

# StrongStart BC Early Learning Programs



StrongStartBC

## Operations Guide





# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Purpose of this guide .....	1
How do I use this guide? .....	1
How this guide is organized .....	2
Program Overview .....	3
StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres.....	3
StrongStart BC Outreach Programs.....	4
<b>Facility Set-Up.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Location of the StrongStart BC Program.....	6
The Learning Environment.....	7
Learning Centres: The Physical Layout.....	8
Accommodating All Ages.....	9
Making the Environment Inviting.....	10
A Safe and Organized Environment.....	11
Shared Space.....	11
Examples of Quality Early Learning Environments.....	12
Equipment and Supplies .....	14
Maintenance .....	15
Snack Supplies.....	15
Cleaning Supplies .....	15
Art Supplies.....	16
Reflecting on the Environment .....	17



<b>Working with Families .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Physical Environment.....	22
Family Storage Needs .....	23
Strollers .....	23
Parent Information Board.....	24
Parent Resources.....	24
Sign-In Area and Procedure .....	25
Adult Participation .....	26
Developing Relationships with Families .....	27
Welcome Packages .....	28
Communication with Parents.....	28
Confidentiality .....	29
Photo Consent .....	30
Volunteer Support .....	30
Identifying Families .....	31
<b>Program Delivery.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Program Goals .....	34
Sample Yearly Program Goals .....	35
Sample Monthly Program Goals .....	36
Daily Program.....	37
Daily Schedule.....	38
Learning Centres.....	38
Circle Time.....	44
Shared Book Time.....	45
Creative Art/Project Time .....	46
Snack Time.....	47
Library, Computer or Gym Time.....	48
Goodbye Time.....	49
Program Activity Links.....	50
Reflecting on the StrongStart BC Program.....	51



<b>The Role of the Facilitator.....</b>	<b>53</b>
Facilitators and Adults .....	54
Facilitators and Children.....	55
Facilitators and Families.....	56
Facilitators and the School/School District .....	57
Facilitators and the Community.....	57
 <b>School District Responsibilities .....</b>	 <b>59</b>
Reporting.....	60
Registration and Requesting PENs .....	61
Attendance.....	62
Reporting Attendance to the Ministry of Education.....	63
Record Keeping.....	63
Computer Access .....	64
Signage .....	65
Hours of Operation.....	66
Overcrowding.....	66
Occasional Program Closures .....	67
Staffing .....	68
Employment Arrangements.....	69
StrongStart BC Facilitator Staffing Requirements.....	69
Validation of ECE Licence .....	70
Criminal Record Checks.....	70
Job Description.....	71
Substitute Facilitators.....	72
Facilitator Hours.....	72
Professional Development .....	72
Staff Orientation .....	73
Facilitator Recruitment.....	73
Role of the Principal .....	74





<b>Communication .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Communication with the Ministry of Education .....	76
School District Communication .....	77
School Communication .....	78
Communication with the Community .....	79
Advertising StrongStart BC Programs .....	81
Connecting Families with Other Services .....	83
 <b>Health and Safety Practices .....</b>	 <b>85</b>
Providing a Safe Environment .....	86
Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces .....	87
Access to Water for Hand Washing .....	88
Dishwashing Guidelines .....	89
Hot Liquids .....	89
Bathrooms .....	90
Diapering Guidelines .....	90
Electrical Outlets .....	90
Medications and Illnesses .....	91
Accidents .....	91
First Aid Recommendations .....	92
Fire Drills/ Earthquake Drills/Lockdown Drills .....	92
Food Safety .....	93
Food Storage and Preparation Guidelines .....	94
Allergies .....	94
Anaphylaxis Framework .....	95

# Introduction

## **UBC HELP Evaluation of StrongStart BC, September 2008**

### **Recommendation 17: To the Ministry of Education**

Develop and publish descriptors of StrongStart BC exemplary program practices (curriculum and pedagogy) that are consistent with the Early Learning Framework and the literature review.

### **Recommendation 19: Evaluation Guidelines with Descriptors (Recommendation 17) for StrongStart BC Programs**

Develop and publish a recommended process and guidelines for the evaluation of the StrongStart BC program consistent with the Early Learning Framework, the literature review, the descriptors referred to in Recommendation 17 and the prevailing research on the evaluation of early learning programs.

### **Recommendation 20: To School Districts**

Develop local policies and procedures consistent with the Ministry of Education guidelines to evaluate StrongStart BC programs at the school district level.

The 2008 University of British Columbia's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) [evaluation](#) of StrongStart BC centres concluded that StrongStart BC early learning programs are effective and meet the needs of families, schools, and communities. The evaluation team also made a series of recommendations to strengthen the program. In response to some of those recommendations, this StrongStart BC Operations Guide was developed to provide programs with information, sample exemplary practices, and tools to reflect on their practices.

## **Purpose of this guide**

This StrongStart BC Operations Guide is intended to help school districts plan, set up, run, and improve the quality of StrongStart BC early learning programs. Building on provincial StrongStart BC early learning program [policies](#), this guide provides suggestions for district-level policy and programming,

## **How do I use this guide?**

StrongStart BC facilitators can use this guide to help set up and plan their programs, reflect on and self-evaluate their practices, create welcoming environments for families, build connections with the community, and communicate with principals and other district leaders.

Principals can use this guide to provide leadership for the StrongStart BC early learning program, to find ways of connecting the program to the larger school community, and to facilitate dialogue among facilitators, teachers, families, and community members.

District Early Learning Contacts can use this guide to appreciate the role of the school district in supporting its programs, to guide the creation of new programs, to help with staffing decisions, to monitor program quality, and to facilitate communication between the facilitator, families, the school district, and the community.

Superintendents can use this guide to not only better understand the StrongStart BC early learning program and the district's responsibilities, but also stimulate dialogue among various groups in the education and early learning sectors and in the broader community.



## How this guide is organized

The StrongStart BC Operations Guide is organized into seven sections:

- [Facility Set Up](#)
- [Working with Families](#)
- [Program Delivery](#)
- [The Role of the Facilitator](#)
- [School District Responsibilities](#)
- [Communication](#)
- [Health and Safety Practices](#)

Throughout the guide, hyperlinks take the reader to more information and examples of effective practises.



This symbol indicates a link to the Ministry of Education website



This symbol indicates a link to a StrongStart BC resource or example created by a school district.



This symbol indicates a link to an external website or internet resource.





## Program Overview

StrongStart BC early learning programs provide school-based early learning services for families or caregivers and their pre-school aged children, at no cost to families. The programs are intended to fill a niche for young children who are not attending childcare and are in the home with their parent or other caregivers, such as grandparents or nannies. Both children and adults benefit from StrongStart BC early learning programs--children have access to high-quality learning environments and benefit from social interactions while the adults who accompany them learn new ways to support learning, both at the program and at home.

Two types of programs are available: StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres and StrongStart BC Early Learning Outreach Programs.

### StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres

StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres are located in school facilities and operate five days per week, for a minimum of three hours per day. Centres are most often open in the mornings, Monday to Friday. However, a number of centres are also open on weekends and evenings.

StrongStart BC facilitators, who are qualified Early Childhood Educators, staff the centres, which are designed to be rich early learning environments. A variety of activities, including dramatic play, puzzles, blocks, stories and shared reading, music, and art are available to support children's learning and development.

Adults attending StrongStart BC centres can expect to participate in organized sessions like circle time, in play activities, and in serving a healthy snack. Adults can discover new ways to support the children's learning at home and may make valuable connections with others attending the centre.



StrongStart BC policy can be found on the Ministry of Education's Early Learning website. A list of up-and-running StrongStart BC centres is available on this website.



## StrongStart BC Outreach Programs

In sparsely-populated rural or remote areas of British Columbia, attendance at StrongStart BC centres by families may be challenging due to distance, travel time, or lack of transportation.

The purpose of StrongStart BC outreach programs is to provide quality early learning experiences for children in communities where a StrongStart BC early learning centre would not be a viable model. Outreach programs are generally based on the following criteria:

- remoteness from a school that has a StrongStart BC centre, or is likely to have a centre;
- small number of pre-school aged children in the community; and
- limited access to early learning programs in the area, specifically rural or remote communities.

Outreach programs may operate on a reduced schedule, to accommodate the many remote locations it serves.

Similar to a centre, the outreach programs are facilitated by qualified Early Childhood Educators.



[StrongStart BC outreach policy](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education's Early Learning website. A list of up-and-running [StrongStart BC Outreach Programs](#) is available on this website.

# Facility Set-Up

The physical environment of an early learning program is often referred to as the “third teacher”. The set-up of the StrongStart BC facility affects the quality of the program. A high-quality early learning environment is rich, responsive, relevant, and respectful.

The following sections will help districts and facilitators plan the location, set up the program and consider the quality of the environment:

## Location of StrongStart BC Program

## The Learning Environment

## Equipment and Supplies

## Reflecting on the Environment



**UBC HELP  
Evaluation of  
StrongStart BC,  
September 2008**

**Recommendation 2:  
To School Districts**

Before designating sites, consult with intersectoral coalitions or interagency groups and other child/family serving agencies in the area to (a) assess current offerings, and (b) consult on the best school location for community needs.

**Recommendation 4:  
To School Districts**

In determining the placement of the program in the school, ensure that the classroom has running water, accessible outdoor play areas suitable for preschool children, and easy access to washrooms.

## Location of the StrongStart BC Program

The location of a StrongStart BC program in a school, and the quality of the learning environment, indicates to families how highly the school district values them and the program. The location and the environment also communicate to families how young children are perceived as learners. If a program is difficult to find or access, or if the program is not bright, clean, and inviting, the adults and their children will not return.

Before choosing a StrongStart BC site, the school district early learning leader responsible for this work should consult with early childhood coalitions or inter-agency groups and other child/family serving agencies in the area to assess current offerings and community needs. Groups to consult may include [British Columbia Family Resource Programs](#), [Child Care Resource and Referral](#), [Success by 6](#), and local ECD planning tables (i.e. [Children First](#)).

Once a potential StrongStart BC site has been identified, the school staff should be involved in the discussion, particularly the principal. Engaging school staff is critical to creating a well-integrated and welcoming program.

Elements to consider when locating a StrongStart BC program in the school include:

- access in the room to hot and cold running water, to address both hygiene and programming needs such as snack time and art activities.
- proximity to the kindergarten classroom, to increase the ease of interaction between staff, parents/caregivers, and children in the StrongStart BC program and kindergarten,
- easy access to washrooms, as young children often need quick trips accompanied by an adult when using the washroom,
- safe access to an outdoor play area suitable for pre-school age children, with handles on both the inside and the outside of the exterior access door,
- proximity to the school's main entrance, to minimize distraction for classes caused by people entering and leaving the program,
- accessibility for wheelchairs and a storage area for strollers,
- location of parking for adults who drive young children to the program.



## The Learning Environment

The StrongStart BC physical environment affects not only the impression adults and children have about the program but also how they engage in the program activities. When the environment is welcoming, well-organized, and interesting, and when it reflects the cultural diversity of the community, adults and children will be more likely to engage actively and attend regularly.

Organizing the early learning environment takes careful thought and planning. Facilitators should consider how the space is divided, the types of activities it should accommodate, and ways to make the center accessible. The organization of the space should encourage adult participation and interaction with the children as well as facilitate individual and group play. The plan for the room should reflect the needs and interests of multiple age groups and abilities and support all domains of children's development.

Excellent resources are available on designing environments for young children. For example, *Designs for Living and Learning* by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter describes ways to create healthy and inviting physical, social, and emotional environments for young children. Its illustrations will spark ideas for centres. *Early Learning Environments That Work*, by Rebecca Isbell and Betty Exelby, explores ways to use furniture, color, materials, and storage to nurture young children.

The following sections describe how to set up high-quality learning environments:

### Learning Centres: The Physical Layout

#### Accommodating All Ages

#### Making the Environment Inviting

#### A Safe and Organized Environment

#### Shared Space

#### Examples of Quality Early Learning Environments





## Learning Centres: The Physical Layout

The learning centres in a StrongStart BC program are areas set up to reflect children's interests and encourage parent participation and interaction with the children.

The following is a list of common learning centres in a StrongStart BC program. Each is described in more detail in the [Program Delivery](#) section.

- [Manipulative Centre](#)
- [Building Centre](#)
- [Science/Nature Centre](#)
- [Dramatic Play Centre](#)
- [Creative Centre](#)
- [Language and Literacy Centre](#)
- [Book Centre](#)
- [Outdoor Centre](#)
- [Games Centre](#)

In smaller spaces, facilitators may offer fewer learning centres; however, they can rotate or change the centres to provide variety and address different areas of learning. Children and adults need time to experience a learning centre fully before it is replaced with a new one.

Learning centres can be delineated using shelving units, rugs, or partitions. The set-up should not create blind spots where children cannot be seen. If possible, the art area and sand/water table should be located on a hard surface such as a tiled floor, to aid in clean-up. Quiet and noisy areas should be separated, so that children and adults can respect each other's play experiences. Include an area that allows for large group activities, such as circle time or movement activities.

Facilitators should label each learning centre using both words and symbols that best describe it. This will contribute to a language-rich environment and assist children in developing their pre-literacy skills by linking symbols with letters and objects.

