relation to children’s developmental progress |
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| **SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES** | • Review your schedule and routines to support a seamless and cohesive flow of activities for young children  
• Review partners’ health, nutrition and safety protocols | • Review existing program schedules and routines with the aim of reducing transitions and duplication of activities, e.g., repetition of group time, snack, etc.  
• Determine where there is program flexibility that meets the needs of children and families in collaboration with partners, e.g. arrange FSP start time to coincide with school entry time, especially in winter months | • Establish consistent routines and work together to adjust or reduce the number of transitions and duplications for children  
• Work with families to identify the best schedule for their child |
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| EARLY IDENTIFICATION (ID) AND INTERVENTION | • Establish open communication with schools and child care to create an environment of mutual support between programs  
• Identify the rights of children in relation to supports and services through the school and child care system  
• Use confidentiality agreements and information-sharing guidelines when communicating about children with school or child care  
• Create and distribute promotional materials on early identification services within schools, child care and FSP to share with families  
• Identify steps taken by schools and child care when a child is identified  
• Familiarize FSP staff with “Toronto Red Flags Guide” and understand the steps and protocols  
• Identify gaps in services for children  
• Collaborate to create a common consent form that can be used by FSPs/schools/child care to reduce paperwork for families | • Invite principal and kindergarten teachers to program as a method of connecting and establishing relationships to discuss early ID and intervention services  
• Share procedures for identification and referral of children with special needs among partners  
• Provide workshops on early ID and intervention for families, schools and child care  
• Identify gaps/duplications in services for families who may be in need of additional support | • Identify existing models that can be used for building cluster relationships with FSPs/schools/child care  
• Develop a common early identification/intervention strategy based on commonalities, best practices and legislative requirements  
• Create joint professional development opportunities for FSPs, schools and child care on early ID and intervention  
• Survey schools/child care/FSP for staff that can contribute services/skills in the area of early ID and intervention to support families  
• Create common resources for families that will support parents at home or while they wait for services |
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| PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | • Allocate resources for staff professional development  
• Seek out opportunities to schedule joint professional development among partners  
• Introduce local early years services to community partners  
• Develop FSP module for front line staff and students | • Join professional learning opportunities on a regular schedule  
• Share information about upcoming changes in programs  
• Offer placement opportunities to ECE and teaching students in Family Support Programs  
• Offer training to ECE and students teachers about family support programs  
• Attend training together to form a common basis of knowledge, formulate a common language and exchange program resources and models | • Jointly plan and deliver professional development opportunities with early years partners to support areas of program including social skills, behavior guidance and assessment  
• Integrate resources for intersectoral training on early years framework |
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<td>FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</td>
<td>• Increase parent/caregiver awareness of community programs and services</td>
<td>• Discuss outreach strategies to increase awareness of early years programs</td>
<td>• Establish a common approach to ensure meaningful parent input into early learning programs</td>
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<td>• Inform parents about early years service integration activities</td>
<td>• Engage parents in a variety of ways so they can support children’s development (e.g. school readiness, reading at home, parenting workshops)</td>
<td>• Encourage parents to help organize and plan for community activities (parent information sessions, workshops, training)</td>
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<td>• Increase the capacity of parents to participate on boards and advisory councils in coordination with partners</td>
<td>• Share information about community events among sectors</td>
<td>• Encourage parent participation in program planning e.g., daily activities, celebrations, skill/interest sharing</td>
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<td>• Encourage parents to visit a variety of programs</td>
<td>• Develop a community newsletter with input from parents</td>
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<td>• Plan events with partners such as literacy nights to encourage reading and family involvement</td>
<td>• Establish links with various cultural groups</td>
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| USE OF SPACE AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION | • Identify space that has potential to be shared; e.g., school library, gym, meeting room in community centre etc.  
• Develop protocols for use of common space  
• Develop understanding of partners’ program needs in relation to school space as well as security, health and safety protocols and policies etc.  
• Support early years integration strategies by identifying resources that can be shared, e.g., materials, books, staff  
• Contact partners with info about available resources | • Discuss space needs with school and child care program and evaluate available space with the aim of reducing transitions for children and families  
• Determine what resources/space can be shared among partners | • Identify areas where programs can be co-located or shared  
• Work collaboratively to eliminate barriers to allow for multi-use of space  
• Allocate space for joint activities  
• Work with partners to contribute resources for joint activities, e.g., space, staff, materials  
• Develop one resource for each cluster of services (hub) for parents with information about local schools, FSPs and child care  
• Work with specialized service providers to support families and children in family support programs |
Resources

- **Ward Reports on Children** (www.toronto.ca/children/wardreports.htm) contain statistical information on the children and families residing in each ward, and also provide maps and listings of children's programs and facilities including:
  - child care
  - community centres and libraries
  - elementary schools
  - family support resource programs
  - demographic information on children and families.

