

Mission Statement: Our mission is to provide a nurturing and safe environment to support learning for the families and students of the university.

Purpose: The UNI Child Development Center (CDC) is an accredited non-profit child care and early learning facility designed to meet the needs of young children by providing quality programming within a safe and nurturing environment. The CDC provides high quality, full-time child care for the children of faculty, staff, and students of the University of Northern Iowa. The CDC serves as an educational laboratory for UNI students majoring in Early Childhood Education and other related fields, facilitating the students' learning about young children.

Beliefs:

- We believe teachers are well-educated facilitators providing developmentally appropriate activities.
- We believe developmentally appropriate activities are: individualized, varied, challenging for the varying ages of children, and relevant/based on children's interests.
- We believe exploration allows children to experiment with materials and construct their own knowledge with teacher guidance.
- We believe in UNI teacher education and providing opportunities for preservice teachers to experience early childhood education in action; facilitate the preservice teacher's ability to become reflective practitioners and take knowledge learned and act on it.
- We believe the environment should be safe, nurturing where children feel loved and cared for.
- We believe in providing family-focused child care where parents are comfortable and confident in their child's safety and well-being.
- We believe in an environment of mutual respect where children are allowed choices and are a part of the decision-making process.

Philosophy: The UNI Child Development Center recognizes the uniqueness of each child by providing a developmentally appropriate, child-directed learning environment in which the child can construct his/her own knowledge through teacher guided, hands-on experimentation and exploration in the areas of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. The CDC also recognizes the importance of family in the development of each child and welcomes the involvement of parents and family members in the program.

These assumptions are made about children and the ways that they learn:

1. Children are intrinsically motivated to learn.
2. Children construct their own knowledge through interaction with their environment and other people, thus making learning an internal rather than an external process.
3. Learning involves error-informed experimentation to allow for natural steps to understanding.

Children are encouraged to be autonomous to the degree that they are able to do so. Autonomy, in this context means the ability to govern one's self, taking into account all relevant factors. Personal autonomy is encouraged by giving children choices that are structured to their level of development. This includes making a conscious decision about the learning center that they choose to engage in. The children have the opportunity to find solutions to problems that are acceptable to everyone involved. This could include determining rules for a game that is being played, solving a social conflict between children, deciding on the best way to get toys picked up, analyzing what type of silverware is needed for lunch, and hypothesizing and testing their conjectures for a science experiment.

The climate in the classroom is one of mutual respect with the teacher being a facilitator of learning rather than a dispenser of knowledge. Children are encouraged to respect others in the classroom as they are themselves respected. In working toward the development of autonomy, the children are encouraged to become responsible for their own behavior and make decisions reflecting that responsibility. This guidance approach includes the use of encouragement and consequences that are reasonable, respectful, and related.

