**Valley Gardens Playschool**

**Curriculum Statement**

Valley Gardens Playschool promotes a wide variety of learning opportunities for children to develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. First and foremost, we believe that children learn best through play. Play can take many forms and we encourage children to take part in all types of play by creating inviting and stimulating interactions, environment and experiences. Our schedule is predictable but flexible to meet children’s needs and allow for these learning opportunities.

Staff members observe children’s free play to determine, then promote their interests and pursuits to best facilitate learning through play. Each of the play areas is changed frequently depending on how the children are using the toys and materials that we have prepared for them. New items might be added to enhance their current play based on the staff’s observations, or perhaps we will change an entire area to re-invigorate interest in that centre. The opportunity for choice is so important to our program that free play, when children can choose the experiences they want to investigate, is the largest segment of time scheduled into our 2-hour classes.

Free play promotes healthy development such as creativity, communication, problem-solving, independent decision-making, and social skills like developing friendships or asking for help from an adult. For example, children develop communication and problem-solving skills as they work together to build ramps for car races - or they develop creativity and social skills as they set up a pretend picnic, bake and serve cookies, or play dress-up. Decision-making, spatial skills and numeracy concepts like one-to-one correspondence are developed when children choose to do a puzzle, build a tower, or construct mountains in the sand table - and we see creativity and self-esteem develop as children make original works of art. In addition, when children write their names they are learning symbol correspondence and developing fine motor skills or when staff and children read a favorite book together they are developing their imaginations, as well as literacy skills such as letter recognition and anticipating what will happen next. These are just a few examples of the many ways in which children’s minds, bodies, and skill sets grow and expand through independent play choices.

Another way we encourage children at our preschool centre to learn is through ongoing interaction with each other and staff members. While staff observe play, we also participate with the children by asking questions, making comments, being a character in their pretend play, and by expanding their play ideas with suggestions. For example, we might encourage the children to add to kitchen play by expanding it to a restaurant or picnic. We also talk with children and model how to develop relationships and friendships with one another – our actions show how to share or take turns, pretend together, or work as a team. Snack time is another opportunity for social interaction between the children, as well as between staff and children. Children learn to cooperate, make friends and get along with others when they share a meal together.

We also provide learning opportunities through structured activities such as circle time, group games, and occasional sit-down art or games. As with free play, the structured time is designed to promote the current interests of the children, by using information staff have gained during their observations. Staff members observe children during the structured time and adjust the length of it to correspond with the children’s engagement in the activities and songs presented. We recognize that young children cannot sit for extended periods of time and so we make circle time fun and stimulating with plenty of movement. Sometimes, circle time goes longer than expected; other times they are cut short – each in response to the children in the group and what they are gaining during the learning experience. Children learn turn-taking, listening to a speaker and participating in a group when their abilities, interests and needs are recognized and used in planning structured, teacher-led activities. Music, song, and movement are very important and are incorporated into interactions, the environment and experiences in the centre.

Play environments are also monitored to make sure they are representative of all children and their families – regardless of gender, age, ability, ethnicity or culture. For example, we provide dolls that are both male and female and different skin colors, a toy wheelchair and crutches, play food from different cultures, as well as class posters and books that represent people from around the world and in society. As with the toys and materials provided, we also include family diversity in our discussions.

Overall, Valley Gardens Playschool promotes learning and development through free choice in play, limited structured times, as well as ongoing support of the children in friendship development and learning social skills. This is communicated to parents on a daily basis through conversations at pick-up time, as well as through monthly newsletters and information posted on the website. This information includes past learning and development (eg. how they enjoyed a party, special visitor, or planned activity), as well as information on upcoming events and activities (eg. spirit weeks, holiday discussions, etc.) We encourage parents to voice questions or concerns with staff, check in with their children about their daily learning, and offer support and praise to their children for their accomplishments. We believe that play is a child’s work – and our role is to facilitate and foster that work, leading to independent, confident, and compassionate individuals.