

# Keeping in Touch

Staying Connected, Growing Together • Fall 2025



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## Welcome

The **Keeping in Touch** (KIT) resource was created to celebrate and support the creativity and dedication of all who participate in the quality education of young children. The resource strives to provide inspiration and knowledge to professionals in the Early Learning and Care Sector through informative articles and resources which promote inclusionary practices, cultural diversity and competence, programming ideas and community information. The KIT Committee is comprised of professionals from various agencies within the Toronto Children's Services Every Child Belongs model. We welcome you to share this resource with your colleagues, friends, and family.



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# Social-Emotional Learning in Early Learning Environments

**LILIANA PINEDA**, Registered Early Childhood Educator, Resource Consultant, Macaulay Centres for Children

**Social-Emotional Learning** is a term that has really come to the surface in recent years, and with good reason. So, what exactly is Social-Emotional Learning, and why is it so important? In a nutshell, Social-Emotional Learning encompasses the following:

- **Self-Awareness:** the ability to recognize and identify our own emotions
- **Social Awareness:** empathy for others, understanding different perspectives
- **Problem Solving Skills:** personal and social
- **Self-Regulation:** how we manage our own emotions
- **Relationship Building:** positive, healthy relationships with the people in our lives

Developing Social-Emotional skills allows children to build healthy relationships with peers, supports

in developing problem-solving skills, and allows the child to develop coping skills. While some learning may happen naturally, children require responsive and nurturing Educators to support them in learning these complex skills. So, what does this look like in our programs? Well, it goes beyond just teaching skills through activities. It is about how we respond and find those teachable moments to support the child in learning these skills. But it is also how we, as adults, respond to things in our daily lives, and how we model Social-Emotional behaviours. Here are some ways that we can support Social-Emotional Learning in our programs:

### 1. Modelling Positive Behaviours:

- Showing a genuine interest in the children in your care and building the connection between child and Educator
- Seeing the child as capable and treating them as a partner in the program
- Using a calm, soft tone of voice at all times,

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## The Early Learning Environment

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even when redirecting behaviours

- Getting down to the child's level and demonstrating active listening when speaking to the children in your care

### 2. Through Daily Activities:

- Intentional programming allows the Educator to carefully build on the child's learning. Planning activities where you can include opportunities to identify emotions, like reading a book and talking about the feelings of each character, but also how the child feels as they listen along to the story.
- Incorporating visuals like emotion wheels, and self-regulation kits where children can build on their understanding of emotions and coping strategies.
- Discussions in group settings allow for opportunities where children can build on their problem-solving skills. Going through scenarios can help children learn how they would want to approach certain situations (i.e., "What should we do if we want a turn with something?").



Wheel of Emotions graphic by VectorMine from Adobe Stock

### 1. Coaching the Child:

- It is natural for children to encounter conflict, and as Educators, we want to do our best to build the child's problem-solving toolbox. This can include labelling children's feelings, as well as the feelings of others, and offering guidance while allowing children to come up with a solution together.

It's important to note that Social-Emotional Learning is ongoing for children. Understanding the different needs of the children in our care can also help in individualizing teaching strategies as needed. With intentionality and care, Social-Emotional Learning can be naturally woven into our daily programs to further enhance these skills and support the positive learning environment.

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“When little people are overwhelmed with big emotions, it is our job to share our calm, not join in their chaos.”

— L.R. Knost





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## Supportive Strategies for Rest Time

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Rest time is a vital part of early learning programs. Many children settle into rest or sleep with ease during this period, while others may find it challenging.

What matters most is not that every child sleeps, but that every child experiences a calm, restorative break in their day (Staton et al., 2016), as it helps with regulating emotions and attention. Providing flexible, developmentally appropriate alternatives to sleep ensures that children benefit from rest time.

For non-nappers, educators can offer:

**Reading and audiobooks:** These can nurture imagination and early literacy skills. Provide a selection of picture books or audiobooks, allowing children to browse through the books or listen with headphones.

