

APRIL 1, 2025

FAMILY HANDBOOK

OCCASIONAL AND RESPITE CHILD CARE

H&R | **CRFM**
MFRC | **HetR**

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Overview

The Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre (H&R MFRC) is an independent, registered charity, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Occasional and Respite Child Care is a casual childcare service provided to military and veteran families experiencing transitions, absences and/or relocation. It is a service for children aged 8 months to 12 years old. During a session, children will play games, listen to stories, sing songs and much more.

This service is not provincially licensed and follows provincial requirements for unlicensed child care, prohibiting the number of enrolled children to six per session. Although unlicensed, we adhere to the guidelines of the licensed childcare centre at the H&R MFRC. Occasional and Respite Child Care has two primary sources of funding: fundraising/grants and child care fees.

Philosophy & Goals

We collaborate with families, communities, and professionals to provide an inclusive early learning environment where the children's best interests are met. We create supportive early learning experiences, both indoors and outdoors. A sense of self occurs through active discovery and play that follow children's lead fostering development in well-being, discovery and invention, language and communication, and personal and social responsibility.

Inclusion Philosophy

Occasional and Respite Child Care accepts and welcomes military families of all abilities. We believe all children deserve an environment and experiences that promote growth in all areas of their development. We endeavour to provide full inclusion of individuals and families with diverse needs; some reflecting their family's background or culture.

We invest in an early learning environment that sets children up for success. Families must be transparent about their child's unique needs/behaviours, exceptional circumstances or diagnosed disabilities at the time of enrollment and disclose areas their child will require support; this allows us to properly assess our ability to apply our resources to ensure the success of your child.

We will work directly with the families to determine and implement program accommodations or adaptations to ensure children can actively partake in all aspects of the program, to the best of our ability, recognizing our limitations.

Professional Qualifications

Our Early Childhood Educators (ECE's) are trained in Early Childhood Education and must hold a Nova Scotia Early Childhood Education Classification Level with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Additional training requirements include Standard First Aid & CPR (C) and AED, Child Abuse Registry Check, Criminal Records Check & Vulnerable Sector Check and Enhanced Reliability Check.

General Information

Location and Hours of Operation

Shearwater Site

30 Provider Rd, Shearwater, NS B0J 3A0

Tuesday: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Wednesday: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Friday: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Some Saturdays: TBD

Halifax Site

6393 Homefire Crescent, Halifax, NS B3L

4T4

Thursday: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Some Saturdays: TBD

*There are no sessions held on Holidays or long weekends.

Contact Information

24/7 Family Information Line for urgent information: 902-427-7788

Occasional Care Number: 902-210-3010

Occasional and Respite Child Care Administrator Email: occasionalcare@hrmfrc.ca

Eligibility and Registration

Pre-booking is limited to a maximum of two sessions/week per family. Families can register up to 30 days before or at least 24 hours before the session. Should a family wish to cancel, they must do so at least 24 hours before the session for a refund.

To ensure fair and reasonable access, families must register in advance. Register online at www.halifaxmfrc.ca to access the program's calendar and pay online. Priority will be given to families who are experiencing additional stressors due to the military lifestyle, including, but not limited to: absences, relocation, and transitions into and out of the military.

The H&R MFRC reserves the right to cancel this service at any time. Should this occur, affected families will be contacted and receive a full refund.

Ratio

Program	Ratio (ECE: Children)
Infant (8 – 18 months)	1:4
Toddler (18 months – 12 years)	1:6

Family & Child Orientation

Acceptance into the program is contingent upon submitting a fully completed Occasional and Respite Child Care Registration Agreement. This agreement must be submitted no later than the start of the first session. Families can register online from 48 hours to 30 days before their session. Families who are new to the service can call or email for intake with the Occasional and Respite Child Care Administrator.

Families are responsible for ensuring information is maintained and accurate, such as change of contacts, address, medical information, and family status.

Separated Families

We understand each family is unique in its structure and that family breakdown may be part of a family's life. We remain neutral in family disputes, treating each parent/family member as having equal access to information (unless officially notified otherwise). Our focus is on the best interest of the child. To best support the family, we ask that family separation/unique circumstances be disclosed at the time of accepting a space, or as family structure changes.

