# The City of Hamilton's Early Years System

# Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy

## Policy Statement

We believe that equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging is about creating a culture that embraces the uniqueness of individuals and is representative of Hamilton's population. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment that respects and honours the diversity in our community that includes but is not limited to citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex/pregnancy, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. We acknowledge the history and ongoing effects of colonialism, systemic racism and discrimination in Canada and will work to create an Early Years System where everyone can experience a sense of belonging.

## Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

As part of this policy, we want to affirm the City of Hamilton's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and acknowledge the distinction of Indigenous Peoples as rights bearers. Through listening to families, staff and supervisors who identify as Indigenous, the City of Hamilton understands the importance of acknowledging the unique experiences of Indigenous Peoples as rights bearers in this nation as the original people. The City of Hamilton commits to the following Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

- Call to Action #1: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:
    - Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.
    - Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
    - Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.
    - Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing.
    - Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.
- Call to Action #3: We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

- Call to Action #5: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.
- Call to Action #12: We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

We recognize and acknowledge the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people (MMIWG2S) Calls for Justice and are committing to doing our part to eliminate violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA) people.

## Why is Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Important?

By supporting equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in the Early Years System, we will be able to bring to life our vision of having all children, families and members of the workforce experience a real, lived and ongoing sense of belonging. Furthermore, we will be able to support and develop a positive organizational culture in which individual differences and the contributions of all team members are recognized and valued.

## Purpose

To reaffirm our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging. This policy is intended to foster equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging throughout the system by implementing these principles through our policies, procedures, and practices so that all people who participate or have a purposeful role in the Early Years System experience a real, lived and ongoing sense of belonging.

## Scope

This policy applies to all members of the Early Years System including:

- City of Hamilton Children's and Community Services Division
- Children
- EarlyON Child and Family Centres and Licensed Child Care Operators
- Organizations working within the Early Years System and persons participating in the Early Years System (e.g., volunteer, visitor, service provider, contractor)
- Parents/Caregivers
- Staff
- System leaders

## Guiding Principles

- Every person who participates or has a purposeful role in the Early Years System will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Every individual's identity, strengths, needs and abilities will be honoured and appreciated.
- Any form of discrimination will not be tolerated.

- The principles of equity, diversity and inclusion will be embedded in the Early Years System to ensure that every person can experience a real, lived and ongoing sense of belonging.

### Expectations for The City of Hamilton Early Years System

- Acknowledge the history and ongoing effects of systemic discrimination and oppression that continue to affect human rights and dignity. These forms of discrimination include but are not limited to the following: ableism, antisemitism, biphobia, classism, homophobia, Islamophobia, racism (including anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, and other specific forms of racism), sexism, transphobia and other systems of oppression.
- Everyone who participates or has a purposeful role in the Early Years System must be accepted and respected for their entire identity.
- Discrimination will not be tolerated. This includes discrimination on the following protected grounds: citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex/pregnancy, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

### Responsibilities

All members of the Early Years System share the responsibility for creating an equitable, diverse, inclusive and belonging environment.

The City of Hamilton Children's and Community Services Division is committed to:

- Creating opportunities for professional learning on equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, reconciliation and accessibility topics for all employees
- Developing inclusive policies, procedures and practices
- Ongoing communication and dialogue with the community to help inform our work
- Understanding personal unconscious bias and how this may affect interactions with others and inhibit our ability to be inclusive
- Using data-driven information to make evidence-informed decisions
- Working to identify and remove systemic barriers for the workforce and families

The Early Years System's organizations are committed to:

- Developing inclusive policies, procedures and practices
- Embedding culturally responsive practices into programming
- Establishing an inclusive environment that is free of discrimination and harassment
- Fostering a positive workplace culture where everyone can experience a real, lived and ongoing sense of belonging
- Inclusion of all children regardless of ability, needs, gender, race, ethnicity, creed, and socioeconomic status

- Ongoing communication and dialogue with families to create an inclusive and belonging environment
- Participating in professional learning opportunities on equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, reconciliation and accessibility topics
- Understanding personal unconscious bias and how this may affect interactions with others and inhibit our ability to be inclusive

## Measurement

| Intended Outcome | Assessment |
|---|---|
| Increase in members of the workforce feeling accepted and respected by:<br>- Leadership<br>- Co-workers<br>- Children and families | Feedback from members of the workforce |
| Increase in children and families feeling a sense of belonging | Feedback from families |

## Policy Review

A review of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy will occur every three years or sooner, as required. This policy will be updated as needed to ensure we are aligning with our vision. Updated versions will be shared with those impacted.

## Accountability

All leadership, boards of directors and staff must read and sign off on the policy in the first year of implementing the policy. For the years following, any new leadership, members of the boards of directors and employees will be asked to sign off on the policy. The policy will need to be shared with parents/caregivers through the organization. All identified under the scope are expected to adhere to the policy.

If a person does not adhere to this policy, appropriate levels of resolution should be attempted within the organization. After this, if a complaint has been brought to the City of Hamilton's attention, the City will follow up with the early years organization to determine what appropriate corrective actions will take place.

