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MERKOS L'INYONEI CHINUCH

# THE HOW AND WHY OF ADMINISTRATION IN A MERKOS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

*A practical guide presented in cooperation with the  
MIDF Early Childhood Initiative*



# THE HOW AND WHY OF A MERKOS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

## Preface:

The Early Childhood Initiative of the Machne Israel Development Fund (MIDF) has sprouted new early childhood centers in towns and cities across the US and abroad.

Together new and existing Chabad early childhood schools form a network of more than 200 in the US and Canada alone. They have common aspirations and goals even as they serve different populations; they all teach children and mean to positively impact their families as well. Their purpose is to educate the young and reach out to the adults.

Contemplating the creation of a new E/C center can seem daunting in spite of the fact that one may have taught school for years and the responsibility can appear overwhelming. As one becomes more familiar with the processes and requirements, it all begins to fall into place.

This booklet is meant to make the process of starting a new school all the more manageable because it reviews the “How and Why” of the administrative and financial responsibilities it touches only briefly the curricula, religious needs and other programming expectations of Jewish E/C programs. It was also designed to dovetail with the standards of the National Accreditation board of Merkos L’Inyonei Chinuch, and the National Council for Private School Accreditation, NCPSA. It will make the eventual accreditation process seem like a logical next step in the school’s road toward educational excellence.

It is the fervent hope of all those involved with the mission of the Merkos Chinuch Office, MIDF, the Merkos National Accreditation Board that this small step will serve *l’kadesh shem shamayim* to exalt the greater glory of the Al-mighty. We pray that the world of *chinuch* will be enhanced in the course of the pursuit of our sacred task.

*Rabbi Nochem Kaplan*  
*Merkos Chinuch Office*

## Chapter 1

### PHILOSOPHY, GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION:

*Defining the School's Fundamental Mission and Principles under which it should operate.  
Laying the proper groundwork will enable the school E/C center to establish itself upon a solid foundation and smooth the road to continuous professional administrative functioning.*

#### 1. **Philosophy:** The “why” and the “how” of a school

Statement of philosophy and mission:

For any educational institution to maximize its potential it must have a clearly written and actively implemented statement of philosophy and mission that conveys the general and specific purpose of its educational programs. That philosophy is shaped by its religious ideology and orientation and serves as the basis for the daily operational and instructional decision making as well as long range planning. This assures that the school has clear direction and identity which then give meaning to its educational programs and the methodological best practices it encourages and supports.

This requires careful thought and consideration but it is not a difficult process, it is rather a deliberative one.

Religious Foundation Principles:

An Early Childhood Center affiliated with Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, naturally sees adherence to Halacha as an essential ingredient of its mission. Thus all Merkos institutions should include in their by-laws a statement regarding the Halachic foundation of the school, including the Halachic authority that may arbitrate on religious policy. In addition a school may choose to include other fundamental philosophical principles in its by-laws to be determined by the school itself.

Educational Philosophy:

The school/program needs to create a statement of its philosophy regarding the care and education of children. The philosophy considers current research and is shaped by the religious ideology and orientation of the program and is consistent with the program's mission and vision statements. For a school to function as a single unified educational entity its philosophy of education must permeate all of its education programs, guiding the school and defining its character. Articulating its educational philosophy is a prerequisite to establishing sound educational operations and it is that which identifies it as a serious educational enterprise rather than a day-care service.

Adherence to Teaching Methodology That Reflects Best Practice:

Current research supports a variety of teaching practices as effective and appropriate. Which practices are most appropriate for a given educational institution and a particular subject area will naturally be determined by the philosophy of the program. A Merkos affiliated school should choose an educational identity and teaching methodology which will make it successful in its particular community. A school should identify the methodological best practices it encourages and supports. This is an expression of the school's determination to strive for educational excellence, as the school defines the very term itself. The development of effective teaching practices gives meaning to this goal and makes possible its achievement.

2. **Governance:** Who governs the school and under which guidelines:

The Rebbe zi"l stressed many times and required of all Merkos affiliated institutions to operate in a manner which reflects scrupulous adherence to Halacha, adherence to all legal requirements and principles of good management. This section deals with those requirements.

The school must operate as a licensed, legal entity:

A Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch affiliated school/early childhood center must be licensed or authorized by the local civil authority including where applicable, but not limited to, the Board of Health, Fire and Safety regulations, and any licensing required.. Licensing requirements vary from state to state, even from county to county but all pertinent information is available locally and not difficult to come by. The governance and leadership must assure the integrity, effectiveness and reputation of the school through the establishment of policy, provision of resources and assurance of a quality program. They must act ethically and in accordance with Jewish Halachic principles to ensure the trust and support of the community it serves.