**Art and creative activities:** Colouring books, crayons, or markers can encourage creativity and the development of fine motor skills.

**Puzzles and manipulatives:** Simple puzzles or pegboards can encourage problem-solving and fine

motor development. Quiet building toys like magnetic tiles and foam blocks are excellent choices for independent exploration.

**Sensory play with calming textures:** These can provide grounding experiences that promote self-regulation. Use a non-messy filler, such as pom-poms or cotton balls, for quiet exploration in a sensory bin.

Relaxation strategies build lifelong stress management skills. Educators can introduce:

**Breathing exercises:** Teaching simple deep breathing techniques helps children feel calm and relaxed.

**Gentle stretching:** Child-friendly yoga poses can help children's bodies relax and unwind.

**Comfort items:** Allow children to have a special toy or blanket from home to provide comfort.

Establishing a consistent rest-time routine helps children feel secure and relaxed. Educators can

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## The Early Learning Environment

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support this by creating a calm environment, dimming the lights, playing soft music, setting up a designated quiet space, and using a visual timer to guide the transition gently.

When educators remain calm and avoid pressuring children to sleep, they signal that rest is about restoration, not compliance. This approach supports children's well-being and fosters independence.

These same strategies can be shared with families to support children's individual sleep needs at home.

### Suggestions for activities:

Aqua Magic Mat - [product link via Toys "R" Us](#)

Busy board - [product link via Amazon](#)

Dramatic play puppets - [finger puppets product link via IKEA](#)

Dry erase activities - letter, lines, shapes, numbers, etc.

Felt board stories

Lacing cards

Large letter tracing beads - [product link via Lakeshore](#)

Card games - [product link via Melissa and Doug](#)

Match It! - [product link via Scholars Choice](#)

I Spy Bags - [example via Line upon Line Learning blog](#)

Magna Doodle

Magnatiles

Playdough

Sticker books or homemade wax paper and stickers - [example via Kids Kubby blog](#)

Symmetry Drawing - [example via Totschooling blog](#)

Tangrams

Wiki Stix - [product link via Scholars Choice](#) and [example of activities via The OT Toolbox](#)



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### Site Links:

<https://mamameganallysa.com/quiet-time-bins-for-preschoolers/>

<https://b-inspiredmama.com/busy-bags/>

<https://www.howweelearn.com/quiet-time-activities-mess-free/>

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# Tips for Students and New Graduates Supporting Children with Exceptionalities

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### Training and Professional Development

Professional workshops provide valuable resources, build confidence, strengthen communication skills, and foster creativity. Encourage students and new grads to attend workshops that focus on understanding a variety of exceptionalities, inclusion strategies, and behaviour management. Agencies such as City Wide Training, College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO), hospitals, and schools offer low-cost and effective opportunities to support ongoing professional growth.

### Modeling Positive Attitudes

Encourage students and new grads to show patience, empathy, and respect when working with children with exceptionalities, families, and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Modeling positive attitudes promotes professionalism through self-awareness, sensitivity, and respectful communication. Dr. Jean Clinton clarifies the value of relationship; “What responsive and nurturing relationships mean is that you’re focusing, as a priority, on the quality of your interaction” (CECE, 2017b).

### Collaboration

Model to students and new grads that when supporting children with exceptionalities, collaboration is key. Working together through teamwork, idea-sharing, and problem-solving builds strong relationships, strengthens connections, and fosters innovation. Regular meetings to share observations and progress help to create cohesive support plans, while collaboration also promotes leadership and helps educators feel like valued contributors in their

professional practice.

### Supporting Self-Regulation

Teach and model simple self-regulation strategies such as deep breathing, using emotion visuals, or taking sensory breaks. Support children by co-regulating with them, validating their feelings and offering a safe space. Remind ECE students that children learn to regulate through connection, not correction. Here are some ideas of sensory play-based exploration to support self-regulation: water play, sand play, play dough, music, bubbles, finger painting, and sensory bin experiences.