- **Toronto First Duty (TFD)** is a universal early learning and care program model for every child that simultaneously:
  - meets the developmental needs of children to ensure they reach their full potential
  - supports parents to work or study
  - supports parents in their parenting role.

  The TFD model brings together kindergarten, child care and parenting supports into a single program. Through TFD, parents are able to access the full range of child and family supports available in their community.
  www.toronto.ca/firstduty

- **The Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children** is a 10-year strategy for meeting the early learning and care needs of the city's young children. The vision will bring the existing patchwork of services together into a system that works for Toronto families.
  www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network.htm

- **Best Start Expert Panel Reports:**
    www.gov.on.ca/children/graphics/stel02_183342.pdf
  - The report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources: Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents
    www.gov.on.ca/children/graphics/stel02_183340.pdf

Other Working Together Documents

**Child Care**


**Education**

www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/programs/early_years/docs/WorkingTogether.pdf

www.cateam.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=597
For More Information

CITY OF TORONTO & BEST START
www.toronto.ca/children

BEST START (Ministry of Children & Youth Services)

Toronto Best Start Network Information:
www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network.htm

The Best Start Plan: Toronto’s Vision for Children:
English: www.toronto.ca/children/bs/bsn_vision.pdf

FIRST DUTY
www.toronto.ca/firstduty

Family Support Sector

FRP Canada
http://www.frp.ca/

CAP-C/CPNP Programs

Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC)
http://www.gov.on.ca/children/oeyc/

Family Support Institute Ontario (FSIO)
http://www.fsio.ca/

School Boards

Toronto District School Board
http://www.tdsb.on.ca/

Toronto Catholic District School Board
http://www.tcdsb.org/
Glossary of Terms

Family support programs – Parenting centres, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, prenatal/postnatal groups, family literacy, parenting groups, home visiting, community kitchens, and family health and nutrition programs. The focus is on parents and children. Parents may attend alone. Children are accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

Family support practitioner is the designation used for professionals working in family support programs. Partner programs – Community-based child care and family support agencies, school boards, municipal children service managers, public health, recreation, public libraries etc., participating in a cross-sector partnership to form a community/neighbourhood hub delivery system.

Integrated learning environment – Combines the functions and elements of child care, kindergarten, and family support programs. Elements include combining space, pedagogical approach, daily routines and schedules, assessing children’s development and progress, and establishing and monitoring program quality.

Specialized services providers – Resource teachers for children with special needs, public health nurses, children’s mental health, and other intervention professionals.

Early Learning and Care Programs – include childcare, kindergarten and family support programs working collaboratively

Frontline staff – People who provide direct service or programming to children and families, including Public Health nurses, children’s mental health, and other intervention professionals.

Early learning team – People who provide the daily program, including early childhood educators, early childhood assistants, kindergarten teachers, educational assistants, family support practitioners, and may include special needs service professionals if they are part of the daily program delivery

Pedagogy is the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports the understanding of learning. This includes teaching methods, strategies and techniques.
**Partners** include schools and family support services (family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Community Action Programs for Children (CAPC), Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs (CPNP))

**Child care/early childhood education** – Child care centres, home child care, nursery schools, school readiness programs, preschool programs, special needs resourcing, and preschool early intervention group programs. Children may attend without a parent or guardian.

**Kindergarten** – Junior and senior kindergarten offered to all children 3.8 to 6 years of age by school boards.

**Early identification and intervention services** include specialized services for children aged 0 – 6 and their families offered by child welfare agencies, child treatment centres, infant hearing, infant development, children’s mental health centres, developmental services, preschool speech and language and Healthy Babies, Healthy Children.