The corporate structure of a school/early childhood center:

The school/early childhood center affiliated with Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch must function within acceptable and legal parameters. The Rebbe zi"l ordained that all his mosdos function "B'ofan Chuki" Therefore the school's corporate entity has to have clearly articulated bylaws which govern its activity and provide for sound educational administration practice and for educational options sufficient to cover the school scope and its programs. The governance establishes and maintains written governing policies and procedures that are consistent with the school's philosophy and operates in conjunction with and under the appropriate bylaws of the corporation.

3. **Business Administration:** assuring sound and effective management

The administration of a school where sound fiscal policies are in place will be at peace and at liberty to concentrate on the spiritual mission of the school.

Sound fiscal processes and procedures:

The school business operations should be managed in an ethical and organized manner which includes acceptable budgeting and accounting procedures, long range planning, fund-raising and tuition policies. The school has periodic oversight and public statements which make the public aware of how the governance manages its business. Sound fiscal processes and procedures promote confidence in the school's ability to manage fiscal and material resources in responsible manner.

Tuition and Fees; Refund Policy

There is no single tuition policy for Merkos schools. Each school should establish sound tuition policies, including tuition and a fee schedule appropriate to its operation and clientele as well as fair ethical scholarship and refund policies that are communicated to the parent body. Some schools have opted for a direct withdrawal process others have found that it is advantageous to use a professional company for awarding financial aid. Both of these are acceptable alternatives to handling sensitive issues in-house.

Adequate Insurance policies

It is absolutely essential that the school entity is adequately insured; this cannot be stressed enough. In order to ensure the stability of the school in the case of a significant litigation, the governance should be certain to maintain adequate liability and accident insurance including insurance on any vehicle that transports children.

## *Chapter 2*

# PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION

*Establishing and maintain an advantageous professional relationship with personnel*  
*A school will be as effective as its personnel. Taking the time and making the effort to hone the professional skills of its administration and staff are the best investment a school can make.*

### **Administrative leadership**

Research suggests that the performance of the program director, particularly as it relates to providing leadership in a program, functioning at the administrative level. Providing high-quality supervision and feedback can predict the level of the program's quality. The fact is that the quality of care and education received by the children, the continuing education and professional growth of the staff, and the confidence the parents will have in the program, are all dependent on the knowledge and skills of the director and administrators.

The leadership of any school affiliated with Merkos should represent a skills set including practical classroom experience with children, a theoretical understanding of principles of child development, knowledge of child development, management of personnel and a thorough religious education to ensure that the values of the program can be properly imparted. In many communities, especially those with smaller Jewish populations, it may be difficult to find a single individual that possesses all these qualifications. An acceptable alternative in those cases may be to create a leadership team which may include, for example, a director, a program director, and administrator. It is however critical, that the recommended skill set be represented among those leading the program.

It is equally important that all staff members conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the underlying philosophy of the program, modeling appropriate standards to the students and parent body of the school.

### **The Director**

The director, because of his/her pivotal role in the success of the early education program, needs to have the professional training needed to assume such an essential position. Not always is it possible for a Shliach or Shlucha to present the complete skills set necessary, hiring the properly credentialed people can be a viable alternative. It is professionally acceptable to distribute the requisite skill set among those leading the program, e.g. the administrator has experience in administrative practices, the director holds a degree in early childhood education, and the program director is a graduate of a Jewish Teacher's seminary program.

**General Responsibilities:** The director is charged with assuming responsibility of the day-to-day program operations, maintaining program policies, and monitoring the program's compliance with applicable requirements of civil authorities. The director's leadership addresses the program's goal of fostering the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and character development of children.

**Hiring Staff:** The director/administrator is responsible for hiring staff that support the philosophy and mission of the program in accord with applicable governance procedures. Following are a number of issues which relate directly to the hiring of personnel:

**Background Screening:** The program's hiring procedures include background screening and fingerprinting to obtain a history regarding abuse and any criminal convictions for all employees and for others who have direct access with the children in the program.

**Staff Orientation:** New staff is provided with an orientation and/or a Staff Manual that should include but not be limited to the following:

- Goals and philosophy of the program
- planned activities for the program
- Appropriate classroom management techniques
- Routines and transitions in which the children in the program are engaged
- discipline policies and procedures
- Communication with parents
- Mealtimes and food-handling policies
- Occupational health hazards
- Emergency health and safety procedures

**Employee Handbook:** It is generally a good idea for all school policies, general directions and instructions to be published so that all staff members but especially new personnel can have the basic administrative what when and where at their fingertips. All personnel should receive a copy of the employee handbook and the staff should be instructed at least annually on the schools' employee policies and procedures.