Custody

For the H&R MFRC to enforce or deny access to a family member, such as in cases of family guardianship related to custody and access (visitation, family schedules) we require a copy of the court agreement to be retained on file that outlines specific access or restrictions to the child. Without a signed court agreement, we recognize both family members have equal access.

When a court agreement/document is on file, we are legally obligated to enforce the custody and access arrangements. We must receive written notice of changes when a court agreement/document is no longer valid. In cases where a court agreement is on file and a family member with restricted access attempts to take the child, the Military Policy will be contacted.

Photos

Occasionally, photos are taken to promote the program and used on social media, in print materials and online. A family may choose not to provide photo consent by not selecting specific options or not signing the permission form; in this case, children will be excluded from photos.

Emergency Contacts

- Family must provide at least one emergency contact on registration forms.
- The emergency contact person is authorized to pick up children.
- Your emergency contact person will be called as a last resort when the parents/guardians cannot be reached.

Pick Up and Drop Off

To ensure a child's safety and well-being, parents/caregivers are required to have their child/ren signed IN and OUT with the child care provider, provide a contact number in the event of an emergency, and inform staff of any allergies/medical conditions upon each use of the service.

Drop Off

Please make every effort to drop children off promptly at the start time, this allows your child time to participate in free play, and child lead activities, and prepare for outside time and outings.

Pick Up

- Children are released to authorized persons (16 years and older) as per your registration form.
- We require advanced written permission if your child will be picked up by someone who is not on the authorized pick-up list.
- Children must be picked by the designated end time. Excessive lateness could result in dismissal from the program.
- Identify to an ECE that your child has been picked up.
- It is the responsibility of family members to communicate all information shared by ECEs at drop off and pick up, with each other.

Payment Information

The cost is \$20.00 per child per four-hour session, to a maximum of \$60.00 per family. This can be paid online at the time of registration. Arrangements can be made to pay in person at either site with our administration team. Full-day sessions for relocation purposes are available for \$30.00 per day, per child, for a maximum of two days.

Non-payment will result in dismissal from the program.

Cancellation

- Please cancel as soon as you know that you are unable to attend by phone or email. There are often waitlists and we would like to offer the space to another family.
- No shows/failure to cancel will result in you being charged for that session and denial of a refund.

Access to Information

Children's Files

Children's files are the property of the H&R MFRC, including registration forms and information, accident/incident reports, and other forms or reports, and are used for H&R MFRC purposes only and are held confidential. Access to any information contained in children's files may not be granted.

Supportive Documentation Requests

Request for letters of support for the Canada Revenue Agency, family court, a medical professional etc., is subject to Director approval and requires a written request and discussion with the Director to understand the nature of the request.

- Letters will contain factual and objective information based on documentation and observations.
- Letters will not contain subjective information such as commentary on family members or parenting styles.
- Copies are retained.
- Confidentiality is upheld.

Closures

When the H&R MFRC cannot ensure health and safety, the service will be closed or delayed opening. Some examples include no power or water, no heat or air conditioning or significant weather events. Families are notified and updated directly about closures and delayed openings by phone.

Food and Nutrition

Allergies

Occasional and Respite Child Care is nut-aware meaning we do not allow these items in our classroom. As an inclusive service, we may have other or additional restricted items. As a public facility, we cannot guarantee your child will not encounter allergens. We ask families not to feed children peanut butter at breakfast as residue can stay on hands and clothing.

Allergies must be reported to the Occasional and Respite Child Care Administrator at the time of registration, and included on the forms. If they develop, they must be added to the child's file, in writing.

Nutrition, Lunch and Snacks

Children should bring a variety of food for lunch and snacks, including a beverage or water bottle. Food should be healthy and follow the “Canadian Food Guide standards”. Items can not contain nuts.

The H&R MFRC is a breastfeeding-friendly centre. Breastfeeding is welcome anywhere in the Centre. Staff can also recommend comfortable spaces for breastfeeding.

Health and Wellness

Our goal is to mitigate and reduce the spread of illness for everyone. Staying home when sick reduces the spread of illness and is less impactful to operations.