### Engage in Reflective Practice

Self-reflection is essential when working with children, families, and colleagues. It encourages us to re-examine our values, daily choices, and interactions, opening the door to new learning and growth. Reflective practice strengthens problem-solving, builds resiliency, and supports an intentional, inclusive approach.

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# There's More to Food and Eating: Let's Talk About Culture!

**MARY-KATE ASANTE-ANTWI**, RPN, RN, BScN, MScN, Registered Nurse Consultant, Humber Polytechnic

As early childhood professionals, we often hear this concerning picky eaters; “The child only eats what the parents give them, or they only eat when they are home”. Though it can be frustrating to support children in the early years through picky eating, selective eating, and strong aversions, it is paramount to understand the external influences that can impact a child's food preferences and behaviors surrounding mealtimes.

A big factor influencing food is culture. Educators, Caregivers and Professionals who support children should understand that there is more to food than a child sitting down to exhibit behaviours that are considered appropriate.

Cultures determine how, what, where, and when food is enjoyed. Thus, knowing the child from a holistic standpoint will direct an individualized plan to support any eating and feeding challenges.

Developing strategies and supports that are culturally sensitive can set a child up for success by exploring familiar and different foods from variety of cultures. Remember, food can be a universal language that brings us all together. Children who are picky eaters are no exception, irrespective of culture, beliefs, religion, identity, etc.

Let's explore a simple but complex food item such as

bread—from bannock of the Indigenous peoples, tea bread from Ghana West Africa, focaccia from Italy, naan from India, baguettes from France to Jewish challah. Simple foods like bread can unravel different cultures and traditions that bring us together during mealtimes. Conversations around mealtimes can engage children by talking about a variety of foods that might have the same taste but different names and ways to prepare them. Allow children to express themselves about the taste of what you are offering compared to what they are used to at home.

How about the method of eating? Certain cultures eat with their hands while sitting on a carpet or mat with the whole family. A child from this home will certainly have difficulty eating with cutlery. As an early childhood professional, would you consider this a delay in fine motor skills, or will you explore whether the child has ever eaten with cutlery before? Having an open mind about culture and its impact on food can drive our interventions and support the development of a holistic and culturally sensitive approach.

## References

Government of Canada. (2024, April 29). Canada's Food Guide: Kids - Toolkit for educators. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/toolkit-educators/culture-food-traditions/>





Photo by LaylaBird from Getty Images

# Ontario Autism Program Spotlight: Entry to School Program

**LILIANA PINEDA**, Registered Early Childhood Educator, Resource Consultant, Macaulay Centres for Children

The Entry to School Program is designed to support children with Autism who are starting school. It is a year-long program with 6 months of skill building followed by 6 months of transition support. This program focuses on the following school readiness skills:

- Communication
- Play
- Social interaction
- Functional routines
- Behavioural self-management
- Pre-academics, learning and attention

Some important details to know:

- There are two cohorts:
  - ➔ March to September
  - ➔ September to March

- There are two streams of this service:
  - ➔ Group-Based Skill-Building: child attends the program at a partnering agency
  - ➔ Child Care Consultation: A Transition Facilitator observes the child in the childcare centre that they attend and offers strategies around school readiness skills. The Transition Facilitator often works in collaboration with the childcare team, families, and resource consultants.
- During the first six months of skill-building, the child cannot be attending kindergarten/school.
- The Entry to School program is free for those families who qualify. Additional services through the Ontario Autism Program are also available.
- Invitations for the March cohort can start as early as December / January, so it's important for families to be checking their AccessOAP dashboards.

How do families register for this service?

For a child to be eligible they must:

- Be registered with the Ontario Autism Program
- Be between 3 to 6 years old as of December 31 of the year they start school
- Be starting kindergarten or Grade 1 for the first time
- A child cannot receive this service if they are already attending kindergarten / school

Families with children who are eligible for this service will receive an invitation through AccessOAP.