Basic administrative responsibilities of the director:

**General health policies:**

All schools must establish clear health maintenance procedures including but not limited to the following:

- Hand-washing techniques
- diapering techniques and toileting
- Child abuse/child neglect detection, prevention, and reporting
- cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting procedures

**Implementation of ill-child policies should include the following:**

- Applying the program's policies regarding exclusion of ill children and readmission after illness
- Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting procedures
- Documenting and administering prescribed medication if administered by program employees
- Notifying parents/guardians regarding a communicable disease occurring in children or staff
- Assessing the health of children daily

**Evaluation of all Employees:**

The director must ensure an annual written evaluation is conducted for each staff member that contributes to the staff member's professional development and is kept in the staff member's file. If there is ever to be a question about the performance of any employee, the first question raised will be whether or not there was an annual written evaluation.

**Staff Substitutes:** Assuring that all classes are manned at all times is a prerequisite to any school's functioning. The director must create a current list of qualified substitutes who may be called upon to maintain the integrity of the program.

**Acting Director:** The director will need to absent him/herself from the school facility from time to time. Who is responsible for what during that absence may be the difference between an easy

resolution to a problem and the creation of a major existential issue. The director must designate a qualified person to assume leadership and responsibility of the early education program in the event of his/her absence.

**Team Building:** The director is the one responsible for building strong relationships and communication between the staff and administration, and encourages team collaboration and spirit among the staff. Monthly (or more frequent) staff meeting are an essential element of successful staff building.

**Program Evaluation with Staff:** The successful director meets with the staff regularly to evaluate the early education program and to discuss areas of strengths as well as areas needing improvement. The areas needing improvement are addressed after the meetings through a specific Program Improvement Plan.

**Maintaining Personnel Files:** The director maintains a confidential personnel file on each employee. The file should contain but not be limited to the following and/or contain information that civil authorities require:

- \* resume
- \* Application
- \* Copies of all transcripts
- \* Background of screening results
- \* fingerprint clearance
- \* Documentation of grievances
- \* Annual written evaluation

**Disciplinary Policies:** The director should oversee the interaction between staff and children, publishing the discipline policies and procedures for parents/guardians and staff and taking appropriate measures to maintain discipline. Corporal punishment and demeaning tactics are not allowed.

Additional responsibilities of an administrator:

**Job Descriptions and Other Staff Policies:** Clear and up-to-date written personnel policies should be developed by the administration. These policies include but are not limited to job descriptions; wages and benefits; and resignation, termination, and grievance procedures.

**Communication of Personnel Policies:** Written personnel policies should be shared with staff at meeting and published so that there is never a question if policies have been communicated with the staff. Some schools prefer to retain a receipt from the staff to assure that there is question that policies were properly communicated.

**Children's Information:** The director/administrator should ensure that current, complete, and confidential records are kept for each child and are available to authorized personnel. The file should include such information as the child's Hebrew name and parents Hebrew name, relevant life history, behavioral patterns, assessment so developmental and cognitive development, parental contact information, and appropriate health records as noted in the Health and Safety section of this document.

**Qualifications for Incorporating Religious Instruction** In an ideal situation, the teacher for each classroom will possess the religious training to be able to take initiative in incorporating Jewish religious practices, thematic units, and values into the classroom. Where the main teacher does not

have the training to do this on her own, it is recommended that an associate with this training be sought. At minimum, each classroom should be led by a teacher or associate teacher who has had the experience of teaching in a pre-school classroom and incorporated religious instruction in a manner consistent with the philosophy of the school.

**Continuing Education/Development Programs:** All staff responsible for the care and education of the children in the program participate annually in a minimum of twelve documented clock hours of continuing education or professional development relating to child growth and development in the areas of cognitive learning and social, emotional, and physical development; religious instruction, safety and health issues for young children; family and community relations; classroom and program management; and professional development which may include special needs. Training may also include related language development, discipline, and technology.



## Chapter 3

# CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

*Curriculum design and Practice, Staff Training and Children's Assessment*

### **The purpose of Early Childhood Learning Guidelines:**

Research on cognition and learning, child development, and the social and cultural context of learning has shown that young children are competent learners even at a young age. It is important to note, however, that how a child learns best and the pace of his learning is highly individualized. It is impossible to set age and other benchmarks for achieving pre-reading, for example, one can only to discuss the processes through which children learn and the kinds of educational programs which children need to be exposed to.

The general guidelines which are discussed in this section are intended to articulate what early education programs may be expected to offer as they prepare young children in the areas of literacy, language, pre-reading skills, pre-mathematics, science, and early social studies.