Organizations will need to annually share the activities they are doing incorporate equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in their plans. This will be completed through the equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging sections of the Hamilton Early Years Quality Program (HEYQP) System Priority Template to ensure that this policy is moving this critical work forward.

The City of Hamilton will implement evaluation and monitoring procedures to ensure that the principles of this policy are embedded into all Early Years System policies, procedures and practices, and will communicate these results to the community.

## Definitions

- Accessibility: refers to the inclusive practice of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can access the same information, engage in the same interactions and enjoy the same services. It involves removing barriers and providing accommodations to enable individual to participate fully and equally. Accessibility strives for an integrated and seamless experience, where everyone can navigate and utilize resources with substantially equivalent ease of use.
- Belonging: when each individual is supported, respected, and valued for their identity and unique traits that make them different from each other.[1] Belonging is usually the result of the level of inclusion an individual feels in their environment.[2]
- Colonialism: the historical practice of European expansion into territories already inhabited by Indigenous peoples for the purposes of acquiring new lands and resources. This expansion is rooted in the violent suppression of Indigenous peoples' governance, legal, social and cultural structures. Colonialism attempts to force Indigenous peoples to accept and integrate into institutions that are designed to force them to conform with the structures of the colonial state. "Colonialism remains an ongoing process, shaping both the structure and the quality of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples."[3]
- Culturally Responsive Teaching: using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.[4]
- Discrimination: an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age or disability. These reasons, also called grounds, are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act. [5]
- Disability: one way is to see a disability as a medical condition that a person has. From this perspective, disability covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and some not visible. A disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. There are physical, mental, cognitive and learning disabilities, mental disorders, hearing or vision disabilities, epilepsy, drug and alcohol dependencies, environmental sensitivities and other conditions.[6]
- Diversity: refers to the range of differences and unique characteristics that individuals bring to the table. It includes aspects on race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, and more. Embracing diversity means valuing and celebrating these differences, recognizing the richness they bring to a group or organization.
- Ethnic Origin: refers to the ethnic or cultural origins of the person's ancestors. An ancestor is usually more distant than a grandparent.[7]

- Equity: a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

- Gender Expression: how a person publicly presents or expresses their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language and voice. A person's chosen name and pronoun are also common ways people express their gender. Others perceive a person's gender through these attributes.[8]

- Gender Identity: is each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex.[8]

- Harassment: engaging in a course of comments or actions that are known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. It can involve words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, demeaning or unwelcome.[6]

- Inclusion: is about creating an environment where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, and valued. It involves actively involving and empowering people from diverse backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard and their perspectives are considered.

- Jordan's Principle: makes sure all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including the unique needs that First Nations Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA children and youth and those with disabilities may have.[9]

- Race: there is no such thing as race – instead, it is a "social construct." This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people.[6]

- Socioeconomic Status: the position of an individual or group on the socioeconomic scale, which is determined by a combination of social and economic factors such as income, amount and kind of education, type and prestige of occupation, place of residence, and—in some societies or parts of society—ethnic origin or religious background.[10]

- Sex: the classification of people as male, female or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person's reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes and other physical characteristics. [8]

- Sexual Orientation: the direction of one's sexual interest or attraction. It is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of human sexuality from lesbian and gay, to bisexual and heterosexual.[6]
- Systemic Racism: consists of organizational culture, policies, directives, practices or procedures that exclude, displace or marginalize some racialized groups or create unfair barriers for them to access valuable benefits and opportunities. This is often the result of institutional biases in organizational culture, policies, directives, practices, and procedures that may appear neutral but have the effect of privileging some groups and disadvantaging others.[11]
- Systemic Barriers: obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation and benefits in social, economic and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but built into the way society works. Our assumptions and stereotypes, along with policies, practices and procedures, reinforce them.[12]
- Unconscious or Implicit Bias: those attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.[13]

## Related Documents

### Supporting documents

- Hamilton's Early Years Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Action Plan (in progress)
- Ensuring Equity for All Children and Families: An Equity and Engagement Framework
- Hamilton's 2016 – 2025 Strategic Plan
- The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2016 – 2020
- Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan 2023 Update
- Hamilton's Urban Indigenous Strategy

### Relevant Legislation

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act
- City of Hamilton's Equity and Inclusion Policy
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Hamilton's Charter of Rights of Children & Youth
- Ontario Human Rights Code
- The Final Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

## References


1. https://policies.usask.ca/policies/equity/equity-diversity-inclusion.php#Definitions

2. https://peopleelement.com/overview-of-workplace-diversity-inclusion-and-belonging/

3. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf

4. Gay, G. (2010). Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice. New York: Teachers College Press.

5. https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/about-human-rights/what-discrimination

6. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/teaching-human-rights-ontario-guide-ontario-schools/appendix-1-glossary-human-rights-terms

7. https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=103475

8. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/appendix-b-glossary-understanding-gender-identity-and-expression

9. https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824

10. https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status

11. https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/glossary

12. https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/ei_lens_hb_en.pdf

13. https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/article/understanding-implicit-bias