Many centres set up learning centres in a "U" shape around the room, leaving an area at one end of the room open for large group activities, such as circle time, and allowing for ease of movement from one activity to another.



## Accommodating All Ages

StrongStart BC early learning programs are open to all children prior to their entry into kindergarten. This could include children as young as newborn, and as old as five years of age. As such, developmentally appropriate activities in the program should be available for infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers. Facilitators need to organize activities to accommodate both small and large groups of children of all ages. Ensure materials are safe for very young children, and are large enough to prevent infants from choking. Safe spaces can be created for infants to nap while their older siblings are playing.





## Making the Environment Inviting

Adults and children attending StrongStart BC early learning programs should enjoy their time in the program and want to return on a regular basis. The following ideas can help to make the early learning environment in the StrongStart BC program more inviting:

- **A Home-like Atmosphere.** Providing soft areas, such as couches, rugs, and cushions, a rocking chair for nursing, and adding a coffee or tea station, can create a sense of warmth and familiarity. This home-like setting will help people feel more comfortable in a school program. Soft furnishings can also absorb the sound of noisy play. Displaying children's art in a variety of places, including at low levels, will enable children to see their creations.
- **Attractive and Aesthetically Appealing.** The StrongStart BC environment should be appealing to the senses with colour, light, and textures. Both bright colours and pastels can be appealing, as well as soft and hard textures, but too many colours and textures can make it difficult for children to focus due to over-stimulation of the senses.
- **Open-ended.** Activities that are open-ended allow children to carry on their learning through multiple days and to add their personal interest to activities. Allow space for children to keep their long-term projects.
- **Varying Levels of Stimulation.** Ensure the environment has places for both noisy and quiet activities. Cozy, quiet spaces encourage intimate conversations among children and adults and allow for calm interludes between more boisterous activities.







## A Safe and Organized Environment

The StrongStart BC physical environment needs to be safe and organized. It also must consider ease of movement and use of the program.

**Safety:** Safety is very important in a program that includes young children. School districts should ensure that any piece of freestanding furniture or equipment is durable and sturdy enough for a child to pull himself up on without tipping. Consider securing less-stable pieces of equipment to the wall or floor. Make sure that the room is set up so that anything within possible reach of infants and toddlers is safe for them. This may result in storing or displaying smaller items up higher, so very young children cannot reach them.

An environment that is open allows children and adults to see all the possibilities of play, and enables them to move safely and freely from one area of interest to another. Being able to see all of the room is also important for adults. A good view of the room will help adults who attend with multiple children supervise them safely.

**Organization:** A well-organized environment is more predictable and nurturing to children, as well as adults. When children know where material and equipment are kept and can access them easily, they can see all the possibilities of play and can choose activities independently. By creating a well-organized environment, facilitators can model strategies that will help parents organize children's spaces at home and encourage children to take some responsibility at home as well. Having items labelled and stored, or displayed in an orderly way, means they are easy to find. Cleaning up also becomes more efficient for both adults and children.

## Shared Space

In some centres and for many outreach programs, the StrongStart BC early learning program shares space with another program. Where space is shared, clear expectations and communication are important. For outreach programs, the facilitator may need extra time at the beginning and end of the program to set up, take down, and store the equipment.





## Examples of Quality Early Learning Environments



This StrongStart BC room is bright and colourful, with visually-interesting things located at all levels of the room. Artwork is on display at a height where children can see. The sand table accommodates young children and adults. Steps to the table allow younger children to access the table safely.



The material in this sensory table actively promotes an appreciation of nature and offers sensory learning opportunities. Programs should consider providing a variety of unique materials in a sensory table.



Ensure that there are activities for the youngest children who participate in StrongStart BC early learning programs. This program has provided mats on the floor for crawling babies and safe toys at floor level.





A cozy book corner can encourage shared reading suitable for all ages. A chair is available for a parent and child to cuddle and read together, an infant pillow is on the floor nearby, and books are displayed prominently for children to enjoy. This bright and colourful environment engages both children and adults.



Creative plans can be stimulated using common household objects. This StrongStart BC program provided plastic cups and lids for creative play. The children decided to build a tower together. Facilitators can model the use of cost effective activities that can be re-created at home.



## Equipment and Supplies

StrongStart BC early learning programs should offer a range of durable equipment and toys with high play value and appropriateness for different ages.

When purchasing equipment, facilitators and district early learning staff should consider the scale and shape of the facility, the types of learning centres that will be created, and the activities that will be part of the daily program schedule.

School districts will need to create a budget for the purchase of supplies and replacement items. Some of the supplies in the StrongStart BC program will need to be re-stocked on a regular basis, such as paint, clay, cleaning items, and paper.

StrongStart BC outreach programs have unique equipment and supply needs. Districts will need to consider portability, storage, and sharing of outreach equipment and supplies.



Based on the advice from programs, the Ministry of Education has developed and posted suggested equipment lists that take into consideration the unique needs of centres and outreach programs:

[Suggested StrongStart BC Centre Equipment List](#)

[Suggested StrongStart BC Outreach Equipment List](#)

When planning the equipment and supplies needed for StrongStart BC programs, districts will need to consider:

[Maintenance](#)

[Snack Supplies](#)

[Cleaning Supplies](#)

[Art Supplies](#)



## Maintenance

Equipment in StrongStart BC programs will receive heavy use and will be subject to wear and tear. School districts will need to devise a regular maintenance schedule for the StrongStart BC equipment and be aware of cleanliness standards. School districts should maintain a daily, monthly, and yearly check of equipment for wear and tear and cleanliness. Make sure to keep all warranties for equipment and keep informed of recalls.



[Health Canada](#) provides an updated list of product recalls online.

## Snack Supplies

Snack supplies can be stored in the kitchen of the school, or in the snack preparation area of the StrongStart BC program. Perishable food items used for snack time should be stored in sealed containers in a refrigerator which cools to a consistent 4°C. Non-perishable food items should be stored in sealed containers. Staff should monitor food supplies for freshness. Keep in mind food allergies and sensitivities when planning snack menus.



Based on the advice from programs, the Ministry of Education has developed and posted a suggested StrongStart BC kitchen equipment list: [Suggested StrongStart BC Kitchen Equipment List](#)

## Cleaning Supplies

School districts are responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of the program and the equipment. Cleaning supplies used in a StrongStart BC program should be non-toxic, and stored in a secure location, inaccessible to children.

Facilitators may wish to speak with school custodial staff concerning appropriate cleaning supplies. A valued role for parents and caregivers in some centres is the regular cleaning of toys.





## Art Supplies

Special consideration should be given to the materials that are being used for creative art in the StrongStart BC program. Art materials should be non-toxic, clean, and large enough so as not to be swallowed by an infant or toddler. Facilitators will need to model and guide adults to supervise children carefully when using art supplies that may be a potential safety concern. For younger children just learning how to use art materials safely, facilitators may want to suggest to adults that they place their hand over their child's hand when using small tools that require fine motor coordination, such as crayons, paint brushes, or scissors.



Where available, StrongStart BC programs should use school supplies that meet school district guidelines.

Home made play-dough should be discarded after one week of use and should be stored in an airtight container. Play-dough can be created easily at home, so keep a copy of the recipe on hand for parents and caregivers.



There are several recipes for home-made play-dough, many of which can be found online.

Remind children and adults to wash their hands thoroughly after completing art activities.



Article in the Winter 2008 edition of the BC Early Learning Network Newsletter on found materials.



## Reflecting on the Environment

The physical environment in an early learning program is often referred to as the “third teacher”. A quality early learning environment is **rich, responsive, relevant, and respectful**. By taking time to reflect on these aspects of the environment, school districts and StrongStart BC facilitators can ensure the quality of their StrongStart BC programs.

A **rich** environment does not necessarily mean filling the room with expensive toys. A rich environment is full of a variety of learning opportunities that stimulate all five senses. Children are natural explorers and look for answers using everything that is available to them. A rich environment encourages children to challenge themselves and the theories they have about the world around them. Questions to ask when reflecting on the environment:

- Is the environment inviting and welcoming, to both children and adults?
- Are materials and activities open-ended?
- Does the environment contain a variety of colours and textures?
- Does the environment contain large open spaces and quiet intimate spaces for play?
- Does the environment engage all five senses?
- Do the materials and activities provoke thinking, engage creativity and allow for uncertainty?
- Do materials and activities challenge the children to try new ideas and test theories?







**Responsive** environments consider the developmental appropriateness for all the children who attend, regardless of their age, ability or interests. Children are active learners, and they learn in a variety of ways. StrongStart BC environments should be accessible for children and adults of all ages. Questions to ask when reflecting on the environment:

- Do learning centres support a variety of experiences?
- Are children and adults encouraged to provide ideas for themes and materials?
- Are the activities and materials continually assessed and modified to ensure prolonged interest and age appropriateness?
- Are there enough materials so that several children can engage in play at the same time?

Culturally **relevant** environments reflect the families that use the program. Children who see familiar objects in a new setting may be encouraged to test new theories. Adults who see items that they value in the environment may feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar setting. Questions to ask when reflecting on the environment:

- Are there pictures that represent the cultures of the families who attend?
- Are there materials in the environment that reflect their home lives?
- Are there materials that reflect the natural environment in the surrounding area?
- Are there learning materials and activities that promote the understanding of diverse cultures? Are families asked to share their culture and celebrations?
- Do materials depict the community setting (i.e. urban or rural)?
- Do materials include authentic items rather than toy replicas?



**Respectful** environments make children and adults feel that they are welcome and safe. The environment should reflect pride in the program and show that each child and family is valued. The children and adults should be encouraged to explore new experiences. Questions to ask when reflecting on the environment:



- Are children encouraged to explore and make their own choices?
- Are materials sturdy and safe?
- Are children's ideas reflected in the centre?
- Do the activities and materials reflect non-stereotyped community members (i.e. picture books with women police officers)?
- Is the environment clean and well organized?

Well-designed early learning environments are engaging for children and keep participants coming back.



# Working with Families

One of the unique aspects of StrongStart BC outreach programs and StrongStart BC centres is that they are intended to benefit both children and adults. School districts should create a program that says to children, as well as adults, "This is a place for you!"

The following sections describe areas to consider when planning how to create a successful program for both adults and children:

## Physical Environment

## Adult Participation

## Developing Relationships with Families

## Identifying Families

Some school districts have chosen to elicit feedback regarding their StrongStart BC early learning programs by adopting a parent survey.



An example of a parent survey can be found on the Ministry of Education's [website](#).



## Physical Environment

Families should feel welcome at StrongStart BC programs. Part of helping families to feel comfortable in the program is making the physical environment welcoming for everyone.

Such an environment might include:

- A coffee/tea station that is set up near the entrance to welcome adults and to promote interaction and conversation,
- Adult-sized chairs and other furniture items placed strategically in the room to maximize child-adult interaction at learning centres,
- A range of materials that considers the range in age of children that may attend, from birth to 5 years old,
- A photo wall displaying images from the children's homes and family life,
- A safe, cozy area for babies to lie on or crawl on, out of the way of toddlers,
- Homey features such as rugs, non-toxic plants, pillows, wooden end tables, benches, a gazebo, a trellis or an outdoor sun tent (be sure to consider safety),
- Sources of light such as lamps, a light table, spotlights and the use of projectors for shadows and light experiences as well as natural light,
- Objects or decorative items that represent the cultures of the families attending the program.

The following sub-sections describe items to consider when setting up the physical environment to reflect the needs of families:

### Family Storage Needs

### Strollers

### Parent Information Board

### Parent Resources

### Sign-In Area and Procedure





## Family Storage Needs

Many families arrive at StrongStart BC programs with coats, purses, diaper bags, and backpacks that require safe storage. Many StrongStart BC programs include a cubby or coat storage area to accommodate personal items. Individual hooks for each child are helpful, as are large bins for each family.

Personal items such as purses, diaper bags, and backpacks should be kept away from play areas and children's reach. Suggest to families that they do not bring valuables with them when they attend StrongStart BC programs, as the program is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Adults should be encouraged to keep any valuables with them at all times.

Several school districts have developed unique ways for children to be responsible for their own outerwear when entering the program. Try taking a picture of each child who attends the program. Upon arrival, the children can find their photographs and place them on a coat hook or cubby with their personal items. This allows children to participate in a routine that fosters independence and responsibility, and helps keep the room orderly. Centres may need to create a "lost and found" area when items go astray.

## Strollers

Whenever possible, covered space should be provided for stroller parking. Signage can direct adults to the storage area. Be sure that strollers do not block safety exits. Facilitators should advise families not to leave personal belongings or food in strollers.

School districts may wish to locate the entrance to the StrongStart BC program where it can be easily accessed by strollers or provide an alternate "stroller friendly" entrance.



## Parent Information Board

StrongStart BC programs are busy, active places. One-on-one conversations with parents might be difficult to achieve, so an information bulletin board placed near the entrance to the program can enhance communication with families. Program information, upcoming community events, school information, pamphlets and resources, contact information for local health units, and parent education articles can be posted on the board.

StrongStart BC programs may wish to have a parent or community partner help create a parent information board. It should be updated regularly and reflect the community.