Within the context of Jewish pre-schools, we would expect to find Jewish knowledge and values integrated into these areas; e.g. introduction of Hebrew vocabulary in the language scope and sequence, introduction of Jewish customs and practices as a component of the social studies unit, integration of Hebrew alphabet and printed texts in the literacy component of the program. Classic Jewish educational texts address the issue of developmentally appropriate scope and sequence; developmentally appropriate practice should be considered when setting goals for Jewish studies.

### 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF CURRICULUM PRACTICE

**Curriculum Guide:** The curriculum used by an early education program should always consist of proven successful resources with a consistent scope and sequence for each age group. Some schools E/C centers choose to adopt an educational philosophy which then translates into curriculum, others may choose to glean for a variety of sources. What they all need to be mindful of, is that any curriculum should be age appropriate, consistent with the mission and address the many developmental needs of a child.

The curriculum must provide opportunities not only in a multitude of cognitive skills but also to foster the social/emotional development of children through including but not being limited to instruction and consistent daily practice of activities addressing the following: sharing, cooperating, helping, taking turns, problem solving, learning to transition from home to school, developing self-discipline, gaining confidence in performing age-appropriate tasks, and relating appropriately to adults and peers

**Appropriate Language Experience:** Children begin developing language and literacy at birth. As young children express their feelings, ask questions, and share imaginative stories, they are communicating what they know about their world. Between the ages of three and five children are becoming more aware of print in their environment, however, oral language continues to be their primary means of communicating.

Receptive and expressive language experiences appropriate to the development of children are provided throughout the day. Children in the preschool classes are provided with increased exposure to print and active experiences that support the development of listening and speaking concepts and skills. Children are exposed to vocabulary supporting Jewish experiences. Hebrew and/or Yiddish are incorporated into the language experiences of the children in accordance with the philosophy of the school.

**Balancing the Program—Indoor and Outdoor Play:** The curriculum should be designed to meet the physical needs of each child. Physical development is a highly individualized process and therefore activities must include a regular balance of indoor and outdoor play with opportunities for attention to individual needs. It should provide individualized opportunities for children to develop fine- and gross-motor skills which are a prerequisite to all school oriented activities.

**Social and Emotional Development** The curriculum should provide opportunities to foster the social/emotional development of children. Socio-emotional development is encouraged within the context of Jewish values, and the deliberate expansion of socio-emotional skills as part of moral development is stressed in the curriculum in age-appropriate ways.

**Toddlers:** For toddlers a curriculum must provide opportunities to foster the social/emotional development through activities in which the staff interact with infants/toddlers. Examples may include: listening and responding to needs, making eye contact, using each child's name in a positive manner, holding and singing to children, and encouraging children in such self-help skills as self-feeding, pulling up, walking, crawling, climbing, and sitting.

## 2. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

**Balanced Activities:** The curricular practices provide for a balance of active and quiet activities including large-group (teacher-directed), small-group (teacher/child-interactive), and individual-choice (child-initiated) activities throughout the day.

**Length of Group Times:** The length of group times as opposed to individual activity should be appropriate for the age and development of the children in the class. In mixed-age groupings, accommodations and flexibility meet the needs of each age group included in the class.

**Use of Transition Activities:** Staff should use transition activities to move the children from one activity to another throughout the day. Transitional tools may include songs, poems, or other signs that children recognize as signaling a change of activity.

**Lessons Plans:** Instructional staff should cooperatively develop lesson plans for each class/age group and for individual needs, that reflect the goals and objectives of the curriculum but allow room for flexible application. Lesson plans of Jewish content and values should likewise include age-appropriate integration and allow for individual needs.

**Small Group and Large Group Instruction:** The curriculum needs to consider providing ample opportunities for children to interact independently, in small groups and in large groups, are provided in order to help meet social/emotional needs of children.

**should be provided to support** the learning objectives of the program's scope and sequence. Materials and equipment may include but are not limited to manipulatives, puzzles, building materials, musical instruments, creative art materials, sand and water tables, dolls, and other props that support the educational objectives. Where possible, the Jewish character of the program should be reflected in the materials and equipment, e.g. music, dramatic play props, art materials, and puzzles. Items should not be present that violate the philosophy and goals of the program.

**should be made aware of good** health practices within the context of the school program. Methods may include the use of related daily routines by teachers, teacher example, visits to health facilities or from health care professionals, and other curricular presentations appropriate to the program's curriculum. Curricular plans should include ensuring children learn about healthy nutrition through experience and instruction, as appropriate to the program. Ideally, the nutritional instruction is provided in the context of *Kashrut* (a spiritually healthy diet) and the religious value of respecting the sacred gift of life through good health practices. soap and hot water are appropriately taught as part of the curriculum. Specifically, hand-washing always precedes eating, and children regularly wash hands after bathroom use and outside

activities. Ritual forms of hand-washing are practiced and taught. Hand-washing and cleanliness are taught within the context of Jewish practice and values.

