

WORK IN PROGRESS

PUTTING PLANS IN PLACE TO BETTER SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR WITH A WELL-ROUNDED CURRICULUM, PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND MORE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOLS.

This has been a challenging year for parents and educators. It has driven home the importance of being resilient and coming together to give the best to our children even in trying times, observed Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health Masagos Zulkifli in his inaugural address at ECDA's Early Childhood Conference (ECC) 2020. He stressed the need to be prepared for changes as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve and laid out some upcoming plans for the preschool sector.

“I'm happy that we are continuing our efforts to improve the sector and uplift the preschool profession. Our goal has not changed. We want to give every child a good start in life.

MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI
Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health



Benefits for Children

> TO ENHANCE OUTDOOR LEARNING IN PRESCHOOLS

- Educators will receive training in outdoor learning through **Continuing Professional Development** (CPD) courses.
- ECDA will launch more **professional development opportunities**, with the support of Temasek Foundation, to deepen educators' and trainers' outdoor learning skills.
- The **Outdoor Learning Resource Fund*** will be offered to selected centres to purchase resources for outdoor learning

programmes. ECDA, together with these centres, will conduct an evaluation study on the effectiveness of the outdoor learning training efforts.



* More details on the Outdoor Learning Resource Fund and how centres can participate will be released later in the year.

Enhancements for Educators

> TO DEVELOP FULFILLING CAREERS AND DEEPEN EDUCATORS' EXPERTISE IN THE PRESCHOOL SECTOR

- The **Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education** is being refreshed# to review job roles and support career progression for preschool teachers, including Learning Support Educators (LSEs) and Early Intervention (EI) teachers.
- A **CPD roadmap** is being developed to help educators better structure their professional development.

More details on the Skills Framework review will be shared in 2021.

- **Workplace wellbeing** for educators will be reviewed in collaboration with the Health Promotion Board (HPB), based on findings from the Occupational Health and Safety Assessment.



Preschools for Everyone

> TO HELP LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

- The **KidSTART** programme will be scaled up to reach 5,000 more children over the next three years, and expanded to Yishun, Sembawang and Ang Mo Kio in 2021.
- Community partners supporting the '**Growing Together with KidSTART**' initiative gave \$1.22 million in donations and \$187,000 worth of in-kind sponsorship, and expressed interest to volunteer regularly in specific communities.

> TO HELP CHILDREN WITH LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

- **Early intervention programmes** such as the Learning Support (LS) and Development Support (DS) programmes are currently offered by 550 preschools, with plans to expand to more preschools.
- Children making sufficient progress under the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIIC) can transit to receiving intervention within their preschools through the **Development Support Plus** programme.
- Better support will be provided to children with moderate to severe developmental needs based on the recommendations of the **Inclusive Preschool Workgroup**.
- Focus on inclusive practices will be deepened during preschool teachers' **pre-service training and CPD** to equip them with skills to work with children with diverse needs.





Individual mats for each child ensure safe distancing

GOING THE DISTANCE... SAFELY

HOW PRESCHOOLS ARE STAYING THE COURSE AS THEY ADJUST TO CHANGES ARISING FROM COVID-19.

When preschools reopened in June, they faced new challenges: safeguarding the health and wellbeing of children and staff, while ensuring that children continued to learn and grow. This meant rethinking and redesigning curriculum and pedagogical practices. Routines and activities were adjusted to align with the COVID-Safe ABCs, which spell out guidelines such as compulsory mask (or face shield) wearing, safe distancing and good hygiene habits.



Children stay within their yellow boxes for safe play

NEW RULES OF PLAY

The new measures took some getting used to, especially for preschoolers who are still developing cognitively and emotionally. Six-year-old Ang Kim Yan from KidsCampus (Tanjong Pagar) was happy to return to preschool, but disappointed that playtime no longer featured group waterplay. "I like going to school," she says, "But I miss playing in a tub and splashing around with my friends."