We adhere to Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection Guidelines for Communicable Disease Prevention and Control for Child Care Settings. We adhere to NS Public Health directives.

Families must notify the administrator when their child has symptoms of illness. Families are informed of communicable diseases by email or phone. A medical note may be required to confirm your child is not contagious (i.e., rash, pink eye) to return to the program.

Exclusion for illness

- A fever (100.4°F/38°C in the ear), vomiting and diarrhea.
- Communicable diseases such as Strep Throat, Fifth Disease, Hand, Foot & Mouth and Pink Eye.
- We reserve the right to exclude children from the program if they are generally unwell and unable to participate in the general routine.
- When a child shows symptoms of illness families are contacted to immediately pick up children.

Children can return to the service when they are symptom and medication free for 24 hours or a medical professional has cleared them to attend.

Resource note: Medical advice can be accessed at 811, virtual care (Maple/Telus Health), pharmacists, emergency departments, walk-in clinics, family doctors, Nurse Practitioners and Pharmacists, as per NS Health Authority.

Medication

We only give medication authorized by a medical professional, with proper documentation.

When your child is taking medication, this must be disclosed to the Administrator for us to respond in emergency situations and to understand side effects.

- Life-threatening medication must accompany the child every day. If life-threatening medication is not with the child, they will not be accepted into the program. (I.e. Epi pen, inhalers, seizure medication).
- All prescription medication must be labelled with the child's name, prescribed dosage, and medical professional name.
- We will not accept nor administer expired medication.
- Families are responsible for checking medication regularly to ensure it has not expired.
- We will store and secure all medications in a cupboard or fridge (as required) and return the family at the end of the day. For risk management medications cannot be stored in your child's bag or cubby.
- We are not permitted to administer a non-prescription medication, such as Benadryl, Advil, Tylenol, Cough Medicine or teething gels. Exception: when accompanied by a note from a medical professional.
- For prescribed medication with "as needed" dosages, written instructions and explanation of symptoms from a medical professional must accompany the prescription i.e. inhalers.
- Medication forms are completed by the family and ECEs to document when medication is administered.

Facility Safety

Safety is everyone's responsibility. The safety of our employees, families and children is a priority and we continuously monitor safety concerns. We need the support of families to maintain a safe environment within the facility and in the parking area.

Accident and Incident Documentation

Educators will complete an accident or incident report when a situation happens that involves any injury, a mark is left on the body, or a mark may appear (bruising, redness, cuts/scratches).

An **Accident** is a self-inflicted injury. Something that happens because of the child's own actions or purely by circumstance i.e. without intent.

An **Incident** results from an altercation/confrontation between two or more people. Involves harmful intent or causes injury to another person.

Accident/incident reports are provided to the family to acknowledge they have been informed of the situation.

- Families must review and sign the documentation.
- Families can ask questions and request a copy of the report at the time of signing.

- Reports are reviewed and signed by the Occasional Care supervisor before being retained in the child's file and is considered property of H&R MFRC.
- Reports are used to monitor trends or patterns for further or corrective action i.e. equipment replacement, and room re-design.

Emergency Preparedness

We have emergency procedures in place for the following:

- Fire: monthly fire drills are conducted
- Evacuation
- Lockdown/Hold & Secure
- Pandemic or Public Health Outbreak
- 911 is contacted for medical interventions

Families will be advised when we have enacted an emergency procedure.

Parking Lot

Be mindful and use extreme caution to ensure the safety of all children entering and exiting the building. The road is immediately at our entrance and is a thoroughfare with high traffic volume, and a school bus stop. Children are consistently present and often act quickly including darting off sidewalks and into roadways or around vehicles.

Mind the crosswalks including always holding your child's hand. When road safety laws are not observed we notify the military police.

We discourage children from being left unattended in vehicles. The H&R MFRC is not held responsible/liable for accidents/incidents resulting from children being left unsupervised in vehicles. Incidents are reported to the military police.

Child Abuse Protocol

We adhere to "Reporting and Investigating Allegations of Abuse and Neglect in Regulated Child Care Settings A Protocol for Licensees, Child Care Staff and Care Providers (March 2017)".

