

The CCDC Way – How our principles inform our practice

CCDC is licensed by the [CT Office of Early Childhood Child Care Licensing](#) and operates with fidelity to the following standards:

- [NAEYC Accreditation](#)
- [Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#)
- [CT Early Learning and Development Standards](#)
- [Nature Explore Certification](#)
- [Eco-Healthy Child Care](#)

Our decisions are guided by understanding, appreciation and respect. **Understanding** the timeless principles of child development, **appreciation** for individual variation, and **respect** for the family and culture of each child. Within that context, we strive to support the learning and development of children through observation, interaction, and conversation. We recognize that this process takes time and patience, that learning requires repetition over an extended period-of-time, and that progress is rarely smooth and orderly. We honor the pace of childhood and celebrate every step along the way.

Read more: [Reflections on Play: A Resource Guide](#)

The CCDC Way is organized into seven different categories:

1. Child Development, Learning and Play
2. Social-Emotional Learning
3. Emerging Independence and Self-Efficacy
4. Social Graces
5. Music and the Arts
6. Mealtime Considerations
7. Why and How We Celebrate

1. Child Development, Learning and Play

- a. **We understand that children develop in bursts, rather than in a smooth upward progression.** In advance of these developmental leaps, most children (and their families!) will experience a period of instability that includes interruptions to eating, sleeping, and behavior. Teachers have an opportunity to connect with families at these “touchpoints” and provide anticipatory guidance

Read more: [The Touchpoints Approach: Developmental and Relational Frameworks](#)

- b. **We provide learning experiences that encourage children to ask questions, rather than simply provide them with the answers.** Children are provided opportunities – across all areas of the indoor and outdoor classrooms – to explore, discover, create, investigate, and innovate.

Read more: [Why Preschool Shouldn't Be Like School](#)

[How We Learn](#)

- c. **We teach children to understand their identity and appreciate differences** in themselves, their families, their peers, other people, our community, and our world. We expect that children will be inclusive in their play and learn to be fair and unbiased so that **everyone** feels safe and welcome. As they get older, they are taught to ask these questions: “Is it safe?”, “Is it kind?”, “Is it fair?” Our goal is an anti-racist community and society.

Read more: [How to Teach Children About Cultural Awareness and Diversity](#)

[Anti-Bias Education](#)

[Our Children, Our Workforce Why We Must Talk About Race and Racism in Early Childhood](#)

- d. **We are committed to supporting all children and their families, including those with developmental delays, disabilities, and exceptional needs.** We adapt our programs to the children enrolled, creating classroom communities that embrace and integrate the differing needs, interests, and abilities of each child. When questions arise about a child’s development or behavior, we first consult with their family and – with permission – seek help from appropriate specialists. Our Occupational and Speech Therapists and Psychologist work directly with children and regularly consult with our staff and families to determine what children need to fully participate in our programs. We refer to other professionals in accordance with child and family needs.

Read more: [Early Childhood SRBI: Supporting All Children](#)

- e. **We provide many and varied toys, tools and materials that allow for hands-on, experiential learning, nurture imagination, and satisfy a range of interests, skills, and abilities.** We primarily use blocks, books, puzzles, dolls, a range of sensory and art media, and other open-ended materials (including purchased, natural, and recycled) that can be utilized in different ways.

Read more: [Good Toys for Young Children by Age and Stage](#)

- f. **We avoid toys and books that include commercially marketed characters.** We believe that familiar media characters from movies, television, and other media limit creativity and restrict play. Any “toys from home” that may include these images are kept in a child’s cubby.

Read more: [Commercialism in Children’s Lives](#)

- g. **Children spend extensive time outdoors every day – usually twice a day – in our Certified Nature Explore Classroom.** Children are expected to have opportunities to experience a range of activities and connect with nature in meaningful ways.

Read more: [A Whole-Child Approach to Learning in Nature](#)

- h. **We ask children questions that encourage more than “yes” or “no” answers.** Open-ended questions often begin with “who”, “what”, “why”, and “how”.

Read more: [Open-Ended Questions to Help Children Think](#)

- i. **We support the development of self-regulation skills and dispositions that anchor all learning.** This set of skills includes focus, self-control, and the ability to gather and use information in a variety of ways and circumstances. Examples of activities that support these skills include peek-a-boo with infants, simple songs, conversations, and storytelling with toddlers, and imaginary play with preschoolers.

Read more: [Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence](#)

- j. **We plan activities and take advantage of opportunities to support the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write.** For all age groups, strategies include engaging in rich conversations, reading books, telling stories to expand their experiences and vocabularies, scribbling/drawing, singing, playing, and pretending. As they get older, they engage in writing activities, explore letter sounds, rhyming, etc. Skills are not taught in isolation but embedded in the activities of the day.