Getting children to physically distance themselves from their peers was a challenge for teachers. "Safe distancing measures actually go against many of the practices we try to inculcate in children, like sharing, giving hugs and holding hands," says Ms Nazihah Binti Mohd Tahah, Centre Leader at KidsCampus (Tanjong Pagar). "They had to adjust the social skills we have been teaching them."

Now, instead of giving physical hugs to resolve conflicts, the children exchange air hugs, which help to break the tension as they find them funny. This is just one of many



Getting used to frequent handwashing

creative ideas the centre has come up with to help children adapt to the new normal without making it stressful for them.

Other strategies include using smiley-face floor markers to encourage them to queue up while maintaining their distance; installing see-through table shields so that they can interact safely; and using pictorial cards of emotions to help children express their feelings while masked up.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Tips for adapting to the new normal.

“Ease children into the stringent health and safety practices by injecting new routines with a sense of novelty, such as reciting a COVID-Safe rap song. Keep things on a positive note with inspiring stories of unsung heroes.”

MS WOO MAY LIN,
Teacher at Praiseland Kindercare

BEHIND THE MASK

Praiseland Kindercare teacher Ms Woo May Lin found that wearing masks introduced new challenges in communication, as children struggled to read non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice. To make herself understood through her mask, Ms Woo spoke slowly and clearly. She also used hand gestures to complement her intentions and instructions.

Though physical distancing put a stop to Praiseland Kindercare's regular community project of visiting the elderly, the centre found another avenue to impart important values such as empathy. The K1 and K2 children wrote encouraging notes in care packs for healthcare and migrant workers. "Our Milo gift made the uncles and aunts happy and gave them more energy," says Chau Yu Zhe, 6, with pride.

TALK IT OUT

Though face-to-face interaction has been reduced, Mdm Nathania Oi stays in regular contact with her daughter's preschool teachers over the phone or via a communication book to discuss her progress and



Giving air hugs helps to keep the friendship alive



Imagining themselves as elephants and making sure their 'trunks' don't hit the ones in front is a fun way to practise safe distancing

address any behaviours or issues. Her daughter Naomi Hoon, 4, attends Praiseland Kindercare. "I've managed to maintain a good relationship with Naomi's teachers post-Circuit Breaker. They know they can speak to me about anything, and I know I can do the same," says Mdm Oi.

Mrs Norasidah Mohd Tahir, whose son Hamzah Bin Bachtiar is in the Nursery class at KidsCampus (Tanjong Pagar), advises parents to be patient as children may take more time to adjust to the new normal. "If your child is facing difficulties, talk to other parents, exchange feedback and ask them for advice. Having friends who are in the same situation as you helps a lot," she adds.

THINK POSITIVE

Embracing a mindset of 'when one door closes, another opens' is how we can ultimately get through this together. For example, although staggered mealtimes mean

interacting with fewer peers, it can create a cosier environment. "Small groups allow children to get to know each other better, and further enhance their interpersonal skills such as listening, cooperating and sharing," says Ms Woo.

Ms Nazihah agrees, "There are many things we cannot do with children due to COVID-19, but it challenges us to get creative and innovative in the way we plan and implement activities to hone their social-emotional development. Sometimes adversity unleashes a side that we never knew we were capable of!"



COVID-Safe measures are displayed on table shields

“We might not be able to hug children when they are upset or having a bad day, but we can continue to be empathetic. Give them lots of encouragement and affirmation, replace hugs with stickers, or plan their favourite activity.”

MS NAZIHAH BINTI MOHD TAHAH,
Centre Leader at KidsCampus (Tanjong Pagar)

“Talk to children about what is happening. Tell it like it is; don't downplay or overdramatise things. Acknowledge and address their concerns; don't brush them aside.”

MDM NATHANIA OI,
Parent of Naomi Hoon, 4, preschooler at Praiseland Kindercare



“My teacher taught me what to do when my face is itchy but I cannot touch or scratch it. When my nose is itchy, I scrunch my nose. When my forehead is itchy, I raise my eyebrows many times until it stops itching.”

ANG KIM YAN, 6, preschooler at KidsCampus (Tanjong Pagar)