



## Images of Child and Family

In spring 2021, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University conducted four case studies with childcare directors and senior staff to learn how support for newcomer and Indigenous families can be realized in the Edmonton region. Many themes were derived from these conversations, including that for all sites **a strong image of the child and family deeply influence relationships in childcare environments.**

### A Strong Image of the Child and Family Influence Relationships in Childcare

In the case studies, all the centres spoke about the value of employing staff who have a strong image of the child and their family to create a welcoming environment and foster meaningful relationships. According to *Flight*, a strong image of the child involves a respectful perspective of learning where children are viewed as “strong, resourceful and capable learner(s) and citizen(s)” (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 39). Each centre shared how they emphasize a strong image of the child and family in their childcare environment:

At the **Newcomer-focused centre**, the staff are encouraged to work from a strength-based perspective to acknowledge the resiliencies, abilities, and experiences of all families.

- This sentiment is mirrored in their foundational principle titled “holistic integrated practice.” The objective is to view all children and families as strong and capable individuals.

At the **Indigenous-focused centre**, a strong image of the child is rooted in traditional beliefs and practices where children are viewed as “beautiful, wild, and compassionate.”

- In addition, the centre’s commitment to culturally relevant programming emphasizes the importance of having positive regard for children as it is an essential aspect of Indigenous child-rearing.

At the centre with experience working with Indigenous children and families, children and their families’ cultural identities are at the forefront of programming.

- Families’ funds of knowledge are acknowledged in the learning centre and are evident in the curriculum. The Executive Director shared that families’ experiences and cultures are considered “individually,” “holistically,” and “layered.” Utilizing a strength-based and relational approach, the Inclusive centre fosters a strong image of the child and their family, understanding that each person holds their own set of beliefs, strengths, and experiences.

At the centre with experience working with Indigenous children and families, educators are encouraged to engage in reflective practice and support families from a relational lens.

- The centre strives to create a learning environment where children are recognized for their abilities, strengths, and experiences. One participant shared that knowledge is “not just



child development, but [includes] their knowledge of the child who is in front of them.” This holistic approach to childcare portrays a strong image of the child and their families by valuing and accepting them for who they are.

## Relationship to Flight

*Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework*, encourages a strong image of the child and their family, respecting them as strong individuals with their own experiences and resiliencies (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 38-42). Educators who understand the diverse and changing needs of families support a childcare experience that is welcoming and safe. According to *Flight*, staff must acknowledge the “social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts and relationships of everyday life” (Makovichuk et al., p. 39). Centres are encouraged to support their educators in developing this strong image of the child as these perspectives influence the quality of childcare provided (Makovichuk et al., p. 39). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

## Recommendations and Next Steps

- Childcare centres can implement a strength-based approach in programming and policies to ensure all children and families are viewed as capable individuals. For instance, if those staff in leadership roles model this approach and has it as a foundational practice in their centre, the overall environment will be more welcoming to families.
- Childcare centres can support their educators in developing a strong image of the child and their families by connecting them



to resources (such as Flight) that offer examples, strategies, and information regarding the purpose of a strength-based and holistic approach: <https://flightframework.ca>

- Childcare centres can adopt a flexible disposition when supporting children and families. For instance, centres that value families’ funds of knowledge (their experiences, culture, and beliefs) understand that there are many ways to approach childcare and work to implement this in practice. Centres can encourage educators to suspend judgments and create relationships with families to develop that strong image of the child.
- Childcare centres can invite families, elders and community leaders to participate in programming and policy decisions to respect their beliefs and integrate them into the environment. When centres involve families in these discussions, it helps educators see these individuals as strong and resilient. This positive image of the child and family influences the quality of childcare by fostering trust and building relationships.
- Childcare centres can refer to the additional “inspirations for leading” documents to fully understand the themes and how they work in conjunction with each other.
- Centres can search the Edmonton Council of Early Learning and Care website and click on the ‘resources’ link to gain additional knowledge and learn more about different organizations/ partnerships in the area: <https://www.ecelc.ca/resources>

## References

Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta’s early learning and care framework*. Retrieved from [flightframework.ca](https://flightframework.ca)