Read more: [Raising Strong Readers](#)

[How Most Children Learn to Read](#)

[Why Pretend Play When We’re Trying to Build Readers](#)

- k. **We regularly offer activities and engage in conversations that help develop the basic concepts underlying science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).** We accomplish this through exploration and play, building on children’s natural curiosity about the world and wonder about the way things work.

Read more: [Let’s Talk, Read and Sing About STEM:](#)

- [Tips for Infant/Toddler Teachers](#)
- [Tips for Preschool Teachers](#)
- [Tips for Families With Young Children](#)

- l. **We routinely assess the environment to be sure that it is responsive to the needs of children and to our goals for their learning experiences.** Each learning center is intentionally designed to engage children in particular activities. Materials are rotated to support new experiences. As children navigate the classroom and “live” in it, we watch for the ways that children function. For example: Do the cozy areas invite quiet reading and snuggling? Is there enough room in the block area for more elaborate structures? Are there barriers that provide privacy and discourage running in the classroom? Is it a warm and welcoming place for children, teachers, and families?

Read more: [Making Your Environment Your Third Teacher](#)

2. Social-Emotional Learning

- a. **We strive to support the social and emotional learning of all children.** In general, their ages and individual characteristics help inform our judgment. In particular, there are other factors – health, life changes, and other stressors – that influence each child’s disposition. Our approach is to “meet them where they are”, which can vary day to day. The input of families is critical in this effort.

Read more: [Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development Through Preschool Education](#)

- b. **Children are reminded about social expectations by connecting them to the norms of their classroom and school community.** When they misbehave, we remind them “In this classroom/school, we want you and everyone to feel safe. We expect everyone to be gentle and kind.”

Read more: [Planning for Positive Guidance: Powerful Interactions Make a Difference](#)

- c. **We avoid saying "good job" for encouragement.** Rather, we say things like, "Thank you for helping to put away the blocks." or "I noticed that you helped your friend." (However, if a caregiver is loving and present, he/she needn't over-think the terminology - hearing "good job" is not going to alter a child's life, knowing he or she is valued will.)

Read more: ["Good Job" Alternatives](#)

- d. **We focus on helping children learn to feel right/good themselves when they do the right thing.** We avoid phrases like, "I'm proud of you" or "I like it when..." or "That makes me happy..." Instead we say, "I noticed that you...I'm wondering how you feel?"

There are [alternatives to praise](#), and "I'm proud of you", and they include:

- "Wow! I'm so impressed!"
- "You must be so proud!"
- "I'm proud *for you!*"
- "I'm so pleased for you"
- "You did it!"
- "You look really pleased with your effort"
- "Congratulations!"

Read more: [Three Reasons to Avoid Saying "I'm Proud of You!"](#)

[Praising Children: Evaluative vs. Descriptive](#)

- e. **We see conflicts and misbehaviors as opportunities to teach children the skills they need to get along with others and to learn to follow social norms.** We help children become calm by approaching the situation calmly ourselves. Once they are calm, we help them assess what is needed to solve the problem.

Read more: [Teaching Children to Manage Conflict](#)

- f. **We do not use time out as a method of discipline.** We believe that it is important to provide children with guidance and support as they develop the ability to regulate strong emotions and control inappropriate behaviors. Isolating them when they have difficulty does not teach them to accept help and learn from their missteps. We will, however, set appropriate limits and remove children from situations that they can't seem to handle and offer support. We avoid isolating them unless they ask to have time alone.

Read more:

[*Is Time Out Helpful or Harmful to Young Children?*](#)

[*'Time Outs' Are Hurting Your Child*](#)

[*25 Alternatives to Time Out, Grounding & Taking Things Away*](#)

- g. When conflicts occur between preschool-age children that they can't resolve on their own, we follow these steps:**
1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions. Place yourself between the children, on their level. Use a calm voice and a gentle touch. Remain neutral rather than taking sides.
 2. Acknowledge children's feelings. If the conflict is over an object, let the children know you need to hold the object until the conflict is resolved.
 3. Gather information.
 4. Restate the problem.
 5. Ask the children to think of possible solutions.
 6. Be prepared to give follow-up support. Stay near the children.

Read more: [*Children and Conflict in the Classroom*](#)

- h. Instead of just saying, "Use your words," we give them a script.** For example, "You can say, 'I'd like a turn when you're done.'" or "You could tell her, 'I don't like it when you hit me. That hurts.'" We help children develop a vocabulary to deal with strong feelings and to promote peaceful conflict resolution. For example, "I'm wondering if you are angry/sad/frustrated/worried..."

Read more: [*Use Your Words*](#)

- i. When older children get into a scuffle, we use it as an opportunity to support emerging problem-solving skills.** For example, "When they hit you, that was a problem, but if you hit them back, you just made another problem. Let's talk about how to solve the problem."