[Spring 2008 BC Early Learning Network Newsletter](#) article on a Parent Information Board from School District 73.

## Parent Resources

The StrongStart BC program may be the only program a family accesses. To support parents, resources at the site might include:

- A reference lending library offering books on parenting skills, healthy cooking recipes, and monthly parenting magazines. Items in this lending library can reflect the languages and cultures of the families in the community,
- A regular StrongStart BC [newsletter](#) that informs parents about new program resources, guest speakers, days the program is closed, visitors from other agencies, recipes for play-dough, etc.,
- Written information on child development — be sure the resources use [plain language](#),
- Pamphlets from local agencies for parents to take home,
- Guidelines about the policies regarding [illness](#), [registration](#), and other topics,
- A list of opportunities or suggestions for parent participation or contributions within the program.

Many school districts have created their own [parent resources](#), examples of which can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



The Ministry of Education has gathered many [Online Parent Resources](#), which can be found on the Ministry's website.



## Sign-In Area and Procedure

The sign-in area is usually the first thing families see when they arrive at the StrongStart BC program. It could be a table just outside or inside the classroom with a sign-in book for daily attendance. For newcomers, the area could include StrongStart BC [welcome packages](#) or pamphlets with information for families to take with them, even if the program is closed. Having a white board near the sign-in area is also a good method to communicate daily with families and remind them about the day's program including the snack menu.

Simple instructions should be posted for sign-in (translated into local languages along with pictures to support text if possible). The sign-in sheet or book should include space for the child's first and last name, age, and parent/caregiver's name. This helps to keep track of daily attendance and new families.

A sign-in procedure will be critical if the school needs to be evacuated in case of fire or other [emergency](#). This information can also help the facilitator see trends in age and patterns of attendance that are valuable for planning. Sign-in sheets or books can also provide the district with attendance information needed for entry in BCeSIS.



A photograph of a [sample sign-in area](#) from School District 71 can be found on the school district website.



A [sample sign-in sheet](#) has been developed by the Ministry of Education and can be found on the StrongStart BC website.



## Adult Participation

Adult involvement in StrongStart BC early learning centres and outreach programs is fundamental to the purpose of the program. Research tells us that parents who are active partners in their children's education and development increase the chance of children's success. Research has also shown that when early learning programs include specific goals for parent engagement and learning, parents transfer the knowledge and skills to their home environment.

By finding opportunities for teachable moments, facilitators can help adults feel more connected to the program and understand the important role they play in their child's learning and development.

Adult participation in the program is mainly through the adult interaction with children, but can also take additional forms, such as welcoming new families, assisting with snack preparation, assisting with clean-up, providing suggestions for new program ideas or materials, or participating in some other way that feels meaningful to them.

The following strategies can be used to involve adults in their child's learning and development:

- Using teachable moments to model ways to support learning and describe the learning that is occurring in the moment for the adults,
- Reinforcing verbally and non-verbally the importance of parental involvement,
- Encouraging participation by asking for input in program planning,
- Displaying posters describing early learning ideas,
- Using circle time to demonstrate and explain what is being learned and how to continue the learning at home,
- Displaying photos of activities and descriptions of learning taking place at learning centres,
- Setting up the physical environment to encourage adult/child participation.



The Ministry of Education has developed an information sheet on Encouraging Parent Involvement at StrongStart BC programs, which can be found on the Ministry website.

School District 43 has developed a set of posters describing various early learning activities and what children are learning at each activity. Examples of the play posters and order form can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



## Developing Relationships with Families

Parents and caregivers from many backgrounds arrive at StrongStart BC programs with a variety of parenting styles and knowledge. Developing positive relationships with families takes time and effort, but is a core component of the StrongStart BC program. Facilitators should appreciate and acknowledge that parents are children's first teachers.

Staff should take time to reflect thoughtfully on how they are developing meaningful and trusting relationships with families. Facilitators should consider the following:

- Demonstrating respect to all families and community members by focusing on the strengths of families, treating families with dignity, listening with an open mind and being sensitive to cultural differences.
- Greeting each adult and child upon arrival, bending down to welcome children on their level. It is helpful if facilitators wear a name tag to identify themselves.
- Setting up mentoring opportunities for new families with seasoned participants. New families can be introduced to adults and children who regularly attend and have a good understanding of the program.
- Providing new families with a brief description of the program and giving them a welcome package that explains the program in greater detail.
- Posting a daily schedule and letting families know what is planned for the day.
- Clearly communicating expectations of adult participation. Parents and caregivers will feel more comfortable when they know what to expect.
- Practicing active listening and empathy in conversations with adults and children, focusing on the matter at hand and suspending judgment.





## Welcome Packages

District StrongStart BC welcome packages can be an effective way to inform new families about the program. Packages can include a brief overview and purpose of the program, the days and hours of operation, a typical monthly calendar, and perhaps the district StrongStart BC [registration form](#). The reading level of families varies widely, so be sure to use plain language when creating welcoming packages for families. If you know certain language groups from the area are likely to attend, consider translating the packages.



### Plain Language Sites:

- 1) [www.nald.ca/library/research/summaries/summaries.htm](http://www.nald.ca/library/research/summaries/summaries.htm)
- 2) [www.cpha.ca/en/pls.aspx](http://www.cpha.ca/en/pls.aspx)
- 3) [www.plainlanguage.mb.literacy.ca/index.htm](http://www.plainlanguage.mb.literacy.ca/index.htm)
- 4) [www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain/IntroducingPlainLanguage.html](http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain/IntroducingPlainLanguage.html)  
Plain Language Network

## Communication with Parents

There are many other ways to communicate with families. Some methods for increasing positive communication and interaction with families include;

- Potlucks and picnics
- Celebrations
- Suggestion box
- Parent workshops
- Program calendars
- Parent handbooks



Some of the information parents may be interested in receiving include:

- Recipes for play-dough and other play activities at home
- Developmental information
- General school information
- Special event announcements
- Inter-agency contacts and information
- Community event announcements
- Parenting suggestions
- Promotional materials for new parents
- Program closures
- Other information as pertinent to the program



[Sample StrongStart BC newsletters](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.

## Confidentiality

StrongStart BC early learning programs must ensure confidentiality of information for families attending the program. It is important families feel safe and secure participating in the program. The facilitator will need to be compliant with school district policy and the law regarding confidentiality. StrongStart BC facilitators should refer to their own school district's policies on confidentiality.

The StrongStart BC facilitator may be aware of privileged information about families. Should parents need to discuss sensitive matters with a facilitator, the facilitator should make every attempt to arrange a mutually convenient time to discuss the matter away from other families.

All paperwork that contains personal information should be stored in a safe, secure manner. Child and family names should not be mentioned in newsletters or other methods of communication, to protect their privacy.



## Photo Consent

Providing adults and children with photos of themselves and placing photos of the children around the program makes participants feel involved, and may also help adults and children to gain a better understanding of a child's learning. However, permission must be obtained from the parent or guardian before using pictures of children in newsletters, posters, advertisements, websites or other publications.



A sample [Photo Consent Form](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.

## Volunteer Support

The role of volunteers should be consistent with school district policy, and should honour the philosophy of StrongStart BC as a program that engages parents and caregivers as well as children. Volunteers who are not attending with children can make a positive contribution to the program. Some StrongStart BC programs have seniors volunteer in the program.

Volunteers can assist in areas such as:

- Creating materials for art activities
- Preparing food for snacks
- Modelling skills at learning centres
- Reading with children
- Encouraging children to participate in learning activities
- Assisting other parents who bring more than one child
- Organizing resources at the end of the session
- Documenting children's learning and development
- Assisting with field trips



**UBC HELP  
Evaluation of  
StrongStart BC,  
September 2008**

**Recommendation  
14: To School  
Districts**

Encourage a comparison of attendance data with local demographics to monitor who is (and is not) using the site. A genuine effort needs to be made, site by site, to determine what would make the program more attractive to those who are choosing not to attend. Develop creative marketing strategies for StrongStart BC to reach those who are not aware of the offering. These may include low SES populations (refugees and immigrants, and multicultural and Aboriginal populations). Work with local Aboriginal leaders, with their existing programs and with other agencies to develop partnerships that are sensitive to Aboriginal culture, and encourage families to attend.

## Identifying Families

One of the responsibilities of StrongStart BC programs is attracting families to participate, including vulnerable families. Programs may need help finding families from community organizations or services. This is especially relevant for StrongStart BC Outreach programs where they are very few children in a community. The local health unit may connect districts to first-time parents or newcomers to the community. Other organizations that may be able to assist with connecting with families include:



- [BC Family Resource Programs](#)
- [Child Care Resource and Referral](#)
- [Success by Six](#)
- [Local friendship centres](#)





# Program Delivery

## UBC HELP evaluation of StrongStart BC, September 2008

### Recommendation 17: To the Ministry of Education

Develop and publish descriptors of StrongStart BC exemplary program practices (curriculum and pedagogy) that are consistent with the Early Learning Framework and the literature review.

The years between birth and school-age are a critical time in a child's life. The experiences that children have in the early years influence their future health, well-being, and life-long learning. Children who have had exposure to language rich environments and play-based early learning experiences, and are supported by loving and responsive relationships, are more likely to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions to support their success in school.

StrongStart BC early learning programs offer activities and experiences that support the learning goals of the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*. School districts and StrongStart BC facilitators are required to use the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework, 2008* and *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice, 2009*. These documents help facilitators examine and reflect on their program to determine if it addresses the goals in the four areas of early learning laid out in the *Framework* (Well-Being and Belonging, Exploration and Creativity, Languages and Literacies, Social Responsibility and Diversity).

The [StrongStart BC evaluation](#) recommended that programs use the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* to guide program activities.

Facilitators can use the Questions to Consider in the two documents to reflect on the program, assess the effectiveness of the centres and activities, and the learning environment.

The following sections describe considerations for program delivery:

## Program Goals

## Daily Program

## Reflecting on the StrongStart BC Program



## Program Goals

The overall goal of StrongStart BC early learning programs is to support the development of young children consistent with the goals of the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* and to provide opportunities for adults to observe and practice effective strategies that support early learning.

School districts and StrongStart BC facilitators can use the *Framework* to develop short-term (daily/weekly) and long-term (monthly and yearly) program goals. These goals should also be assessed on a regular basis.

Districts, principals, and facilitators can also consider the EDI (Early Development Instrument) scores for their neighbourhood to guide and develop appropriate goals based on the EDI data and the developmental needs of children in the area.



Information on the EDI, including neighbourhood maps, can be found on the [UBC/HELP](http://UBC/HELP) website.

The following sections describe items to consider when creating program goals:

[Sample Yearly Program Goals](#)

[Sample Monthly Program Goals](#)





## Sample Yearly Program Goals

The following are examples taken from existing programs:

1. Create monthly program plans that focus on an a particular learning goal from each of the four areas of early learning contained in the *Framework*
2. Schedule community partners to visit the program on a regular basis. The visits will need to be planned well in advance, in order to publicize them in the StrongStart BC newsletter.
3. Organize a minimum of two school-StrongStart BC partnership events; for example, hosting a StrongStart BC open house during the Ready, Set, Learn event can bring the school community together.
4. Develop a new parent resource area in the centre that contains materials in at least 3 languages.
5. Provide professional development opportunities for the facilitator to increase skills in working with adults.
6. Identify strategies to attract new families to the StrongStart BC program.





## Sample Monthly Program Goals

The following are examples of monthly goals for a typical program:

1. Plan and participate in meetings with local Friendship Centre.
2. Contact public health nurse to see if she knows of new families who have moved into the neighbourhood.
3. Focus on the following learning goals this month:

**Well-Being and Belonging:** provide an environment where young children can feel confidence in and control of their bodies by:

- providing opportunities for music and large muscle movement in circle time, encouraging children to move in different ways,
- using the gym and age-appropriate equipment several times to develop coordination, balance, stability, locomotion, and rhythm.

**Exploration and Creativity:** build, create, and design using different materials and techniques by:

- using a variety of “real” things, such as mixing bowls and wooden spoons, in the dramatic play centre,
- using a variety natural items such as leaves and pine cones for art projects.

**Languages and Literacies:** engage in sound and word play by:

- inviting a Punjabi adult to teach a song during circle time,
- using rhythm and rhyming games during circle and gym time, and encouraging children to make up their own word games.

**Social Responsibility and Diversity:** understand how children’s own actions may affect nature and the planet by:

- planning a playground litter pick up during outdoor time; talking at circle time about how litter affects everyone’s enjoyment of the area,
- engaging children and adults in day-to-day recycling and waste reduction, and modelling how scraps can be kept for other uses, and what scraps can be recycled.



## Daily Program

The StrongStart BC program is a play-based program. Most of children's early learning takes place through play. The positive emotions associated with play are as important as the skills they build in creating a disposition that embraces learning.

The activities that make up the daily program should also allow for some flexibility and choice, to address the individual interests of the children and adults who attend, and to be responsive to the needs and desires of the families served. The daily activities should support the early learning goals of the *Framework*.