**Forming Habits and Routines:** Teachers and staff members should prepare the classroom environment and plan for the flow of the day, in such a way that encourages children to become independent and to accept personal responsibility with initiative. For example, routines are clearly established so that children know when to clean and organize the room, when to put on clothing for outside activities, and/or when to transition to different activities. Jewish practices are incorporated into routines in a manner that supports the philosophy of the program.

### 3. CURRICULUM CONTENT

**Print-Rich Environment:** Teachers should provide daily interactions with labels, signs, and/or other forms of print, and read aloud to the children. They provide exposure to the sounds and names of the letters of the alphabet. In a Jewish pre-school, there will also be exposure to the Hebrew alphabet and primary Jewish texts. At minimum, each classroom posts the Alef-Bet and contains a Siddur.

**Vocabulary and Comprehensive Development:** The instructional staff should consciously works to help children develop vocabulary and comprehension. They verbally interact with the children to guide them in the acquisition of new and expanded vocabulary, in anticipating outcomes, and in comprehension of what they have heard.

While these techniques for enhancing comprehension are applicable across content, it should be recognized that vocabulary development is often key to the development of comprehension. As such, within the Jewish pre-school, attention should be given to ensuring that the children have the vocabulary to successfully engage with Jewish concepts.

**Phonemic Awareness:** Children begin to develop a phonemic awareness through understanding that words are made up of a combination of sounds. Lesson plans reflect a variety of songs, finger plays, stories, and games that have rhyming words and alliteration to strengthen phonemic awareness.

**Alphabet:** Children need to be exposed daily to the form and function of the alphabet through opportunities such as tracing shapes, copying or writing letters, and practicing writing names. Programs will vary as to the timing of the introduction of the Hebrew alphabet. Some will introduce phonemic awareness in the context of the aleph Bet; some in the context of the alphabet; some programs will introduce both alphabets. Experience with the aleph bet is strongly encouraged.

**Mathematical Awareness:** Young children begin to develop the concept of number through interactions in their environment on a daily basis. They learn through observations and hands-on activities that objects may be manipulated, sorted, ordered, and quantified. They learn about relationships, when engaged in meaningful experiences involving skills that include collecting, counting, building, and comparing.

The instructional staff should plan activities that expose children daily to math related activities. These concepts may be integrated into the Jewish instruction as well.

**Science–Core Knowledge:** Preschool children learn about the natural world, including the physical properties of things around them, as they interact with objects, people, and other living things. Children whose early lives are rich in sensory experiences and accompanying verbal labels tend to have greater facility for building up the more complex labels and patterns required for thought and problem solving in later life. Knowledge and appreciation of these experiences is

placed within the context of Jewish values, i.e. wonder and appreciation of G-d's world and the mandate to interact with the world safely and responsibly.

**Sensory-Rich Environment:** The preschool classroom is a sensory-rich environment and it includes numerous objects and organisms with which the students can interact. Opportunities are provided throughout the day for children to use their senses for observing and learning about objects, events, and organisms. Instructional staff helps children to perform simple investigations and to describe their observations.

**Social Studies—Core Knowledge** Preschool children develop an awareness of self as a growing individual. They learn about their own needs, interests, and abilities. They begin to learn about similarities and differences between themselves and others, including their peers, their family members, and their community. Instructional staff should promote the advancement of social skills and the development positive dispositions by offering numerous opportunities for children to learn about themselves and others.

**Promotion of Communication and Interaction:** Instructional staff foster positive communication and interaction as preschoolers actively engage in a variety of such learning experiences as taking turns, playing simple small-group games, and performing daily routines.

**Cultural and Racial Awareness:** Instructional staff should provide opportunities and activities that expose children to cultural diversity, including Jewish cultural diversity. Especially important is sensitizing children to the cultural diversity that exists within their own community, and particularly, within the school community.

**Musical Experiences:** The curriculum daily provides age-appropriate opportunities to expose children in each age group to a variety of musical experiences—including child-initiated ones—such as singing, listening, rhythmic movements, and playing rhythm instruments. Music is used to enrich Jewish experiences; e.g. chanting or singing of blessings of prayers.

