2.26 Accessibility Policy

Organization: Growing Together Family Resource Centre
Applies To: All employees, students, volunteers, families and visitors
Legislation: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)
Review Frequency: Annually

Purpose
Growing Together is committed to providing an inclusive, accessible and welcoming environment for all children, families, employees, students, volunteers and visitors.

The organization recognizes that individuals with disabilities may experience barriers when accessing programs, services, facilities, information and employment opportunities. Growing Together is committed to identifying, preventing and removing barriers to accessibility while promoting dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

This policy is intended to support compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), its applicable regulations and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Scope
This policy applies to all Growing Together locations, programs and services, including interactions with children, families, employees, students, volunteers, visitors, contractors and members of the community.

Policy Statement
Growing Together will make reasonable efforts to ensure that:

1. Children with disabilities have opportunities to participate meaningfully in all aspects of the child care program.
2. Families and visitors with disabilities can access our programs, services and facilities.
3. Employees with disabilities are provided with reasonable accommodations to support their employment.
4. Information and communication are provided in accessible formats, where requested and reasonably available.
5. Staff understand their responsibilities in supporting accessibility and inclusion.
6. Barriers to accessibility are identified, documented and addressed whenever possible.
7. Accessibility considerations are incorporated into organizational planning, purchasing, facility improvements and program development.

Definitions
Accessibility: The removal and prevention of barriers that may prevent individuals with disabilities from participating fully in society.

Disability: As defined under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA, including physical, sensory, mental health, developmental, learning and other disabilities.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in an activity, program, service or environment.

Accommodation: An adjustment or modification made to support an individual's needs and enable meaningful participation.

Responsibilities

Director

- Ensure organizational policies and practices align with applicable accessibility legislation.
- Oversee the development, implementation and annual review of the Accessibility Plan.
- Ensure required staff training and accessibility records are maintained.
- Review accessibility concerns and coordinate appropriate responses.
- Ensure accessibility requirements are considered when purchasing goods and services and planning facility improvements.

Centre Supervisors

- Identify accessibility barriers within their centres.
- Work with families and employees to identify reasonable accommodations.
- Ensure staff understand and implement inclusive practices.
- Report accessibility concerns to Director and follow up on identified barriers.
- Ensure accessibility considerations are incorporated into program planning and daily operations.

Employees

- Treat all individuals with dignity, respect and consideration.
- Support the inclusion and participation of children with disabilities.
- Communicate respectfully and identify individual accessibility needs.
- Participate in required accessibility training.
- Report barriers or concerns to their supervisor.

Accessible Customer Service

Growing Together is committed to providing accessible customer service to children, families and visitors.

The organization will:

- Communicate with individuals in a manner that considers their accessibility needs.
- Welcome support persons accompanying individuals with disabilities.
- Permit service animals in areas of the premises open to the public, subject to applicable legal requirements and restrictions.

- Provide notice when facilities or services normally used by individuals with disabilities are temporarily unavailable, where required.
- Offer reasonable assistance when accessing programs and services.
- Seek feedback regarding accessibility and respond to concerns in a timely manner.

Inclusion and Accessibility in Child Care Programs
Growing Together recognizes that each child has unique strengths, abilities and needs.

The organization will:
- Work collaboratively with families to understand each child's strengths, needs and required accommodations.
- Make reasonable efforts to adapt the environment, materials, routines and activities to support participation and belonging.
- Provide inclusive learning opportunities that recognize and respect individual differences.
- Use appropriate visual supports, communication strategies, adaptive equipment and other resources where needed.
- Collaborate with families and appropriate community professionals, with consent, to support children's participation and development.
- Review accommodations regularly and adjust them as a child's needs change.

All accommodation decisions will be made on an individualized basis and in accordance with applicable legislation.

Employment Accessibility
Growing Together is committed to fair and accessible employment practices.

The organization will:
- Advise applicants and employees that accommodations are available throughout the recruitment and employment process.
- Provide reasonable workplace accommodations upon request.
- Develop individual accommodation plans where required.
- Provide accessible formats and communication supports for employees where needed.
- Consider accessibility needs during performance management, career development and return-to-work processes.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding employee accommodation information.

Training
Growing Together will provide accessibility training to employees, volunteers and other individuals as required by the AODA and applicable regulations. Training will consist of:

- Watching https://youtu.be/bARpvRDwiGc *How Can I Help You? - Accessible Customer Service Training Video produced by the Ministry of Community and Social Services of Ontario for training Staff, Volunteers and Frontline Staff on the*

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This training video will be viewed upon starting with the organization and annually thereafter.

- Reading Growing Together's 2.26 Accessibility Policy and Accessibility Plan upon starting with the organization and annually thereafter.

Feedback and Concerns
Growing Together welcomes feedback regarding accessibility and inclusion. Individuals may share concerns or suggestions with their Centre Supervisor or the Director. Feedback will be reviewed and appropriate action will be taken where possible.

Policy Review
This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as required to reflect legislative changes, organizational needs and feedback received.

2.26 a) Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Planning Period: 2026–2030
Approved By: Rebecca Dodman
Approval Date: November 2, 2026
Next Scheduled Review: November 2030

1. Organizational Commitment

Growing Together is committed to providing an accessible and inclusive environment that supports the dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity of individuals with disabilities.