The StrongStart BC **Daily Program** includes consideration of the following:

[Daily Schedule](#)

[Learning Centres](#)

[Circle Time](#)

[Shared Book Time](#)

[Creative Art/Project Time](#)

[Snack Time](#)

[Library, Computer or Gym Time](#)

[Goodbye Time](#)

[Program Activity Links](#)



## Daily Schedule

Both the children and adults will benefit from a predictable schedule of activities in a StrongStart BC program. Routines make people feel comfortable and build their confidence in the value of the program. Children need routines in order to be able to predict the flow of the day and build independence. Understanding and following routines is one of the learning goals in the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*. When children feel comfortable and confident about the program's activities, they will feel more empowered and self-assured to try new things. As a bonus, children and families that are confident about the routine of the program can become "tour guides" for visitors or mentors for new participants.



Sample daily schedules in the [BC Early Learning Network Newsletters](#), Winter 2008 and Spring 2008.

One StrongStart BC program uses an innovative technique to encourage parents to take an active part in the daily schedule. Every day, the facilitator writes a point of focus for the program on the blackboard. For example, "Today, adults are encouraged to try exploring the concept of volume with their children. What container holds more? Which shape holds the most? Will this round container fill up the cube?" The facilitator then adds props to the learning centres to support this concept; in this case, adding measuring cups and a variety of containers to the sand table. The parents attending have responded positively to this, saying that it helps to provide them with some focus for their StrongStart BC session.

## Learning Centres

Interactive play occurs when adults and children explore the learning centres together. Learning centres are designated areas of the room where materials and activities are arranged to guide children's learning. Centres can be arranged to accommodate individual children or groups of children. For example, providing a small desk with one or two children's chairs and some natural materials such as pine cones and leaves can be an area for one or two people, while the dramatic play centre can be set up in a large corner of the room, with enough space to accommodate several children and adults.

Play at learning centres can be exploratory, with "hands on/minds on" learning using sand, blocks, dress-up clothes, water, collections, paints, puzzles and more.

Learning centres can be designed purposefully to address the four areas of the *Framework*.





**Manipulative Centre:** play-dough, sand or water table, clay, sensory table.

The **sand table** provides opportunities to learn in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** dumping and pouring of the sand provides opportunities for children to develop muscles in their hands and fingers, with a wide variety of materials.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** providing sand and a variety of tools encourages children to build, create and design using different materials and techniques.
- **Languages and Literacies:** using cups in a variety of sizes introduces mathematical concepts into the play.
- **Social Responsibility and Diversity:** playing together at the sand table encourages children of different ages and or backgrounds to play together.



**Building Centre:** wooden blocks, carpentry bench, soft blocks, railway set.

**Wooden blocks** provide opportunities to learn in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** building with and balancing the blocks helps children to develop coordination, balance, stability, locomotion and rhythm.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** manipulating blocks allows children to try possible solutions to problems in meaningful ways.
- **Languages and Literacies:** using blocks, children can represent and communicate their ideas.
- **Social Responsibility and Diversity:** building together or side by side encourages children to share materials and be respectful of other's ideas.





**Science/Nature Centre:** discovery table with “found” objects, nature table, collection centre (interesting rocks, seeds, etc.), light table.

A **nature table** provides opportunities for learning in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** providing items found in the natural environment allows children to express their natural curiosity as they explore.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** using natural objects in new ways, testing out the various textures and odours in the collection of objects.
- **Languages and Literacies:** talking about the items encourages new vocabulary.
- **Social Responsibility and Diversity:** taking turns and observing what other children do and say about the objects encourages respect for others.





**Dramatic Play Centre:** dress-up clothes, dolls, kitchen set, playhouse, hospital, grocery store, space station, food.

**Dress-up clothes** provide opportunities for learning in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** practicing self-care skills in trying on and hanging up clothes in the centre.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** Trying on clothes in new and original ways allows children to explore the world using their bodies and all their senses.
- **Languages and Literacies:** Dressing up encourages dramatic play opportunities, where children express their thoughts and ideas.
- **Social responsibility and Diversity:** Using “real” clothes, such as a baker’s hat or a mail carrier’s bag, allows children to explore and learn about their community and the wider world.



**Creative Centre:** art table, beautiful junk, creativity centre, invention centre.

**Paint and easels** provide opportunities for learning in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** Providing paint brushes and feathers of various sizes lets children gain confidence and control of their bodies.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** painting with natural materials encourages children to discover new ways of expression.
- **Languages and Literacies:** expressing their own ideas visually and discussing their creations with others.
- **Social responsibility and Diversity:** practising positive regard for shared materials and working harmoniously alongside others.

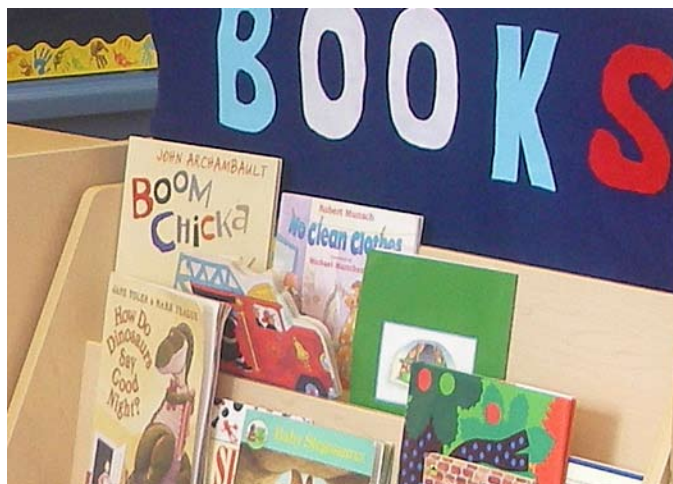




**Language and Literacy Centre:** chalk board/ white board, literacy bucket (contains assorted paper, pens, pencils, felts, stationery, order forms) magnetic letters, flannel board, puppet theatre.

**Flannel boards** provide opportunities for learning in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** independently using a flannel board after it has been used for a story during circle time builds confidence to extend the learning.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** Manipulating a variety of items for the flannel board, some of which stick on the board and some which do not, encourages problem solving to figure out how things work.
- **Languages and Literacies:** Flannel boards encourage children to use a wide variety of materials and expressive mediums to represent and communicate their ideas.
- **Social responsibility and Diversity:** Working with other children at the flannel board encourages children to initiate, maintain, and enjoy relationships with other children including turn-taking, problem-solving, negotiating, and understanding other people's points of view.



**Book Centre:** large and small books, comfortable places to read.

**Picture books** provide opportunities for learning in all four areas of early learning:

- **Well-being and Belonging:** Sitting on a parent or caregiver's lap to enjoy a picture book provides children with attention and affection and connects these emotions with books.
- **Exploration and Creativity:** choosing a book with parent or caregiver allows a child to try new ideas and provides opportunities to discuss thinking strategies behind choices.
- **Languages and Literacies:** Providing books fosters a love of reading and encourages curiosity about vocabulary and written language.
- **Social responsibility and Diversity:** Treating books with care provides opportunities for adults to model respectful, responsible behaviour.



Other common learning centres in StrongStart BC programs include:

- **Outdoor Centres:** garden corner (bean planting, herb planting), bubble play, parachute play.
- **Games Centres:** straws and connectors, puzzles, bingo, snakes and ladders, matching games.
- **Theme Centre:** special-interest centre, determined by the interests of the children, or a special event that is happening (i.e. snow storm).



School District 43 (Coquitlam) has created a set of 8 laminated posters describing various early learning activities, and what children are learning during each of these play activities. Each poster is 11.5" x 17". A set of 8 posters costs \$20. More information on ordering these posters, including poster examples, can be found on the Ministry of Education's [website](#).







## Circle Time

Circle time, a large-group time led by the facilitator, should be a daily scheduled activity at each StrongStart BC program. Facilitators can use the *Framework* to help reflect on and plan their circle times. When planning circle time, ensure your activities are:

- Appropriate for a variety of ages and focused on the children attending that day,
- Reflective of the interests of children and their families,
- Welcoming for both adults and children who want to participate, while providing them with alternate quiet activities should they choose not to participate.

Circle time is typically a gathering time to share poems, songs, stories and action games. This activity builds literacy skills through use of big books, puppet play, story reading, and storytelling. Music and numeracy activities can also be incorporated into circle time. Demonstrations of new equipment, modeling ways to support children's learning, and offering parenting tips can occur during circle time.

Both adults and children can participate in circle time together; however, younger children may need to be engaged in other ways if they have a shorter attention span.

Some StrongStart BC programs have two planned circle times during each program session; one short circle time during the first part of the program, aimed at the younger children, and another longer circle time near the end of the session geared toward the older children. Two circle times also accommodates families who leave early or arrive late to the program.



Online resources for circle time activities:

<http://www.preschoolrainbow.org/activities-large.htm>

<http://users.stargate.net/~cokids/Circle.html>

<http://www.childcarelounge.com/Caregivers/circle.htm>



## Shared Book Time

Shared book time encourages adults and children to bond while reading books. Shared book time is a joyful time for both the adult and child. Ideally, adults will begin to use strategies that have been modelled by the facilitator at circle time or during their individual one-on-one book times with their child.

Many StrongStart BC programs schedule shared book time immediately prior to circle time. Children and adults are asked to tidy up for circle time, and when they are ready, they can read books together while waiting for circle time to begin. Children are encouraged to choose a book to read or look at with the adult. Facilitators can model different ways to enjoy a book besides actually reading the story. The action of choosing a book, discussing the pictures in the book, talking about favourite parts of the book, guessing what comes next in the story, and spending time close together are all important aspects of pre-reading skills and build understanding of the purpose and enjoyment of reading. This is especially helpful for those who do not read English.



Ideas to help parents understand the importance of reading to their children can be found on the [Read Now](#) BC website.





## Creative Art/Project Time

Most young children take a natural delight in art. They love to be creative through manipulating materials such as paint, clay, and glue. Art activities encourage children to express emotions, plan and follow through on plans, make representations of their thoughts and ideas, and problem-solve. When children are creating, they are learning about symbolic representation, an important element of emergent literacy and numeracy. The early symbolic representation in art can help to lay a firm foundation for future academic learning.

Tips to keep in mind when planning art activities include:

- Art activities should focus on the process, not the product.
- Creative art/project time should be open ended and child directed; i.e. don't use colouring sheets.
- For younger children, adults can use hand-over-hand strategies to help their young children enjoy using the materials.
- Art allows adults and children to explore different media that might not be available in the home.
- Adults can explore alongside their children.

Art materials are experienced by children using all their senses. Facilitators can model the value of providing open-ended, sensory art materials, and using open-ended questions to help children describe what they are doing, seeing, feeling, and thinking. Open-ended questions to encourage children to talk and think about art include:

- How does the clay smell?
- How does the finger-paint feel?
- What made you decide to draw a robot?
- Tell me about your drawing.
- Can you think of a different way to use a paint brush?
- How did you make the orange paint?
- How did you make the clay look like that?



Online art resources:  
Art ideas for infants, for toddlers, and for preschoolers.





## Snack Time

Offering healthy and nutritious snacks are a requirement of the StrongStart BC program. Routines like hand washing, serving, using manners, and interacting with the group can all be learned and practiced during snack time.

Snack time connects to several learning goals in the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*:

- Learn about ways to keep themselves healthy, including nourishment, sleep, and physical activity,
- Understand and follow routines,
- Build healthy relationships with both adults and children,
- Learn to appreciate diversity.

Snack time is a language-rich activity. Informal conversation occurs between children, and between adults and children. Interaction is important during this time, so encourage all children to join in.

Families can be exposed to new, healthy food choices at StrongStart BC programs. Frequently, children are more willing to try new foods at snack time than at home. Cultural traditions in food can be shared and explored at snack time.

Some StrongStart BC programs have milk and cereal available as soon as the program opens. This practice provides families who may not have had time or the resources to have breakfast in the morning to have some food before the program gets fully underway.

Consideration of food safety, healthy eating and food allergies must be taken when planning snack time.



Resources to help plan healthy snacks:

The Canada Food Guide [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php) and the Healthy Schools site [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/health/) are great sources for healthy eating ideas.

BC Health Files has a resource entitled “Meal and Snack Ideas for Your One to Three-Year-Old Toddler” that is available in several languages: [www.wcfcca.ca/pdfs/participant\\_resources\\_7/Meal\\_and\\_Snack\\_Ideas.pdf](http://www.wcfcca.ca/pdfs/participant_resources_7/Meal_and_Snack_Ideas.pdf)

Fraser Health Authority has a variety of reproducible infosheets on Nutrition in early childhood, available in several languages: [www.fraserhealth.ca/HealthTopics/HealthyLiving/NutritionInfo/Pages/Infant.aspx](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/HealthTopics/HealthyLiving/NutritionInfo/Pages/Infant.aspx)

Food Flair is a comprehensive manual, developed by LEAP BC with ideas and activities to help create environments that support healthy eating for young children.





## Library, Computer or Gym Time

One of the advantages of placing StrongStart BC programs in schools is access to other spaces in the school, including the gym, playground, computer lab, kitchen, and library.

Whenever possible, schools should schedule some time each week for the StrongStart BC program to use shared spaces, such as the library, computer room, and gym. In some schools, where these spaces are heavily booked, it has been possible to use them when the rest of the school is outside for recess.