All persons are required to report suspected child abuse. The duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect overrides the confidentiality of all professional relationships and includes information considered to be privileged. Every person in Nova Scotia is required by law under the Children and Family Services Act to report child abuse and neglect. Suspected cases of child abuse are reported to the Child Welfare Agency for investigation. When a report is made, families are not informed. H&R MFRC must provide access to the Child Welfare Agency during an investigation.

Family member/authorized pick-up person under the influence

A parent or authorized pick-up person who appears/shows signs of being in an altered state and intends to drive; or when a staff has a concern about the child's safety, the person picking up the child will be asked to make alternate transportation arrangements i.e. Call the other parent, call a friend or emergency contact, or a taxi service.

If the parent/authorized pick-up person refuses we will contact the Military Police immediately.

Behaviour Guidance

Behaviour guidance techniques are implemented as a method of reinforcing positive behaviour, taking into consideration the child's age and developmental level. Our ECEs will demonstrate a professional approach to behaviour guidance; assisting children to learn appropriate behaviour, social and communication skills; including ECEs being consistent when setting limits.

Re-direction is the most used strategy. This is when an ECE intervenes to positively re-direct children when they are exhibiting inappropriate behaviour, this may include removing a child from one activity in which they are being disruptive and introducing them to a new activity.

The following forms of behaviour guidance are permitted:

- Set clear action and behaviour expectations ("rules") for the children.
- Limits set will be enforced consistently and fairly.
- Children will be provided with appropriate "choices" that correspond with the behaviour that is of concern as a strategy to allow children to make their own decisions; ECEs will follow through.
- ECEs will watch for potential conflicts that are arising and re-direct children to another activity as a means of prevention.
- Positive behaviour reinforcement will always be used; ECEs will avoid using "No" statements.
- ECEs will teach children strategies to self-regulate their emotions by helping them to identify their feelings and model coping and calming techniques such as deep breathing.
- ECEs may, when age-appropriate, assist children in resolving conflict by discussing the behaviour with the children immediately following the incident.
- A child may be removed or redirected from an activity or situation. This may include going to a different area of the room, taking a walk with an educator, helping to do a task, or visiting the inclusion team.
- When necessary, ECEs may need to use physical contact to pick up and remove a child from a situation.

The following forms of behaviour management/discipline are prohibited:

- Corporal punishment, including but not limited to:

- Striking a child directly or with any physical object.
- Shaking, shoving, spanking or other forms of aggressive physical contact.
- Requiring or forcing a child to repeat physical movements.
- Harsh, humiliating, belittling, threatening, or degrading responses of any form, including verbal, emotional or physical.
- Confinement or isolation of a child.
- Time outs.
- Depriving a child of basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, or bedding, for example withholding food, or security objects such as taking a child's blanket away at naptime.
- Food is not withheld as a consequence of inappropriate behaviour; nor is it offered to reinforce positive behaviour; food is not used as a reward for completing a task or finishing a meal.

All Early Childhood Educators and staff must adhere to the Behaviour Guidance Policy above.

Inclusion and Behaviour Support

As an inclusive child care program, we use a collaborative approach and engage our Military Family Navigator - Inclusion to support the classroom. To manage behaviour:

- We apply developmentally appropriate practice, strategies and techniques, (i.e. visual cues charts, use of timer)
- Have open communication with families to apply consistent strategies across environments.

Early childhood educators are trained in child development. They are not trained in early intervention.

Family Meetings

A family meeting happens when developmental and/or behavioural concerns are disclosed during the enrollment process to create an opportunity for sharing information and knowledge. We learn about the child's strengths and discuss programs and resources available to support them, as well as the limitations of resources. This is a two-way dialogue that ensures the program best meets the needs of the child, family and service. The meeting's outcome is to learn, develop strategies and ensure support, accommodations, adaptations or assistive materials are discussed, available, and implemented to assist the child in fully engaging in the program.

The meeting may include the Director/designate, Inclusion Coordinator, family members and if possible, an ECE. An additional meeting may be arranged if the child and family are working with an external professional agency.

General Program Policies

Toys from Home

- The service is well-equipped with materials and toys.
- We are not responsible for lost or damaged toys.