Read more: [*Teaching Problem Solving*](#)

- j. We never say "good girl/boy" or "bad girl/boy".** Instead, we are specific about the action that is causing the problem and state what we want them to do, such as "Be gentle." "Sit in the chair, please."

Read more: [Positive Discipline 101: How to Discipline a Child in a Way That Actually Works](#)

- k. **When children use “potty talk” or “strong” words that may be viewed as offensive to others, we refrain from providing too much attention.** We will calmly say, for example, “Those are bathroom words, please keep them in the bathroom.” Or “Those are strong words that can hurt other’s feelings, please stop.”

Read more: [Potty Talk to Swearing...10 Tips to Curb Foul Language in Your House](#)

3. Emerging Independence and Self-Efficacy

- a. **We provide support as children develop self-help skills, but don’t do for them what they can do themselves -- however slowly -- when they are ready.** For example, rather than putting their socks and shoes on for them, we might show them in small steps how to do it themselves and help them along each step of the way as they attempt it.

Read more: [Ways to Encourage Self-Help Skills in Children](#)

[5 Best Ways to Raise Problem Solvers](#)

- b. **When children have difficulty with something and say, “I can’t do it.” we help them reframe the statement** by saying something like, “It looks like you are still learning/working on it and can’t do it yet. You have to practice a lot to be able to do something.” We want children to see that learning requires effort and that working on it/practicing is what is most important.

Read more: [Preschoolers and Praise: What Kinds of Messages Help Children Grow?](#)

- c. **We help children learn to assess the safety of a situation for themselves by saying, “Does that feel safe to you?”** However, if they are attempting something that we are not comfortable with, we may say, “That does not look safe to me.” We permit children to climb up our slides but help them assess when that is safe, i.e., when no one is coming down.

Read more: [The Role of Risk in Play and Learning](#)

[What to Say to Your Kids Instead of “Be Careful”](#)

- d. **We allow children to play barefoot inside and outside (in the warmer weather).** Each classroom establishes their own protocol about when this happens.

Read more: [Why kids should go barefoot more \(and probably adults, too\)](#)

- e. **We avoid saying, "You're okay." to a child who is upset does not appear to be physically hurt.** Acknowledge that they upset and ask, "Does your body hurt, or are your feelings hurt?" or reassure them with "You're safe, I'm here."

Read more: [Why Do We Keep Telling Our Kids "You're OK"?](#)

- f. **We support the development and use of self-soothing behaviors in infants and young children.** The use of pacifiers is limited to infants and young toddlers (only in their cribs). If they have a lovey that brings them comfort, they may use it as needed. We do not interfere with thumb sucking.

Read more: [The Truth About Infant Self-Soothing](#)

- g. **We work with parents to support the reliable use of the toilet.** This typically occurs at some point between the ages of 2.5 and 3.5, with boys often later than girls. It is not unusual for children to have more success at home, although for some children the transition is easier at school. In all cases, our approach is flexible and sensitive to each child's readiness. When children are fully ready – physically and emotionally – the process is much smoother and there are far fewer accidents to manage.

Read more: [Learning to Use the Toilet](#)

- h. **It is our goal that children will learn to regularly separate from their parents in the morning with increasing confidence and independence.** This is best accomplished with sensitivity to the child and parent. Predictable routines as well as support from teachers, help get through some of the inevitable rough patches. We ask parents not to sneak out and avoid handing children over to teachers regularly. At the end of the day, some children may demonstrate a reluctance to leave. Teachers should reassure families that this is not unusual and after a short period of transition, encourage families to provide clear messages that it is "time to leave".

Read more: [Separation and Reunion: Arrivals and Departures Are Prime Times](#)

- i. **We avoid regularly holding children's hand while they are learning to walk as babies or learning to balance so that they can learn to balance themselves.** If we are holding their hands, they can't feel the balance themselves.

Read more: [9 Reasons Not to Walk Babies](#)

- j. **There is a quiet period of rest or sleep every day.** Children need sleep to grow, learn and be healthy, particularly with the length of day and activity level here. Our goal is independent sleep, i.e., children don't rely on adults to get them to sleep. Each classroom has practices appropriate to their age group. Our preschool classrooms only schedule a short rest period for children who have given up their naps. We do not keep children awake or wake them up before the end of naptime. Keep in mind that sleep begets sleep and overtired children have more difficulty going to sleep and staying asleep at night.

Read more: [5 Tips to Help Your Child \(and You\) Sleep](#)

[Naps During School? For Preschoolers, Yes.](#)

4. Social Graces

- a. **Teachers are expected to greet each parent/caregiver and child warmly when they enter our classrooms** and to say a few words to let them know they are welcome.
- b. **We place great emphasis on sharing, taking turns, and learning to empathize with others.** We encourage acts of kindness, compassion and helping others. As children age, they tend to require less direct support to achieve these goals. However, they benefit from recognition when they demonstrate these behaviors.