## Contact Information

AccessOAP Toll-Free Number: **1-833-425-2445**

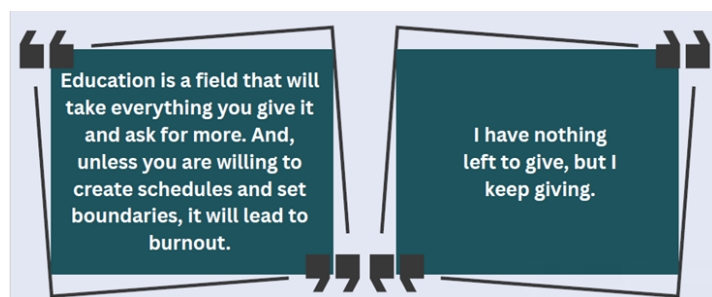
## References

Entry to School Program Information Session; Toronto Autism Network February 2024.

Ontario Autism Program: Entry to School Program.  
**<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-autism-program-entry-school-program>**

# Workplace Wellness for Educators – Preventing Burnout

**SOPHIE SARDO**, Bachelor of Health Sciences: Workplace Health and Wellness student, Humber Polytechnic



## What is Educator Burnout?

A state of chronic physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged job-related stress

## Facing the Facts

- Approximately **50%** of early childhood educators leave the field within the first five years
- **45%** of early childhood educators report high burnout and stress

## The Ripple Effect

Beyond personal health and job satisfaction, burnout affects classroom dynamics and student engagement, leading to a **decline in the quality of education** and higher educator turnover rates.

## What Are the Common Causes?

- Heavy workloads
- Staff shortages
- Safety issues
- Low salaries
- Mental health

## What Can Be Done?

- **Self-Care:** Prioritize your physical and mental health through regular exercise, adequate sleep, and healthy eating.

- **Know When to Take a Break:** If you start feeling signs of educator burnout, step back, rest, and seek support when needed.
- **Workload Review:** Regularly assess and adjust teaching responsibilities to prevent overload. Consider factors such as class sizes, administrative duties, and extracurricular commitments.
- **Mental Health Resources:** Ensure access to mental health supports, including counselling services and stress management programs.

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Kampen, M. (2020, May 4). **8 proven ways to overcome teacher burnout and love teaching again.** Prodigy Education.

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Peck, Delvin. (2025). **Teacher burnout statistics: Why teachers quit in 2025.**

## Professional Learning and Links

### **City Wide Training Calendar**

(<https://www.citywidetraining.ca/>)

### **Connectability**

(<https://www.connectability.ca/>)

### **About Kids Health**

(<https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/>)

### **Zero to Three**

(<https://www.zerotothree.org/>)

### **Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care**

(<https://www.childcareontario.org/>)

### **Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion**

(<https://www.iemhp.ca/>)

### **How Does Learning Happen?**

(<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-does-learning-happen-ontarios-pedagogy-early-years/>)

### **The Mehrit Institute-Self Reg**

(<https://self-reg.ca/>)



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## KIT Resource Committee Partners

### **Centre Francophone**

Tanya Katala Ibalama, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.centrefranco.org/>)

### **CDI**

Brendalee Simas, Child Care Consultant  
(<https://www.childdevelop.ca/>)

### **Centennial Infant and Child Centre**

Lucy Patterson, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.cicc.ca/>)

### **George Brown College**

Jennifer-Cloke Campbell, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.georgebrown.ca/>)

### **Humber Polytechnic**

Larissa Kostevskii, CWT Training Coordinator  
(<https://www.humber.ca/>)

### **Lumenus Community Services**

Diana Burgess and Sheri Robb, Resource Consultants  
(<https://www.lumenus.ca/>)

### **Macaulay Centres for Children**

Liliana Pineda, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.macaulaycentres.org/>)

### **Strides Toronto**

Niki Yeung, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.stridestoronto.ca/>)

### **Terry Tan Child Centre**

Brenda Wilson, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.terrytan.ca/>)

### **WoodGreen Community Services**

Janet Scott, Resource Consultant  
(<https://www.woodgreen.org/>)

“Children have a real understanding of what they invent themselves.”

— Jean Piaget