Learning Environments and Experiences

Following Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework: Capable, Confident, and Curious; our learning environment is set up for a play-based, child-led experience. The activities are based on observations the ECEs gather from the children.

We know that play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise, and imagine. When children play together, they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking, and build new understandings.

Educators create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create, and construct. Educators work with children to promote and model positive ways to relate to others, actively support the inclusion of all children in play, help children recognize when play is unfair, and offer constructive ways to build caring, fair, and inclusive learning communities. (Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, 2018)

Along with following the child's lead and interests, ECE may introduce new ideas, and integrate holidays celebrations, and seasonal activities.

Outdoor and off-site activities

The learning environment extends to outdoor experiences. We have a playground on site and may spend time outdoors. There may be times when the children are outside at drop off time and pick up times. Notices are posted outside the classroom. Children may go off site for walks to learn about their community and outings to experience different environments.

For children to be comfortable and successful while outside, children must come with the appropriate outside clothing for the daily conditions and changes of weather.

- Children go outside up to -25C (-13F) with or without a wind chill factor.
- When the UV Index reported by Environment Canada is high (6-7), we reduce outside time.
- When the UV index reported by Environment Canada is extreme (8+), we stay indoors.

While outside, we allow children to participate in risky play and rough and tumble play, which includes climbing, swinging, jumping off structures/objects, building and exploring with crates, pieces of wood, and recycled and natural materials.

Swimming and Skating

In collaboration with PSP Recreation, children may be invited to attend swimming or skating experiences. Parents will be given advance notice and Activity Waivers will need to be completed.

Swimming:

- PSP Recreation provides lifeguards.
- Children's water wings or lifejackets are provided by PSP.
- A list of required supplies is provided to families.

Skating:

- We adhere to arena rules for ice safety including requirements for helmets.
- Families are required to provide sharpened skates and CSA approved helmets.
- A list of required supplies is provided to families.

Gym

Our facility in Shearwater (Hampton Gray Memorial Building) has a gym.

- Children may explore gross motor activities in our Shearwater gym during inclement weather conditions or as part of a planned activity.
- Children may explore the gym if they become overwhelmed in the classroom, need a break from a situation or need to burn off some energy.
- We provide age-appropriate gross motor material/equipment such as tricycles (no helmets), small trampolines, balls, hula hoops, rocking horse, balance beams, little coupe cars, scooter boards, etc.

Rest Period/Naptime

This program is a multi-age setting, and children are only here for a short period so we have no set nap time in our routine. If children require a nap, we will do our best to set up a sleep area but cannot guarantee that the lights will be turned off or that other children will be quiet.

Appropriate Clothing

We teach and promote self-help skills with dressing and washroom routines, so clothing must be child-friendly with easy snaps, zippers, and loose enough to pull on and off. Sweatpants, t-shirts and sweatshirts are encouraged. As part of the learning process, children are engaged in messy activities so send your child in clothes appropriate for an active and messy day- stains will happen!

Appropriate and comfortable clothing for all weather conditions is required; if children do not have appropriate clothing families may be called to bring in required items. To ease on misplaced/lost clothing clearly label ALL clothing with your child's name.

Diapering

Families will need to provide:

- Cream or ointment is required for diaper rash.
- Diapers and wipes and replenished as necessary.

If using cloth diapers, we require:

- Diapers to be assembled (proper size, cloth liners inside).
- Diaper covers are required to help eliminate any leaks.
- If applicable facecloths (instead of wipes).
- Wet bag for soiled diapers and facecloths.
- Diapers and facecloths will NOT be cleaned/rinsed out.

Clothing

- Indoor sneakers or other rubber-soled shoes.
- A change of clothes (shirts, pants, socks).
- Cloth or wet bag for soiled clothing.

Outdoor clothing

- Winter: warm boots, one-piece snowsuit, two pairs of waterproof mittens, hat that covers ears and the child keeps on head, neck warmer (no scarf).
- Fall/Spring: rubber boots, one-piece rain suit, warm jacket.
- Summer: hat, extra clothing to be used for outside water play, towel, waterproof shoes.

Other items

- Sunscreen (No Spray).
- “Water” bottle/Sippy cup with a covered mouthpiece.
- Other items may be required based on programming (notice will be given).