**Creative Arts Experiences:** The curriculum daily provides opportunities to expose children in each age group to a variety of age-appropriate creative arts experiences—including child-initiated ones—such as painting, gluing items together to create art, cutting for design purposes, combining mediums, molding with clay, and creating one's own stories, plays, and other dramatic activities. Art is used to enrich the Jewish curriculum.

**Training of Instructional Staff:** Instructional staff is trained in the use and deliverance of the curriculum. Opportunities for instructional staff to share their suggestions and ideas regarding the curriculum are provided annually. Suggestions and/or training should include explicit reference to the Jewish curriculum of the school.

**Teaching toward Individual needs:** Observations of children by staff address the various learning styles, multiple intelligences, and learning preferences. Staff then use these observations to incorporate classroom activities that address the individual needs, strengths, and preferences of the children in their care.

#### 4. ASSESSMENT:

**Continuous Student Assessment:** Ongoing assessment of children's progress takes place and is used to plan activities for individual children and for groups of children. Children's progress is reported with supporting documentation, and the assessment methods are consistent with the program's philosophy and methodology.

**Variety of Assessment Techniques:** The school E/C program recognizes that instructional improvement, as evidenced by the progress of children, requires the use of multiple tools for assessment. Such assessment should include such tools of evidence as the following:

**Observations of Child Development:** Observation by a qualified observer will tell a great deal about a child's development. Where there is no qualified professional on staff it is a good idea to get professional evaluation if a teacher is concerned or has serious concern that a child may be lagging in development or may have a learning deficiency or behavioral issue.

## Chapter 4

# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, SAFETY AND NUTRITION:

*An esthetically pleasing, comfortable, healthy, and safe environment is a hallmark of a good E.C program.*

### 1. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:

**School Facilities:** Schools and E.C. centers should provide equipment, materials, and space to facilitate the children's success in learning, by encouraging teachers to effectively organize the classroom and playground environments in a way that not only promotes the achievement of each child's educational goals but also increases the number of opportunities for achieving these goals during both child- and teacher-initiated activities. The Jewish ambience and atmosphere of the facility also creates the conditions that foster the child's integration of Jewish identity and values. The building ambience should reflect the Jewish nature of the program. At minimum, there must be *mezuzot* on each door,

**Appropriate classroom space:** The physical environment of the program must meet all pertinent State health requirements; it provides sufficient lighting, good ventilation, and a comfortable temperature. It includes not only appropriate furnishings, such as tables and chairs, that allow children's feet to touch the floor but also appropriate room flooring and soft areas that are comforting to children.

**Suitable for Class Size:** Classrooms should be suitable for the age and activities of the children in the program, and meet all State health requirements. General accepted standards are: Floor space have minimum of **thirty-five square feet** of usable space per child, outdoor areas include seventy five square feet per child.

**Classroom Arrangement of Furnishings:** The physical environment of the classroom should be arranged not only to stimulate learning by accommodating large and small groups of children but also to encourage exploration and experimentation.

**Age Appropriate Furniture and Equipment:** The environment designed for toddlers and two-year-olds facilitates optimal age-appropriate learning experiences. Shelving and storage units provide an organized flow to the room and thereby invite children to interact with materials and equipment.

**Accessible & Appropriate Sinks and Toilets:** Sinks and toilets are readily accessible to children. The number of sinks and toilets (child-sized ones are recommended) must be in compliance with civil authorities and adequate for the number of children in attendance.

**Adequate Outdoor Space and Equipment:** To accommodate the children's various play activities, the outdoor physical environment should include **seventy-five square feet per child** on the playground at any given time and provides adequately for safety concerns. Playground equipment should be varied and sufficient for the number of children on the playground at the same time. The playground is designed and equipped to provide optimal learning experiences for children. The program provides adequate protection for the play area, including fencing and a balance of sun and shade.



**Substitute and Adequate Space Indoors for Large Group Play:** When inclement weather prevents children from playing outdoors, alternative activities are planned to ensure large-motor exercise and to foster large-motor development.

## 2. HEALTH ISSUES

**Staff Training:** The school early education program is responsible for the health, safety, and general welfare of each child while the child is in attendance. The staff should have continuing and required training in emergency first aid and in special medical needs in order to be alert and prepared for emergencies. Parents need to feel reassured that their children are in safe, caring and responsible hands they have the right to expect that staff members are safety conscious with a view toward prevention.

**Documentation of Civil Agency Inspections:** The school E/C center should be inspected by city/state agencies as applicable for licensing or exemption under state or federal law (i.e., fire department, health department, food services, etc.) and inspection documentations should be kept on file. If the program is exempt from licensing, voluntary inspection has been sought, and recommendations for improvement have been followed.