Read more: [Raising a Moral Child](#)

- c. **We model "please", "thank you", and "excuse me", but do not require or remind children to say it.** However, it's important to acknowledge their attempts at developing "manners". For example, "Thank you for being so polite." It is also fine to include it as a suggestion. For example, if a child wants something that another friend is using, we may offer this advice: "You could say 'Can I please have a turn?'"

Read more: [The Not-So-Magic Word](#)

- d. **We don't ask children to say, "I'm sorry"** when they have done something wrong, whether accidental or intentional. Being contrite and having regrets is not typical of young children. They're usually not sorry and asking them to say it anyway often does not improve the situation. As an alternative, we focus on reparation and will say things like, "You hurt your friend and they're crying, let's ask them what might help them feel better." or "Please come with me to get some ice to help them feel better."

Read more: [*You'll Be Sorry – Children and Apologies*](#)

[*Why We Shouldn't Make Young Children Say 'Sorry'*](#)

- e. **When one of our fish or an insect dies, we make a point of talking to children about it.** We offer them the chance to see it (nearly all will want to) and let them ask questions. Young children are curious about death but do not fully understand what it means. When a death occurs, it's best to explain in very simple terms that, for example, "Our pet died. Their body totally stopped working."

Read more: [*Talking to Children About Death*](#)

[*'How Do I Teach My Child About Death'*](#)

5. Music and the Arts

- a. **All art should be considered in light of the process, not the product.**

Characteristics of process art:

- There are no step-by-step instructions
- There is no sample for children to follow
- There is no right or wrong way to explore and create
- The art is focused on the experience and on exploration of techniques, tools, and materials
- The art is unique and original
- The experience is relaxing or calming
- The art is entirely the children's own
- The art experience is a child's choice

Read more: [*How Process Art Experiences Support Preschoolers*](#)

[*The Benefits of Art for Kids*](#)

- b. **We do not draw things for children that they cannot draw themselves, except shapes and free form designs.** We want children to have confidence in their abilities and patience with their progress. We may, however, show them photos or drawings in books as examples or prompts.

Read more: [Why Not Draw for a Child?](#)

- c. **When children draw or create something, we only comment on the elements of the creation like colors, lines, shapes, etc. We ask** open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about your picture," but don't say things like, "That's beautiful!" or "What is it?"

Read more: [How to Talk to Kids About Their Art](#)

[Five Easy Steps for Talking with Children About Art](#)

- d. **We do not use any food items for sensory play or art activities** out of respect for cultures that are offended by playing with food as well as those who would consider it wasteful.

Read more: [Should Food Be Used in Preschool Sensory Activities.](#)

- e. **We do not use items like shaving cream that contain chemicals for sensory play or art work.** While technically safe – and a wonderful sensory experience – it can be harmful if ingested.

Read more: [Shaving Cream Poisoning](#)

- f. **Music is an integral part of our everyday life.** We use music to soothe or stimulate, to ease transitions from one activity to another, celebrate various events, and just for fun! In addition to our weekly classes, music can be planned or appear spontaneously as children play.

Read more: [Music Activities Teach Important Skills to Children in Child Care](#)

6. Meal-Time Considerations

- a. **We don't tell children what to eat or how much; we want them to learn to trust their own appetites according to their energy needs.** We never use food as a reward or for comfort; nor do we tell children that they have to eat "x" number of bites before they eat a treat.

Read more: [*Children's Eating: The Development of Food-Acceptance Patterns*](#)

[*Eating and Emotions in Obese Toddlers – Facilitating Self-Regulation*](#)

- b. In consultation with families and with direction from medical professionals, we provide accommodations for children with food allergies, including controlling what food other children eat at school. In addition, children may not share food with other children.

Read more: [*Managing Food Allergies in Schools*](#)

7. What and How We Celebrate

- a. **Birthday celebrations are limited** to making a sign for the classroom, having the child decorate a "birthday crown" and/or the family donating and reading a birthday book to the classroom.

Read more: [*Holiday and Birthday Celebrations*](#)

- b. **We do not educate children about practices for religious holidays like Hanukkah, Kwanza, Christmas, Passover, Easter, etc.** We ask families to share their practices and children in the preschool rooms will typically share themselves when asked.

Read more: [*Anti-Bias Education and Holidays: Making Thoughtful Decisions*](#)

- c. **We don't have children make something to celebrate holidays, including Mother's Day and Father's Day.** Families may, however, suggest that children create something for an occasion directly. We don't decide how a family will celebrate.

Read more: [*Embracing All Families on Mother's Day & Father's Day*](#)