Family Expectations and Conduct

We collaborate with families to ensure a safe and healthy environment for children. We must also provide a safe and healthy workplace for our employees and volunteers, including psychological safety. Families can support us to achieve both goals by upholding professional relationships and adhering to policies.

Early Childhood Educators are professionals who are trained in Early Childhood Education and are NOT permitted to provide private child care services to the families we serve. When you require other child care resources the MFRC can assist.

Employees must adhere to a professional code of conduct and confidentiality agreements which includes maintaining professional relationships with families and professional boundaries, to protect their employment. Families and employees will NOT enter personal relationships including romantic partnerships, social media and private childcare, or other conflicts of interest.

Social media has the potential for conflict of interest, crossing boundaries and a negative impact on the family's privacy, employees and the H&R MFRC's reputation.

Social media is not an acceptable forum to ask questions or seek resolution when families are not satisfied with the service. Families must address questions/concerns to staff.

Disregard for any of the above will be cause for dismissal.

Resolution of concerns or complaints

We believe open, transparent communication is always the best approach to conflict resolution, valuing all persons. We foster a mutually respectful process for families to communicate complaints and resolve concerns. The family will not experience any barriers to service because of using the complaint and resolution process. All complaints will be addressed in a timely and respectful manner, with follow-up communication within 3 working days.

Negative social media posts about the situation/issue are not an acceptable means of resolution and often do more harm.

The Occasional and Respite Administrator must be given the first opportunity to address questions and to rectify the concerns of families. First point resolution with the following escalated process must be used to seek resolution:

1. Speak to your child's ECE; daily pick up or drop off time or set up an appointment.
2. Next level resolution, contact the Occasional and Respite Administrator Supervisor to discuss the concern.

When a family is not satisfied with the resolution with the Occasional and Respite Administrator's Supervisor, they can pursue a formal complaint by contacting the H&R MFRC Executive Director, in writing.

The Executive Director reviews/investigates the complaint and responds to the complainant within fourteen days in writing detailing the review, results, and actions (to be) taken. The Executive Director is the final authority on operations. When necessary, the Executive Director will advise the Board of Directors.

The H&R MFRC is an independent non-profit organization, our services are confidential, and we do not report to the CAF Chain of Command, therefore they do not resolve conflicts for family complaints or issues.

Dismissal of a child or family

Our goal is to provide a safe and healthy environment for everyone in the H&R MFRC, including employees, children, families and volunteers. There may be times and reasons when a child or family member is limited access or is dismissed. Depending on the type and severity of the issue, notice of dismissal may or may not be given. Dismissal can happen for reasons such as:

1. Continual or any disregard for policies outlined in the Family Handbook or any H&R MFRC policy.
2. As a last resort, when we have exhausted all our resources and efforts. Families are engaged in the process and efforts, so typically notice is provided in this situation.
3. When an altercation is deemed to threaten the health or safety of a child or employee. The family member may be restricted from accessing the facility immediately and/or notice of dismissal can be immediate.

Any inappropriate behaviour, such as harassment, discrimination, verbal or physical aggression, is not acceptable. We reserve the right to ask anyone displaying this behaviour to leave the area or facility.

We adhere to NS Violence in the Workplace legislation. As an employer, the physical and psychological safety of our employees is a priority.

Family Communication Plan

Open communication between families and ECEs is essential for providing quality care and building trusting relationships with each other. Families should share information with the ECEs about their child's morning and previous night's routine (sleeping, eating, moods), changes in family structure or life changes (bereavement), relocation, deployment or any transition related to the military lifestyle. Our team receives ongoing training on the military lifestyle and can support your family during these experiences, including referrals to MFRC services and supports.

Confidentiality & Privacy

The privacy of families is important to us. The H&R MFRC respects and protects the confidentiality and privacy of its families, students, volunteers and employees. To ensure privacy, all information collected by the H&R MFRC is used solely for operational/programming purposes under strict confidentiality in compliance with the Privacy Act. The protection of confidential information is vital to the interests of our organization and families. Learn more: <https://cfmws.ca/penelope-system-privacy-notice>.