### Library

Use of the school library encourages adults and children to become regular public library users. Both school and public libraries are a great resource for families. Teacher-librarians often provide story time for StrongStart BC children and their families either in the centre or in the library. Some teacher-librarians have set up a special book loaning system for StrongStart BC families, which includes library cards, a pre-school book section, and a parent reference section.

### Computer Room

Computers can be a great tool for parents to search for information about child-development. Computers can also be used to document children's development in classroom activities with photos, especially as many families do not have access to technology at home. The school's computer room can help to expose adults and children to new technology that they might not otherwise have access to. The facilitator and computer teacher can help guide adults and children to access appropriate electronic early learning tools found online.

Families can use computers in StrongStart BC programs to search for information about child development and find resources. Computers can also be used to document children's development in classroom activities with photos, especially if families do not have access to computers at home.

Careful thought should be given to how much time children engage with computers at StrongStart BC programs. The major focus of the program is interaction among the children, the adults, and the learning environment.

Some StrongStart BC programs have found it a challenge to have computers in the centre without rules and routines governing their use. In some programs, the computer is only available at certain times or on particular days. Facilitators who choose to have a computer available for family use in the centre could model the importance of limiting screen time as well as the benefit of adults and children using a computer together. A 5-minute sand timer or other timing device that a child is able to manipulate is helpful to indicate that computer time is up.



Research on [Integrating Computers in Early Childhood Education Environments](#), by the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network.

Online learning resources from [LearnNowBC](#).



### Gym or Outdoor Playground

Gym time for large-muscle activities is highly valued by most StrongStart BC parents. Many children and adults do not have regular opportunities to move within such a large, indoor space. Gym equipment that is appropriate for children age 0-5 years includes balls, hoola hoops, parachutes, and cones for navigating around.

StrongStart BC programs should also consider using the outdoor space available at the school, especially during good weather.

Specialized equipment is not necessary for children attending StrongStart BC programs. Many activities that require little or no equipment can be organized outdoors or in the gym.

Connecting with nature is one of the learning goals in the *Framework*. Outdoor activities such as scavenger hunts and short hikes can help to support this goal.



Many ideas for physical activities for families with young children can be found in the Healthy Opportunities for Preschoolers resource, developed by [LEAP BC](#).

### Goodbye Time

Goodbye time is an important social ritual and routine at the end of the StrongStart BC session. This transition time can be challenging for some adults and children. Facilitators can organize routine ways to signal the end of the session to make it easier for families to leave the program. Activities could include gathering art projects, dressing in outdoor clothes, or a good-bye song. Children need to understand that they can return to the program on another day and their favourite activities will still be in the program.

Because StrongStart BC is a drop-in program, families arrive and depart at various times throughout the session. Some families may leave before goodbye time. Facilitators can plan a quick ritual or activity for these families, such as a special goodbye wave or short verse.



## Program Activity Links



[Perpetual Preschool](#) – a site with over 12,000 free ideas for educators and parents of young children.

[Enchanted Learning](#) – a site with theme ideas from preschool to Grade 3.

[Tools for Aboriginal Communities](#) – a series of calendars, specially created for the parents of young children from Aboriginal communities, featuring activities that aim to promote healthy child development in the early years. Each calendar is illustrated by a First Nations artist and targets a different age group.

[Healthy Opportunities for Preschoolers](#) – HOP - The resources provided in this book are intended for use in training care providers in support of the Healthy Opportunities for Preschoolers initiative.

[Invest in Kids](#) – Resources for parents and professionals working with children 0-5.

[Big Science for Little Hands](#) – Science World's early learning site that includes activities for 3-5 year-olds that are intended to serve as a starting point and inspiration for scientific explorations. Each theme includes small and large group activities which can be adapted to any environment.



## Reflecting on the StrongStart BC Program

StrongStart BC facilitators can use the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* and *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice*, as well as other tools, to examine, reflect, and plan their program to ensure that it addresses all areas of early learning.

Early childhood educators use a variety of tools for reflection such as:

- Written field notes
- Anecdotal descriptions
- Children's portfolios
- Checklists
- Photographs

By reflecting on the program, and creating plans based on those reflections, facilitators will continuously improve the quality of their early learning program.

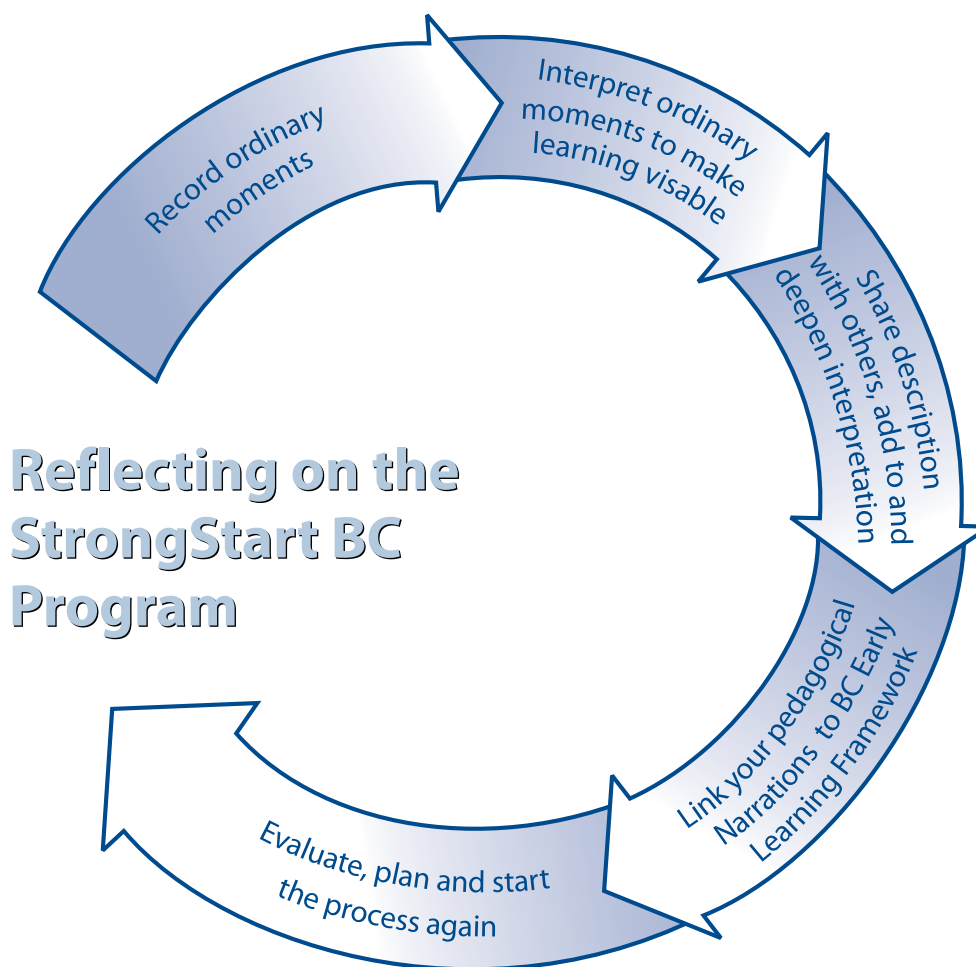


Figure 1: Pedagogical Narration and the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: A Cyclical Process, from *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework*, p. 14.





# The Role of the Facilitator

By definition, **facilitators** help a group of people understand and reach their common objectives. In a StrongStart BC program, the common objective is children's optimal development and learning through a partnership between families and school districts.

StrongStart BC facilitators encourage adult and child participation, create environments and activities to influence children's learning, model strategies that can be used by adults to support children's learning, and provide information to increase adults' understanding of children's development and learning. StrongStart BC programs provide parents and caregivers with opportunities to observe and practice new approaches.

Research has shown that one of the main contributors to a quality early learning program is the educator, in the case of StrongStart BC early learning programs, the facilitator. The skills of the facilitator are pivotal to the success of the program.

The following sections describe the roles and responsibilities of facilitators:

## Facilitators and Adults

## Facilitators and Children

## Facilitators and Families

## Facilitators and the School/School District

## Facilitators and the Community



## Facilitators and Adults

Being a role model, leading by example, is a key aspect of being a StrongStart BC facilitator. Providing parents with information is another important responsibility.

Facilitators can share information with parents and caregivers in a number of ways:

- Provide opportunities for adults to observe and learn new skills and techniques to interact with their children,
- Share information about child development and parenting strategies,
- Demonstrate ways to connect with community resources,
- Share ideas about ways to enrich home environments to support early learning.

Encouraging adults to actively participate and interact with their children is an important responsibility of the facilitator. This can be accomplished in many ways, including:

- describing expectations for adults' active participation, using a StrongStart BC [welcome package](#), or by posting expectations on the [parent information board](#),
- [encouraging adult/child interactions at learning centres](#),
- providing verbal prompts to assist adults who feel awkward or don't know what to do next,
- helping adults to observe and understand better their child's growth and development through dialogue or through documentation such as scrap-booking, photos and exemplars.





## Facilitators and Children

Facilitators are responsible for creating a learning environment and activities that positively influence children's learning. More information on setting up the [StrongStart BC facility](#) and [program planning](#) to foster learning can be found in other sections of this resource.

StrongStart BC facilitators support and influence children's learning by observing, forming relationships, having conversations, and celebrating diversity.

Careful observation of the children's responses can help the facilitator provide a more responsive program. Facilitators should regularly observe how children use and interact with the environment, with each other, and with parents and caregivers. Observations can help ensure that health and safety are addressed, that the program reflects the needs of the children, and that the activities captivate their interests. The observations that facilitators make regarding the children in the program can help to guide the program planning.

The StrongStart BC environment is a social one, where children interact with each other and with adults. Facilitators can build relationships with children, and through these relationships enhance the learning taking place in the program. Meaningful interactions occur when facilitators take the time to share their interests with children, listen carefully and respectfully to each child, and respond to their individual interests. Conversations with the children can assist them in making their own choices about learning activities.

StrongStart BC programs are attended by families of many diverse backgrounds. Facilitators should consider how to reflect the diversity of families in the programming and the facility set-up, props and materials.

A facilitator's teaching role includes:

- Offering new possibilities for children that they may not have at home,
- Listening to and responding to children's ideas and needs,
- Fostering relationships among and with children,
- Arranging the classroom in ways to invite children's participation and creativity,
- Capturing and sharing examples of learning, using various forms of documentation such as pedagogical narrations, photographs, oral storytelling.





## Facilitators and Families

Adults and children may arrive at StrongStart BC early learning centres or outreach with some confusion or anxiety about the program. Facilitators can ease families into the program by providing a welcoming environment, personally greeting them, and showing genuine interest in their attending and becoming involved. Connecting with families can be done in a variety of ways, including creating a welcoming environment in the program, showing respect for the families that attend, and connecting with families outside the scheduled program hours or in the community.

Facilitators may wish to consider the following on how they can best establish meaningful relationships and connection with families:

- Consider sharing their own brief biography, including picture, on the parent information board. Parents want to know about the facilitator working in the program.
- Hold social events at the StrongStart BC site for families. Newsletters, potlucks, and open houses can assist in making connections.
- Utilize parent's strengths to get them involved in the program. Consider developing an inventory of skills that adults would like to share with the program. This could include assisting with translating information into other languages, or sharing songs from different cultures.
- Refer and connect families to community resources. This could be accomplished by having community resources available on the parent information board, or having community service providers such as public health nurses visit the program.
- Honour the language and cultures of all families that attend the program. Consider how those cultures can be reflected in the program.



## UBC HELP Evaluation of StrongStart BC, September 2008

### Recommendation 9: To School Districts

Engage the StrongStart BC facilitators as an integral part of the school staff's internal activities. Encourage StrongStart BC staff attendance at staff and school events, inclusion in professional development activities, use of other school professionals and sharing of facilities and resources.

## Facilitators and the School/School District

To be effective, facilitators need to develop a strong, positive relationship with the staff in the school where the centre is located, as well as with the school district. Facilitators, principals, and district early learning contacts may wish to:

- Hold regular meetings to plan and reflect on the program,
- Meet with school staff (teachers, principal, custodian, and librarian) and school PAC to discuss the program,
- Connect with community groups and other service providers to discuss the program and how to create linkages and referral systems,
- Add information on the StrongStart BC program to school newsletters, websites, and other publications.

## Facilitators and the Community

*The British Columbia Early Learning Framework* vision of families, communities, and governments is that "they will work in partnership to support children in building the foundations for early development and lifelong learning."

StrongStart BC facilitators and school district early learning leaders can connect with their community in meaningful ways. This could be by participating in community-based Early Childhood Development planning tables, connecting with local Aboriginal friendship centres, and/or inviting community agencies to display resources and share information in the StrongStart BC program.





# School District Responsibilities

School Districts hold the ultimate responsibility for their StrongStart BC early learning programs, even if they contract out the operating of the program to a third party. School districts are responsible for following the Ministry of Education Policy on StrongStart BC early learning programs, and the conditions of the Early Learning Transfer Under Agreement between each board of education and the Ministry.