**Children's Health Records:** All licensed children's programs are required to keep up-to-date, complete, and confidential health records for each child enrolled in the program are maintained in a safe and secure area and are available to authorized personnel. These files may include such information as the child's life history, developmental milestones, screening or assessment results, typical behaviors, and interests. Children in attendance are in compliance with the requirements of civil authorities regarding immunizations, physical examinations, and communicable diseases.

**Emergency, Health, and Security Information:** Current emergency information should be maintained for each child enrolled in the program, including expected attendance, parent/guardian contact information, people authorized to take the child off the premises, allergies, and other important health information.

**Policies Regarding Illnesses:** A written policy regarding the attendance of children who are ill, have been diagnosed with a contagious disease, or have been found to have a communicable condition should be developed and made available to parents/guardians. An isolation area should be made available for ill or contagious children while they wait for someone to take them home.

**Cleanliness Requirements:** Children and adults wash their hands with soap and water after toileting, before eating or handling food, and as otherwise necessary to prevent the spread of disease.

## 3. SAFETY ISSUES

**Supervision of Arrivals and Departures:** Safe arrival and departure procedures are essential to assure safety, in addition they are a means to starting and ending the day in an organized fashion. The must also assure that all children in the program are accounted for throughout the day and released only to authorized adults. Children should be supervised by sight at all times, especially during transition of children from one teacher to another or from one area to another.

**Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect:** It may be a commentary on our times but the staff must train to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect. They need to know the laws and procedures for reporting to the appropriate agency. All communications with authorities are documented and placed in a confidential file. The Merkos overall policy published in "Guidelines for schools: The Safety of our children: serves as the foundation of schools policies. In addition, the director should

be in contact with a Halachic authority and relevant Jewish family service agencies to determine the best procedure for adhering to reporting requirements while protecting the privacy of families and ensuring the most favorable outcome for children and their families.

**Policies and Procedures to Eliminate Child Abuse:** Exemplary abuse prevention should be practiced throughout the early education program. Viewing windows allow for visual access into the classrooms, bathroom doors are left open, and random walk-throughs are practiced throughout the day. In addition, Jewish values are integrated into the program in a way that reduces conditions that lead to abuse.

**First Aid Certified Personnel:** At least one staff member with first aid certification—and infant/child CPR certification should be present on the premises at all times. (It is recommended that all staff have basic first aid and CPR training.)

**First Aid Supplies:** The program maintains adequate first aid supplies and a clearly marked universal precaution kit that are conveniently available to the classrooms but not to the children. The program should maintain a detailed medical log regarding the use of these items.

**Written Record of Accidents and Illnesses:** A written notice of accidents and/or illnesses is kept on file, and a copy is given to the parents/guardians of the children in the program.

**Emergency Preparedness Plans:** Being properly prepared for any eventuality is essential. The school needs to create a general disaster plan and/or an Emergency Crisis Manual that includes evacuation procedures and inside actions in the event of a disaster or crisis (e.g., snowstorm, tornado, lightning, flooding, fire, bomb threat, violence, and hostage situation). The plan should include directions for disasters common to the geographic area. Staff members are familiar with routes and procedures, which are posted in each classroom, and staff regularly practice drills with the children and conform to that recommended by the Office of Homeland Security.

**Fire Extinguishers and Detectors:** Fire extinguishers and smoke detectors must be provided and checked as mandated by the local fire marshal, and staff is trained in the use of fire extinguishers.

**Notifying Parents/Guardians in Emergencies:** A plan is in place to contact parents/guardians in case of an emergency closing, and the parents/guardians have been made aware of the plan.

**Field Trip Policies and Procedures:** The school should have clear written field trip policies and procedures that ensure the supervision of all children at all times and thus promote the safety of the children. These are shared with parents/guardians and implemented by the program. The policies and procedures must include that permission is attained from parents/guardians and that roll checks are logged before, regularly during, and upon return to the program's facilities.

#### 4. NUTRITION AND FOOD SERVICES

**Child Nutrition:** One of the basic responsibilities of every parent and caregiver is to provide nourishing food that is clean, **safe**, and developmentally appropriate. Sound food habits build on eating and enjoying a variety of healthful foods. In a Jewish program, there must be recognition of the importance of Kashrut as the standard in a Jewish setting, as well as provision made for the as the ethical and religious values that are imparted during meal-times.

(Where applicable) **Food Preparation; Response to Civil Authorities' Standards:** If food is prepared on the premises, the school must be in compliance with the requirements of civil authorities for food storage, preparation, and service. Food may be prepared at an approved facility and transported to the program in approved containers and at approved temperatures.