We recognize that accessibility is an ongoing responsibility and that barriers may exist within our physical environments, communication practices, organizational procedures and program delivery.

Through this plan, Growing Together will identify existing barriers, establish strategies to address accessibility concerns and continually improve the accessibility of our programs, services and workplaces.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this Accessibility Plan are to:

- Identify and remove barriers that may prevent individuals from accessing our programs and services.
- Ensure children with disabilities are supported in participating in meaningful learning experiences.
- Provide employees with reasonable workplace accommodations.
- Improve accessibility within our facilities and outdoor play environments.
- Ensure communication and organizational information are accessible.
- Provide ongoing accessibility education and training.
- Establish accountability for accessibility throughout the organization.
- Review accessibility practices regularly and identify opportunities for improvement.

3. Accessibility Improvement Areas

A. Customer Service and Program Accessibility

Goal: Ensure children, families and visitors with disabilities have equitable access to Growing Together programs and services.

Actions:

- Provide individualized accommodations based on the needs of children and families.
- Work collaboratively with families to identify barriers and appropriate supports.

- Adapt program activities, materials and routines to encourage participation.
- Provide alternative communication methods when needed.
- Ensure support persons are welcomed where applicable.
- Review concerns or complaints related to accessibility and inclusion.

Responsibility: Director, Centre Supervisors, and Classroom Educators
Timeline: Ongoing

B. Physical Environment and Facilities

Goal: Identify and address physical barriers within child care facilities and outdoor play spaces.

Actions:

- Conduct an annual accessibility review of each centre.
- Assess entrances, hallways, doorways, washrooms and common areas for accessibility barriers.
- Identify potential barriers within outdoor play spaces, playgrounds and pathways.
- Ensure accessible parking and designated accessible routes are maintained where applicable.
- Consider accessibility when planning renovations, construction or facility improvements.
- Address maintenance concerns that may affect accessibility, including damaged ramps, uneven surfaces and obstructed pathways.
- Identify opportunities to incorporate accessible play equipment and inclusive learning environments.

Responsibility: Director and Centre Supervisors
Timeline: Annual review and ongoing improvements

C. Information and Communication

Goal: Ensure information is communicated in a manner that considers the accessibility needs of individuals.

Actions:

- Provide accessible formats or communication supports upon request, in accordance with applicable requirements.
- Use clear and understandable language in family communications.
- Consider visual supports, alternative communication methods and assistive technology.
- Ensure organizational documents and online information meet applicable accessibility standards.
- Review website accessibility and identify opportunities for improvement.

- Ensure emergency and program information can be communicated to individuals with disabilities.

Responsibility: Director and Centre Supervisors
Timeline: Ongoing; annual review

D. Employment Practices

Goal: Provide an accessible and inclusive workplace for employees and job applicants.

Actions:

- Notify applicants that accommodations are available throughout the recruitment process.
- Provide workplace accommodations when required.
- Develop individual accommodation plans where applicable.
- Consult with employees regarding accessible workplace information and communication needs.
- Provide individualized workplace emergency response information where required.
- Consider accessibility during performance management, career development and return-to-work planning.
- Maintain confidentiality of employee accommodation information.

Responsibility: Director and Centre Supervisors
Timeline: Ongoing

E. Staff Education and Awareness

Goal: Ensure employees understand accessibility requirements and their role in creating an inclusive environment.

Actions:

- Provide required AODA and Ontario Human Rights Code training.
- Include accessibility information during new employee orientation.
- Provide additional education regarding inclusive child care practices.
- Review organizational accessibility policies with employees.
- Encourage staff to identify and report accessibility barriers.
- Maintain documentation of required training.

Responsibility: Director and Centre Supervisors
Timeline: Upon starting with the organization, when revisions are made and annually thereafter.

F. Organizational Policies and Procedures

Goal: Ensure accessibility is considered throughout organizational decision-making.

Actions:

- Review organizational policies annually to ensure they reflect accessibility requirements.
- Consider accessibility when purchasing goods, services and equipment, where required.
- Incorporate accessibility considerations into facility planning and renovations.
- Provide an accessible process for submitting feedback and concerns.
- Ensure accessibility responsibilities are understood by administration and staff.
- Review the Accessibility Plan and document progress toward established goals.

Responsibility: Director and Centre Supervisors
Timeline: Annual review and ongoing

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Growing Together will monitor progress through:

- Annual accessibility inspections of centre facilities.
- Review of accessibility concerns and feedback received.
- Review of employee training records.
- Review of individual accommodation processes.
- Identification of outstanding accessibility barriers.
- Evaluation of completed improvements.
- Updates to organizational policies and procedures.

Identified barriers will be documented, assigned to the appropriate individual and addressed based on urgency, feasibility, available resources and applicable legal obligations.

5. Communication and Availability

Growing Together will make its Accessibility Policy and Accessibility Plan available to employees, families and members of the public.

Individuals may request a copy in an accessible format or with communication supports.

Accessibility concerns, questions or suggestions may be directed to:

Director: Rebecca Dodman
Email: rebecca.dodman@gtfrc.org
Telephone: (519)352-6554 ext. 6

6. Review and Updates

This plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years where required by the AODA. Growing Together will also conduct an annual internal review to evaluate progress, identify new barriers and determine whether changes are required.