The following sections describe the areas of responsibility for school districts regarding their StrongStart BC early learning programs:

## Reporting

## Hours of Operation

## Staffing

## Role of the Principal







## Reporting

Strong evidence confirms that when programs are continually funded and sustained over many years, part of their success can be attributed to the collection of good utilization data.

A core responsibility of school districts is to ensure PENs (Personal Education Numbers) are requested for all children who attend StrongStart BC early learning programs, and to record attendance at these programs.

District early learning leaders and StrongStart BC facilitators should work together to set up protocols for who is responsible for the various aspects of attendance reporting.

The following sections describe the considerations for reporting attendance and collecting data:

### [Registration and Requesting PENs](#)

### [Attendance](#)

### [Reporting Out to the Ministry of Education](#)

### [Record Keeping](#)



## Registration and Requesting PENs

Most StrongStart BC early learning programs have found that the best way to collect information needed to request a Personal Education Number (PEN) is to have families fill out a registration form. Because of the drop-in nature of the program, facilitators may need to take a session or two to develop a relationship with a family before asking the parent or caregiver to complete a registration form.

The registration form can provide valuable information for the district, as well as information that is needed to assign each child a PEN.

Information provided on the registration form must be verified with valid identification, such as a birth certificate, passport, or documents issued by Immigration Canada. **BC Health Care Cards are not considered valid identification for verification purposes.** The required information to request a PEN includes:

- Legal surname
- Legal given name
- Legal middle name
- Usual surname
- Usual given name
- Usual middle name
- Birth date
- Gender
- Residential Postal Code



A list of acceptable documentation can be found online on the [PEN](#) website.



[Sample Registration Forms](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.

The same process for requesting a PEN for entry into kindergarten is used to assign PENs to younger children. A child's PEN will follow them from StrongStart BC through to Grade 12; therefore, districts will need to ensure that the information entered is accurate.



Further information on Ministry Policies regarding PENs can be found on the [PEN](#) website.



[Frequently asked questions](#) and answers on PEN, Attendance, Reporting and Data Requirements can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



Personal information about a child (name, date of birth) needs to be verified with valid identification. The most common piece of identification is the BC birth certificate, but some families do not have this document. School districts can help parents apply for their child's birth certificate. Families can apply at any time, not just in the months immediately after birth. There is now an online application service for ordering birth certificates. Most other provinces have a similar process.



Information on obtaining birth certificates can be found on the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#) website.

Several StrongStart BC programs have developed creative ways to encourage parents to complete a registration form, including providing a "Welcome to StrongStart BC" package to new families. This [welcome package](#) may contain items such as a brief introduction to the StrongStart BC program, including expectations for parents, goals of the program, a schedule of operation for the program, illness policy, other community resources, and a registration form.

Clipboards are helpful for completing registration forms. Pens that attach to the clipboard allow parents/caregivers to interact with their child and still complete the necessary forms. A child could be given a child-size clipboard to print or draw on while the adult is filling in the form.

Some districts have included school staff, such as secretaries, in the StrongStart BC program during its opening days in the fall to assist families in completing the registration form.



A [Fact sheet](#) for parents on data collection can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.

## Attendance

As per Ministry of Education policy, attendance records must be kept for all children attending StrongStart BC early learning programs. Attendance information must then be entered into BCeSIS. The best way to accomplish this is for adults to sign-in themselves and their children each time they attend the program. Facilitators may need to remind adults about this process. Locating the sign-in book or daily sign-in sheet at or near the entrance works well. Information from daily sign-in sheets can then be transferred to weekly or monthly attendance records. Daily attendance may also be used in case of emergency evacuation of the school, to verify that everyone is safely out of the building.



[Sample Sign in Sheets](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



## Reporting Attendance to the Ministry of Education

School districts are required to enter PENs and positive attendance for each child attending a StrongStart BC program. This information will be extracted from BCeSIS by the Ministry of Education on 2 reporting dates per school year.

- January 10 (attendance for September through December)
- July 10 (attendance for January through June)

The information received by the Ministry does not include personal identifiers for the children who attend the programs.

## Record Keeping

Several types of records must be kept at each StrongStart BC early learning program. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Registration for each child who attends the program,
- Attendance for each child who attends the program,
- PEN for each child who attends the program,
- Full accounting of the receipt and expenditure of the financial contribution from the Ministry for StrongStart BC programs.

Additional information that may be useful to record or retain might include:

- Visits from community partners,
- Field trip permission forms,
- Copies of newsletters and calendars,
- Accidents or illnesses,
- Referrals to community agencies,
- Photo permission forms.



The [StrongStart BC Policy](#) on maintaining data and records can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.





## Computer Access

StrongStart BC facilitators require access to a computer, either in the StrongStart BC room or elsewhere. Computer access is required to log on to the StrongStart BC website, receive and respond to emails, create documents for distribution to families, and to access research about early learning. If the facilitator has been assigned the role of entering information into BCeSIS and requesting PENs, then they will need access to the Internet. Most StrongStart BC facilitators have a school district email address.





## Signage

Ministry-approved outdoor signage for StrongStart BC programs is a requirement and can help new families to locate the program easily.

To create a StrongStart BC sign, school districts should provide the “eps” and “pdf files” (which can be found at the link below) to a local graphics company. The graphics company can use these templates and insert the full name of the StrongStart BC program in the bottom panel.

Many StrongStart BC programs have sandwich board signs that can be placed in an area visible to families from a nearby road. Schools have also posted signs at the entrance to the school.

Signage should be placed in a location where it is visible to as many people as possible to promote the program, and as close to the entrance to the site as possible.



A [StrongStart BC sign template](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education website.



# StrongStartBC

## Roy Stibbs StrongStart Centre

**UBC Help  
Evaluation of  
StrongStart BC,  
September 2008.**

**Recommendation 3:  
To School Districts**

3a. Encourage sites to vary (or supplement) their program hours to meet community needs.

**Recommendation 13:  
To School Districts**

If overcrowding is a problem, create different attendance patterns for groups of families or daycare groups to avoid closure of the classroom.



## Hours of Operation

The days and times of operation for the program should meet the needs of families in the community. Once these have been established, these hours should be posted and communicated widely. Programs operating in the morning appear to be able to attract more families than those operating in the afternoon.



StrongStart BC programs operate five days a week for 3-4 hours a day, during the school year, September through June. Many programs are closed when the school is closed, for example, on district-wide professional development days and statutory holidays.

Outreach programs operate on a different schedule, due to their remote location and the nature of the outreach program. Outreach programs operate 3-4 hours per day, at least one day per week or other mutually-agreed upon program schedule approved by the Ministry of Education.

Most programs open shortly after the school day begins, so that parents who drop off older children at school can carry on to the StrongStart BC program with their younger children. Many districts have found that by operating at a variety of times, they can attract many more families.

One district has tried Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:45 am – 11:45 am, Wednesdays and Fridays from 4:00 pm – 7:00 pm and Saturdays from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm. This type of program attracts families with young children in the mornings, working families during the late afternoon, and a wide variety of families on Saturdays.

## Overcrowding

If overcrowding is a problem, school districts may wish to consider proposing different attendance patterns during the week. For example, families could sign up to attend Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays, or Tuesdays and Thursdays. Another idea from the school districts to ease overcrowding is to suggest to some families that they arrive and leave early while others arrive late and stay until the program ends. Many adults with very young children may only wish to stay for an hour or two.



## Occasional Program Closures

Occasionally, a StrongStart BC program cannot follow its regular schedule of operation. These closures may be due to circumstances such as inclement weather, professional development days, or facilitator absence. It is important that families have as much advance notice as possible that the program will be closed. The principal and school office should be aware of any program closures. Also, posting a sign outside the program indicating program closures will be helpful for families and the rest of the school.

In remote locations where weather conditions play an important factor in attending the program, facilitators may wish to advise parents to contact the school first when the weather is inclement to see if the program will be operating. This may save a futile trip in adverse conditions. In some StrongStart BC outreach programs where the facilitator travels long distances to reach the program, the facilitator may wish to call the principal to discuss whether the program should be open on a particular foul weather day. One way to inform families about program closures is to put a notice on the district website. Families could be advised to check with the website to confirm that programs are operating that day.







## Staffing

The StrongStart BC facilitator plays an integral part in the success of the program. All facilitators are required to be Early Childhood Educators, who have been specifically trained to work with young children age 0 through 5. StrongStart BC facilitators must hold a current Early Childhood Educator license to practice in British Columbia.

The following sections describe staffing items for school districts to consider:

### [Employment Arrangements](#)

### [StrongStart BC Facilitator Staffing Requirements](#)

### [Validation of ECE Licence](#)

### [Criminal Record Checks](#)

### [Job Description](#)

### [Substitute Facilitators](#)

### [Facilitator Hours](#)

### [Professional Development](#)

### [Staff Orientation](#)

### [Facilitator Recruitment](#)



## Employment Arrangements

School districts have made a variety of arrangements for employing facilitators to deliver StrongStart BC early learning programs. In most cases, facilitators are employees of the board of education. The evaluation team indicated a higher level of job satisfaction with facilitators who are employed directly by school districts.

In some cases, school districts have contracted agencies to operate their programs. School districts should keep in mind that they hold the ultimate responsibility for their StrongStart BC programs, even if they contract out the operating of the program. Careful creation of the terms of the contract and regular communication with the contracting agency can help to ensure the program is successful.

When planning to contract with an agency for StrongStart BC programs, school districts should meet with the potential contractor to discuss the expectation of services. Items to be discussed should include:

- administrative responsibilities and costs,
- budget allocation and financial reporting requirements,
- attendance reporting procedures,
- facilitator hours and duties,
- substitute facilitators.

## StrongStart BC Facilitator Staffing Requirements

The facilitator for every StrongStart BC program must hold a current Early Childhood Educator Licence to Practice in British Columbia. The standards for receiving and updating an ECE Licence to Practice fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, [Early Childhood Educator Registry](#). Although StrongStart BC programs are not licensed with Community Care Facilities Licensing, the Ministry of Education still requires that each facilitator hold a current Licence to Practice. This professional recognition ensures that they remain current through professional development.

In the instance where a Licenced Early Childhood Educator cannot be recruited, allowances might be made upon approval from the Ministry of Education for individuals who are working toward their ECE to be StrongStart BC facilitators and are closely supervised by a qualified person.



More information on obtaining a Licence to Practice can found on the [Early Childhood Educator Registry](#) website.



The Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Registry provides information about:

- training options for those interested in pursuing ECE careers,
- requirements for a licence to practice,
- who can apply for an ECE licence to practice.

## Validation of ECE Licence

School districts can access the ECE Registry database to identify whether an individual is currently licenced as an ECE in the province. This service is provided so that anyone can validate a licence to practice certificate.

In order to verify a licence, you will need to have the certificate or registration number located on the upper right-hand corner of the ECE's certificate, the educator's first and last name, and expiry date.



The ECE Registry website contains information on how to validate an ECE Licence.

## Criminal Record Checks



All StrongStart BC facilitators must undergo and pass a criminal records check. Information on criminal records checks can be found on the following website: [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/criminal-records-review/](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/criminal-records-review/)

A recent change to the Criminal Records Review Act, individuals who are required to do criminal record checks, which includes StrongStart BC facilitators, must now be checked every five years. School districts will need to review facilitators' criminal record checks to remain in compliance with this section of the Act.



## Job Description

StrongStart BC facilitators require not only early childhood development experience and knowledge but also leadership skills and experience working with adults and children. Employers should reflect these skill requirements in their job descriptions with clear and concise specifications. The description should contain the terms of employment and suggested wage and benefits package, and should identify the person to whom the facilitator reports.

The following list might be considered when advertising for and interviewing a candidate for the facilitator's position.

A StrongStart BC facilitator will:

- Model skills in front of and in partnership with many parents with different beliefs and values,
- Manage the many needs of parents as well as young children,
- Create, organize and maintain an early childhood environment and respective learning centres in a school-sized classroom,
- Maintain attendance records and registration forms and have compatible computer knowledge and skills required for this task,
- Consult with school administration, district administration and local agency groups,
- Liaise with the school's kindergarten teacher and be an integral member of the school staff,
- Communicate successfully with other agencies pertaining to referrals,
- Liaise and consult with speech-language pathologists and learning assistance teachers, public health nurses, multicultural workers and others as necessary,
- Prepare written communications for parents and the school as necessary,
- Act as a role model in the community and as a member of the local ECE community,
- Build a relationship with multiple parents in a group setting,
- Plan a program for a mixed-age group from infants to 5-year-olds,
- Prepare resources for one-on-one adult/child interaction,
- Document child developmental progress in a drop-in program,
- Communicate with school, school district, and Ministry staff,



[Sample Job Descriptions](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education website.





## UBC HELP Evaluation of StrongStart BC, September 2008.

### Recommendation 18: To School Districts

Provide professional-development activities for principals, kindergarten teachers and facilitators of StrongStart BC programs...

## Substitute Facilitators

When the StrongStart BC facilitator is absent from the program, districts have the option to either temporarily close the centre or have a substitute facilitator who is familiar with the program and who holds an ECE licence to practice run the program. To ensure the program continues to run smoothly with a substitute facilitator, districts can prepare a package of information including a checklist about critical actions the person needs to follow to sustain the program. In addition, shadowing the facilitator for a session or two in advance will help maintain program quality. Adults attending the program should be informed when there is a substitute facilitator in the program. Whenever possible, informing them in advance is preferable.