**Nutritional Guidelines:** The meals and/or snacks provided for the children should meet the nutritional guidelines regarding food groups and quantities that are age appropriate for the children, as suggested by the Child Care Food Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**Kashrut Policy:** Every Jewish school and /or E.C. program should have a policy, cleared with the school's chosen rabbinic authority, regarding the Kashrut standards of the school. The policy must include standards for foods prepared on premises, as well as policy regarding foods brought by children from home for individual consumption, sharing of foods, and standards for foods brought into the classroom for parties, class events, instructional activities, or the like. The policy should include as applicable whether the facility can accommodate both meat and dairy foods, either, or neither, acceptable standards for Kashrut supervision of foods entering the facility, acceptable procedures for food serving and preparation, and procedure to be followed in the event the policies are violated.

**Suggestions for Food from Home:** Suggestions for food choices that meet nutritional requirements are made available to the parents/guardians who send meals and/or snacks with their own children. Parents/guardians should be encouraged to include at least two food groups, including one protein source, for each snack and four food groups for each meal. Parents should be properly informed of the Kashrut policy regarding food brought from home, they need to understand the policy and why it is essential to the school.

**Standards for Mealtime:** Mealtime should be cultivated as a pleasant social time. Staff members sit with children and encourage healthy social interaction, appropriate table manners, and good eating habits. The children should be encouraged to serve themselves and assist with cleanup, within age-appropriate levels of ability.

**Inculcation of Jewish Values Governing Meal-time:** Many Jewish values and practices center on meals: including the ritual washing of hands before eating bread, the recitation of blessings before and after eating, table manners and respect for food. It is an excellent opportunity to share these Jewish values with parents while providing a springboard for a discussion on Kashrut. In addition, Shabbat and holidays often have particular customs or laws governing what food is eaten or how. Parents will learn that in a Jewish program, the values, customs, and rules governing food will be incorporated in the program as age-appropriate.

## Chapter 5

### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

*The School respects the critical role parents play in supporting the growth and development of their child.*

Parents are a child's first teacher, and the E/C program respects the critical role parents play in supporting the growth and development of their child. Partnerships with parents are part of a quality early education program. A rapport needs to be built between staff and parents, which supports communication between the home and the E/C program.

**Contents and Communication:** All informational sources established by the school should accurately describe the E/C program, its mission and policies, so that parents are knowledgeable and can be properly supportive of the school and its program. Parents/guardians of the children should receive a parent handbook that includes but is not limited to (1) the philosophy statement regarding the care and education of young children attending the program, including what discipline techniques will be used; (2) policies regarding holidays, illnesses, hours of operation, fees, refunds, enrollment, and termination procedures; and (3) an explanation of the program's day-to-day functioning.

**Communication with Parents or Guardians:** Administrators and staff need to communicate with the parents/guardians in a variety of ways on a regular basis—daily and weekly by verbal communication or posted information and monthly by newsletter and/or classroom calendar of events, or through evolving electronic means.

**General Conferences about their Children:** Conferences with each child's parent(s)/guardian should be offered at least twice per year—and at other times as needed—to discuss the child's developmental progress, personal care, and education. Conference schedules accommodate working parents/guardians. Significant changes in a child's pattern of behavior and/or physical condition are reported to the parent(s)/guardian(s), documented, and placed in the child's file.

**Visitation Rights:** As part of the school's effort to raise the comfort and confidence of the parent body, the school should have a welcoming policy regarding visits by parents/guardians on the program's premises, including in their child's classroom. Policies concerning parent/guardian involvement (e.g., visiting, observing, and volunteering) should be understood by all parents/guardians, to ensure the partnership between home and school is maintained. Policies should reflect both the value of making parents welcome on campus as well as respect for the needs of the faculty and students in ensuring an orderly routine and a secure classroom environment.

**Parent Training Programs:** Many parents enter into parenthood with the best of intentions but no experience and little understanding of what good parenting demands and what Jewish parenthood should be. It is a good idea for a school to plan and implement regularly scheduled parent education programs that support parents/guardians in their parenting role and reinforce the mission of the school. The Jewish nature of the school should be reflected in the programming selected. Examples of Jewish oriented-programs are: seminars on age-appropriate ways to inculcate Jewish values, and parenting workshops presented from a Jewish perspective and picnic for parents and children to celebrate an upcoming holiday. As needed, opportunity is given to the parents to learn more about the Jewish values underlying the program so that they can effectively support the child's learning at home.

**Referral to Community Resources:** The director should become familiar with community services and resources regarding children with specific needs and provides this information to parents/guardians. The director and staff work collaboratively with community agencies in providing information as needed. In communities with appropriate Jewish family support services, the director may also be able to assess the appropriateness of the Jewish support services and refer parents to them as needed.