If having a substitute facilitator is not the chosen option, the program may need to close for a short period of time. School staff and families should be notified as soon as possible if the program is temporarily closed. Because the program is drop-in, it may not be possible to individually notify parents of the program closure if the facilitator's absence has not been predicted; however, ensuring that the school office staff are aware of the closure will assist in communicating this to parents.

## Facilitator Hours

StrongStart BC centres must be open 5 days per week, a minimum of 3 hours per day (StrongStart BC outreach programs may open on a protracted schedule, due to their unique nature).

StrongStart BC facilitators will need time over and above these three hours to plan, prepare for the program delivery, attend meetings, participate in professional development, do community outreach, and carry out administrative duties as needed. This may also include time required to purchase snacks and supplies for the program.

## Professional Development

In order to maintain an ECE licence to practice, a minimum of 40 hours of professional development is required for ECEs every five years. Professional development plans for each year should be planned into the facilitator's schedule.

Some districts include StrongStart BC facilitators in local professional development workshops, conferences, and training offerings. In addition, districts can allocate some funds for facilitators to attend workshops when registration or travel costs are involved, for example Ministry of Education sponsored meetings.

In 2007 and 2008, provincial StrongStart BC facilitator meetings were held for all facilitators. In 2009 and the future, more provincial and regional professional development opportunities will take place. The agreements between the Ministry and boards of education require facilitators to participate in these meetings.



## Staff Orientation

New StrongStart BC staff should be provided with as much information as possible before stepping into their new role. Networking with existing facilitators in the district or other districts is critical. Visiting another centre is a great way to familiarize new facilitators with the program expectations.

District early learning leaders should carefully plan the orientation for new facilitators by providing them with a local StrongStart BC program policy and guideline handbook, arranging an initial meeting with the school principal and other school staff members, reviewing district policies and practices with them, and engaging in an on-going dialogue about the goals of the program.

## Facilitator Recruitment



To assist and support school districts to recruit Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) for StrongStart BC early learning programs, the Ministry has posted StrongStart BC [career information](#) on its early learning website.

Information provided on the Ministry website includes:

- Background information on StrongStart BC early learning programs and working in a StrongStart BC program,
- Frequently asked questions on becoming a facilitator,
- Testimonial statements from StrongStart BC facilitators.



In addition to local job posting strategies, school district can also post StrongStart BC career opportunities on the [BC Public School Employers' Association](#) website. This will allow any prospective Early Childhood Educator across the Province to search for StrongStart BC opportunities at a single website. BCPSEA may also be able to offer other recruitment supports.



**UBC HELP  
Evaluation of  
StrongStart BC,  
September 2008.**

**Recommendation 10:  
To School Districts**

Designate responsibility for program leaderships and supervision to a district staff member and the principal of involved schools. Provide them with professional-development experiences so they can work with the facilitator to integrate the StrongStart BC program into the school system. Designate clear reporting relationships.

## Role of the Principal

The StrongStart BC Evaluation report states that “Research on school leadership credits the role of the school principal as essential to the successful implementation of new programs in schools—not for pedagogy of new programs which are typically led by school district staff but for human resource, parent resource, professional development, communication, interagency collaboration, safety and facility management.”

The evaluation found that StrongStart BC programs thrived when the principal supported the program.

Support from principals can be provided in several ways. Principals can drop in to the program to greet parents, share stories with the children, meet regularly with the facilitator, and advocate for the program at the community and district level.

Other ways that principals can play a leadership role in the StrongStart BC early learning program include:

- Making the facilitator a real member of the school staff team,
- Creating strong collaborative relationships with partners that affect the program, both inside and outside the school community,
- Being supportive of all staff, including StrongStart BC facilitators, kindergarten teachers, and school resource teachers,
- Directing resources to the program,
- Resolving obstacles to providing a quality early learning program,
- Building a collaborative approach to solving problems with staff,
- Meeting with new principals in schools with StrongStart BC centres or outreach programs to ensure a smooth transition.

By being actively engaged with the StrongStart BC program, principals will become involved early on with young children and their families. This early involvement will strengthen school-home connections and build partnerships with families.

# Communication

To make StrongStart BC early learning programs successful, information needs to flow between and among the Ministry of Education, school districts, district early learning contacts, StrongStart BC facilitators, families, and community partners. For districts, this should include local health authorities and other local agencies that serve families.

The following sections describe communications school districts should consider:

## [Communication with the Ministry of Education](#)

### [School District Communication](#)

### [School Communication](#)

### [Communication with the Community](#)

### [Advertising StrongStart BC Programs](#)

### [Connecting Families with Other Services](#)





## Communication with the Ministry of Education

To support effective programming for StrongStart BC early learning programs, school districts, facilitators, and the staff in the Early Learning Branch of the Ministry of Education communicate on a regular basis by a variety of means.

School districts are required to keep Ministry staff updated with current district early learning contact information and facilitator contact information.

School district staff should regularly check with the Ministry of Education early learning [website](#) for up-to-date information on StrongStart BC early learning programs and other early learning initiatives, including [Ready, Set, Learn](#) and the [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#).

School districts must arrange with the Ministry of Education's Public Affairs Bureau an official opening for each of their StrongStart BC early learning programs. Districts must also provide and install a sign that meets Ministry of Education standards for signage, marking their StrongStart BC programs. Additional information on the StrongStart BC communications protocol can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



The [communications protocol](#) for StrongStart BC programs can be found on the Ministry of Education website.

Communication goes both ways. The Early Learning Branch of the Ministry of Education publishes an Early Learning Newsletter. These newsletters contain news about Ministry initiatives, research information, important updates on early learning programs, and other items of interest for StrongStart BC facilitators and early learning staff.



[Early learning newsletters](#) can be found on the Ministry of Education website.



## School District Communication

School districts need a plan for how they communicate with families about the StrongStart BC programs they are offering. Parents often contact the school district office for information on early learning programs in their community. To answer parents' questions about their StrongStart BC programs, many districts have dedicated a section of their websites to early learning programs and/or to their StrongStart BC programs. Websites can help to promote the programs, clarify the intent of the program, inform interested families of the hours of operation, and other pertinent information.



School district websites that include StrongStart BC information:

- <http://public.sd43.bc.ca/district/strongstart/default.aspx>
- <http://web.sd71.bc.ca/strongstart/>
- <http://strongstart.sd33.org/>



## School Communication

Well-established communication strategies should be in place between the StrongStart BC facilitators and the district early learning leaders and school staff. To be truly effective, StrongStart BC early learning programs must be an integral part of the school. Facilitators and district early learning contacts should set up regular meetings with school staff, including principals, kindergarten teachers, librarians, and other staff members to communicate about the program and to discuss ways the programs can connect and interact.

Regular school communication processes can include StrongStart BC information. Promoting StrongStart BC programs can be a regular feature mentioned in each school newsletter. The newsletter offers an excellent vehicle for "spreading the news" to neighbourhood families who may have pre-school age children.

To increase communication, schools can involve their StrongStart BC programs in events throughout the year such as Ready, Set, Learn, Welcome to Kindergarten, sports days, special assemblies, and celebrations.



## Communication with the Community

Awareness is growing in BC communities about the importance of providing programs to children prior to kindergarten entry. One way to transmit this message is to encourage key individuals to visit a StrongStart BC early learning program.

To be successful, StrongStart BC programs need to build relationships not only within the school but also with the broader community. Strong relationships among StrongStart BC program staff and community service staff will strengthen the efforts of each. District early learning contacts, principals, and facilitators can all play a role in building these relationships. When creating yearly program goals, districts may wish to consider including a schedule for sending out invitations to influential community leaders. Consider:

- Board of Education members
- Municipal leaders
- Business leaders
- Senior staff from interagency services
- Your local MLA

Creative and non-traditional approaches are often necessary to build productive relationships with community organizations. Districts might consider:

- Additional paid hours beyond program hours for the StrongStart BC facilitator or district early learning contact to meet with community groups,
- Designating a district staff person to sit on the early childhood coalition planning tables,
- Providing regular updates on StrongStart BC programs to community groups,
- Working with family support agencies to identify families who might benefit from the program,
- Meeting with Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal-serving agencies to develop partnerships and encourage families to attend,
- Inviting community groups or agencies to use the StrongStart BC program space when it is not needed.

An effective way to better understand and encourage interagency cooperation is to develop a chart that documents the inter-connectedness among services. Examples of such charts are contained in the UBC HELP [evaluation](#) report.





**UBC HELP**  
**Evaluation of**  
**StrongStart BC,**  
**September 2008**

**Recommendation 15:**  
**To School Districts**

Establish a formal relationship with the local intersectoral coalition (if not already in place) to collaborate on early learning initiatives. Establish partnerships, share resources and develop interagency referral processes that can be implemented through the StrongStart BC program.

StrongStart BC programs are part of the wider array of early learning services. StrongStart BC can help families connect with other community programs such as libraries, health care, and child care. Districts should create opportunities for community agencies to connect with families who attend StrongStart BC programs. This could include inviting guests to the program, sharing resources, consulting with other drop-in programs, posting information about other agencies, and inviting community groups to any open houses or community events the program may hold. Opportunities for community connection can be effectively established by having service providers and professionals participate in the daily program of StrongStart BC. It does not have to be a formal presentation but rather a chance for service providers and parents/caregivers to interact.



An example of an interconnectedness chart can be found in the [StrongStart BC Evaluation](#), p.44, Revelstoke (Mountain View Elementary).



## Advertising StrongStart BC Programs

School districts will need an ongoing advertising and marketing plan for StrongStart BC programs to connect with families moving into the area and young families with newborns, as well as other families who may not be aware of the program. Advertisement limited to the school community will not reach families whose young children are not yet attending school. Districts will need to be creative in developing methods to reach the community. Consider:

- Radio interviews
- Newspaper coverage
- Flyer distribution
- Open houses
- Pamphlets
- Posters and flyers for community spaces and service agency offices
- Health fairs
- Ready, Set, Learn events
- Doctors' and dentists' offices
- Mall notice boards
- Grocery store or community centre bulletin boards

Districts should tailor their advertising strategy to the community the program serves. In one neighborhood the local coin laundry might be a great place to distribute information; material on the bulletin board of a social housing development might attract families. Many facilitators and district early learning contacts have connected and shared brochures and posters with these agencies. Groups that might distribute or post advertisements or promotional materials include:

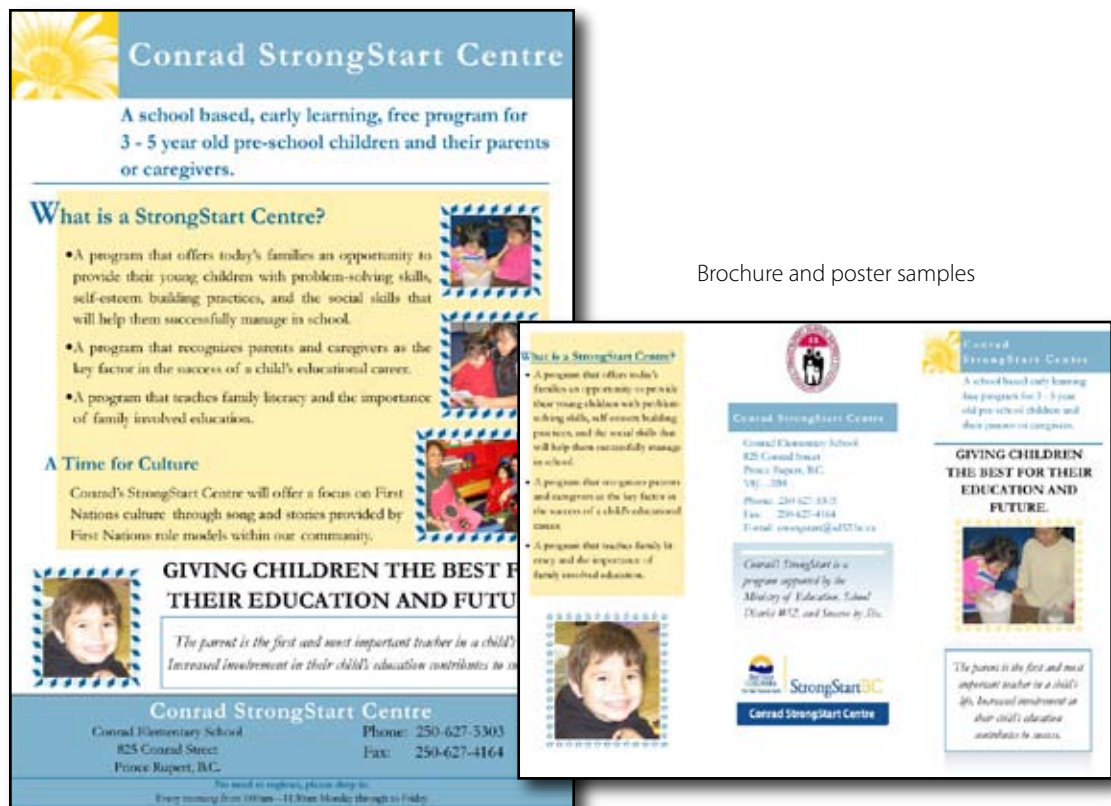
- Aboriginal Head Start programs
- Child Care Resource and Referral sites
- Local television public service programming
- Aboriginal agencies
- Literacy programs
- Local public health clinics
- Family Resource Program sites
- Make Children First planning table members
- Community ECD program



Word of mouth is often the most effective and economical way to advertise the program. Encourage adults attending the program to invite families that they know to visit the program. Adults who are enthusiastic about StrongStart BC can be the best ambassadors for the program, and engaging them in promoting the program will also build their own feelings of "ownership" for its success.



Sample StrongStart BC brochures and posters can be found on the Ministry of Education's website.



Brochure and poster samples



## BUMBLEBEES StrongStart BC Centre

-An Early Childhood/Parent Participation Centre funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Education & a partnership with Make Children First

Ages 0-6 ~ Free~ 8:30 am ~11:30 am

Monday thru Fridays~ Drop-In Format throughout school year



**UBC HELP  
StrongStart BC  
Centre Evaluation  
September 2008:**

**Recommendation 16:  
To School Districts**

Establish internal policies and procedures for referrals of families and/or children with special needs or who may be considered to be living in a condition of risk. Define roles, responsibilities and processes for referrals both in the school district and to interagency groups, particularly health authorities and social services, using formal and informal channels of communication.

## Connecting Families with Other Services

Research has shown that successful early learning programs build parenting skills, provide information, and refer families to community resources. The StrongStart BC evaluation found that “referrals were becoming a natural, efficient, and commonplace part of the integrated approach to young children” (StrongStart BC Evaluation, p. 45).

Reciprocal relationships need to be established between StrongStart BC programs and the various agencies so they can work together to make referrals.

One of the greatest advantages of collaborative relationships among StrongStart BC programs and other services is early identification and interventions to help children and families at critical stages of children’s development.

For the purpose of referring families to services beyond the StrongStart BC program, school districts may wish to consider the following:

- Work with local early childhood coalitions to develop referral processes,
- Establish internal policies and procedures for referrals of families and/or children with special needs or those who may be living in a condition of risk ,
- Define roles, responsibilities, and processes for referrals to health authorities and social services, using formal and informal channels of communication, depending on the situation,
- Create protocol for instances in which non-StrongStart BC program personnel visit the program to observe children or carry out assessments,
- Provide facilitators with clearly defined protocols for making referrals and allowing observations for the school district and for community service providers.





# Health and Safety Practices

StrongStart BC early learning programs should be safe for children, adults, and staff. School districts should assess the safety of the environment, food served, and children's personal safety within the program. The physical environment must be safe for children of all ages, including infants and toddlers. Snacks or other food served should take into account allergies and food sensitivities of the children and adults who attend. The program should have procedures in place in case of accidents and emergencies.

The following sections describe areas of consideration for the health and safety of families attending StrongStart BC programs:

## Providing a Safe Environment

### Food Safety





## Providing a Safe Environment

The first consideration for making a StrongStart BC program safe for all who attend is the program environment. Safety issues within the environment should be addressed before the program is open to families.

In making a StrongStart BC environment safe, school districts should consider the following:

[Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces](#)

[Access to Water for Hand Washing](#)

[Dishwashing Guidelines](#)

[Hot Liquids](#)

[Bathrooms](#)

[Diapering Guidelines](#)

[Electrical Outlets](#)

[Medications and Illnesses](#)

[Accidents](#)

[First Aid Recommendations](#)

[Fire Drills/Earthquake Drills/Lockdown Drills](#)



## Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces

All surfaces in the StrongStart BC environment should be kept clean. Surfaces that require the most attention are toys that children may put in their mouths, the diaper changing areas, and food preparation areas.

Small items, such as small toys, cups, bowls, and utensils, can be washed in a dishwasher. Larger items, such as tables will require a different method of disinfecting. The most common way to disinfect tables is to use sanitizing spray. Please note that many sprays on the market are not disinfectants. It is easy to make your own disinfectant.



- For small dishes and small toys: Mix 1 tsp. of household bleach with 1 gallon of water or 5 ml with 4 litres. Immerse dishes for two minutes.
- For larger toys and surfaces: Mix 10 ml of bleach with 1 litre of water (1:100 solution). Leave on for 30 seconds. Create a new mixture daily and apply from a spray bottle.

Bleach solution should be stored in a cool place, out of reach of children. If facilitators choose to use commercial disinfectant, care should be given to its use, following the manufacturer's instructions on the label. Facilitators may wish to discuss cleaning procedures with the school custodian.





**UBC HELP  
Evaluation of  
StrongStart BC,  
September 2008:**

**Recommendation 4:  
To School Districts**

In determining the placement of the program in the school, ensure that the classroom has running water, accessible outdoor play areas suitable for preschool children, and easy access to washrooms.

### *Access to Water for Hand Washing*

Wherever possible, the StrongStart BC program should have access to hot and cold water in within the program centre. This will enhance program offerings but more importantly, will prevent the spread of bacteria. Facilitators, adults and children should wash their hands before preparing and eating food and after using the toilet, and should use individual towels, liquid soap and running water. A stable platform or step stool can be provided in front of high sinks for children.





## Dishwashing Guidelines

All StrongStart BC programs should provide a healthy snack for the families that attend. All dishes used for snack time should be cleaned properly. Use an electric dishwasher daily, if possible, or wash dishes daily using warm water and detergent.

StrongStart BC staff can use the “3 sink method” when washing dishes.

1. wash dishes in a clean detergent solution
2. rinse with clean water at 43° C
3. sanitize for at least 45 seconds using clean hot water, or use 2 ml of household bleach with 1 litre of water (or other sanitizing solutions)
4. air dry



The following is a link to a poster on washing dishes: [www.ingoodhands.ca/pdf/Dishwashing.pdf](http://www.ingoodhands.ca/pdf/Dishwashing.pdf)

## Hot Liquids

Hot liquids – not fire – are the most common causes of burns to young children. Scalds from hot water can represent a significant risk to young children who attend StrongStart BC early learning programs. The best way to prevent burns from water is to carefully assess the temperature of the water coming from the hot water heater. A safe temperature for a hot water heater is 49°C (120°F). Facilitators can speak to the school principal if they feel that the temperature of the hot water in the program needs to be reduced.

Burns can also occur from hot liquids, such as coffee and tea. Place containers of hot liquids, such as coffee pots, back from the edge of counters and tables. Remind those parents/ caregivers with coffee or tea to keep their cups out of children’s reach.



More information on hot water safety can be found at: [www.aboutkidshealth.ca/HealthAZ/Burn-Safety-Hot-Water-Temperature.aspx?articleID=8652&categoryID=](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/HealthAZ/Burn-Safety-Hot-Water-Temperature.aspx?articleID=8652&categoryID=)



**UBC HELP  
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In determining the placement of the program in the school, ensure that the classroom has running water, accessible outdoor play areas suitable for preschool children, and easy access to washrooms.

## Bathrooms

All children and adults who attend the StrongStart BC program should have adequate access to bathroom facilities. Special consideration should be given to families who attend the program with young children in diapers. School districts should also keep in mind that parents/caregivers will need to accompany their children in the bathroom.

Schools that include a StrongStart BC program may wish to designate a specific bathroom for families attending the StrongStart BC program. This is advisable since these bathrooms will be used by both adults and children at the same time. Schools may not wish to have adults access bathrooms that students use.

Adults should supervise their own children in the bathroom to ensure flushing and hand-washing procedures. Also consider:

- A stable platform or step stool should be provided in front of high sinks or toilets,
- Bathrooms should have running hot and cold water, liquid soap and individual hand towels.



Consider posting hand washing information in the bathrooms, printed in a variety of languages.

Handwashing posters to download in a variety of languages.

## Diapering Guidelines

Many families attend StrongStart BC programs with infants and toddlers who are still in diapers. Consideration should be given to how families can change and dispose of diapers in a safe and sanitary manner.

- Change tables should have a non-porous surface and should be sanitized by the adult after each use .
- Provide a closed garbage container for soiled diapers.
- Keep the diapering area separate from the food preparation area; ideally the change table will be mounted in the bathroom.

## Electrical Outlets

Young children must be protected from potential electrical shocks. Cover electrical outlets in all areas of the program that are used by children. If your StrongStart BC room is used by other programs, or is cleaned by custodial staff, be sure to check that these outlets are still covered prior to opening the program for families.



## Medications and Illnesses

Families may arrive at the StrongStart BC program with illness or with medication. School districts should consider the following when developing a medication and illness policy for the StrongStart BC program:

- Parents/caregivers should be the only persons responsible for administering medication.
- If a child or parent/caregiver appears to be sick with a communicable illness, the parent should be asked to leave the classroom to protect other children, parents and staff and for the comfort of the sick person. Symptoms such as a generalized rash, vomiting, diarrhea, chronic cough, fever, or known communicable disease such as measles or mumps should raise concern.
- If in doubt or if a parent refuses to follow the illness policy, public health expertise should be consulted.
- Any outbreak of disease (2 or more persons within 48 hours) should be reported to the local health authority using the procedure used by the school district.
- Health authorities will be able to provide information on identification of illnesses, next steps, and prevention of common childhood diseases and illnesses. This information can be shared with adults attending the program, as well as the school.



A list of local health authorities is provided on the [Ministry of Health Services](#) website.

## Accidents

When an accident or injury occurs at a StrongStart BC early learning program, immediate action should be taken to help the injured party. Steps should then be taken to ensure that a similar occurrence does not happen. Facilitators should review the occurrence, including precipitating factors, location and equipment, to learn from the experience and to prevent future occurrences. School accident procedures should be followed if the accident is deemed moderate to severe.





## First Aid Recommendations

The StrongStart BC facilitator should be provided with the opportunity to register for a certified first aid course. A standard first aid kit should be readily available in the classroom. Where bodily fluid and/or blood are involved, the following procedures are recommended:

- Wash hands before and after and wear disposable gloves,
- Cover cuts,
- Clean affected surfaces with bleach,
- Dispose of all materials in secure plastic bags,
- Wash blood-stained laundry in hot soapy water.



A list of [Red Cross First Aid Supplies](#) can be found on the Red Cross website.

## Fire Drills/ Earthquake Drills/Lockdown Drills

The StrongStart BC facilitator should follow local school policies and procedures concerning safety drills.

Fire, earthquake, and lockdown drills may occur at schools on a regularly scheduled basis. It is important that StrongStart BC early learning programs be familiar with the site's evacuation procedure. Keep an up-to-date attendance list accessible by the entrance to the program, and post the emergency procedures for parents and visitors who attend the program. Speak to the school principal regarding emergency drills and request to be notified prior to these drills occurring. Prior notification of emergency drills allows the facilitator to guide families through the procedure, making it a positive experience for families. Many children may be fearful of the loud warning sound, and preparing them will be helpful.

StrongStart BC programs may wish to consider adding an earthquake kit to their safety supplies. An earthquake kit is a portable bag or backpack that contains emergency supplies, and hangs or is placed beside the room exit. This kit will need to be taken with the facilitator when the room is evacuated during an emergency evacuation.



[Grab 'N Go Kit](#) emergency supplies list can be found online on the Provincial Emergency Preparedness site.



## Food Safety

Snack time is an integral component of the StrongStart BC daily program. Considerations for healthy eating, safety, and food allergies must be taken when planning and preparing for snack time.

### Food Storage and Preparation Guidelines

#### Allergies

#### Anaphylaxis Framework





## Food Storage and Preparation Guidelines

Snack time is an important part of every StrongStart BC session. This is a time to share food, encourage conversation, and learn more about the cultures with the families that attend the program.

When planning and preparing snack, consideration should be given to food safety, including allergies, safe food handling, and storage.

Other items to consider when planning and preparing snack include:

- Purchase foods from reliable sources,
- Store dry foods in covered glass or plastic containers,
- Wash fruits and vegetables before serving,
- Store perishable foods in a refrigerator,
- Throw out leftovers that have been served ,
- Keep food surfaces (cutting boards) free from cracks and sanitize regularly,
- Clean and disinfect snack tables regularly,
- Provide garbage containers with lids,
- Avoid peanuts, hard candies, whole grapes, popcorn, nuts and seeds,
- Be cautious with hard vegetables or chunks of food (due to choking possibilities).

## Allergies

Adults and children with life-threatening allergies who attend StrongStart BC early learning programs will need assurance that they are protected while in the program. All schools must have an anaphylactic plan in place. Please talk to your principal about this plan.

Facilitators must be made aware of any allergies and have a full understanding of the child or adult's condition. As part of the enrolment process, consult with parents/ caregivers about any allergies and necessary safety precautions, including the posting of an alert about the child's allergy on the parent notice board. Other adults attending the program can be informed about these allergies as well, since parents and caregivers often help with snack preparation.



## Anaphylaxis Framework

To protect children with life-threatening allergies, the Ministry of Education requires school districts to establish school-based anaphylaxis policies and practices that meet rigorous provincial standards. District responsibilities include identifying individuals at risk, storing and administering medication, and creating an allergy-aware school community.



[Anaphylaxis Guidelines](#) can be found online on the Ministry of Education website.



