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CENTRE MANAGEMENT · GUIDE 1 OF 6

Building a sustainable centre

How to keep your centre steady, trusted and ready for whatever comes next — without running yourself into the ground.

01 What “sustainable” really means

A sustainable centre is one that can keep going — paying staff fairly, caring well for children, and improving year after year — without you running yourself into the ground.

It is not about being the biggest centre in town. It is about being steady, trusted, and prepared.

02 The four pillars

1. A clear vision

You need to know where you are going. Without a vision, every day feels like firefighting.

Ask yourself: What do I want my centre to look like in two or three years? What would I be proud of?

Write your vision down. Display it where you and your staff can see it. Share it with parents. When everyone knows where the centre is going, every small decision becomes easier.

Example vision: “To see every child in our community reach their full potential through quality early learning, nurturing relationships, and equal opportunities for growth.”

2. Healthy finances

A sustainable centre lives within its means. That means:

- Knowing exactly what comes in and what goes out — every month.
- Charging fair fees that cover your real costs (not just what feels affordable to parents).
- Saving a small amount each month, even if it is only R200, for emergencies and repairs.
- Paying yourself a fair salary. You are not a volunteer.

If more money goes out than comes in, something has to change — fees, costs, or enrolment. Ignoring it makes it worse.

3. A strong team

You cannot run a sustainable centre alone. Burnout is the biggest threat to ECD principals.

- Train your staff. A teacher who feels capable stays longer.
- Delegate clearly. Write down who does what.
- Treat people fairly and pay on time.
- Build a culture where staff feel valued — not just used.

When your team grows, your centre grows.

4. Strong relationships

Sustainability is not just about money — it is about trust.

- Parents who trust you talk to other parents. Word of mouth fills your centre.
- The community — clinics, schools, churches, local businesses — can support you in ways you may not expect.
- Funders and partners want to back centres that are stable, organised, and transparent.

03 Habits that protect your centre

- Review your numbers on the same day each month.
- Have a short staff meeting every week.
- Keep one file (paper or digital) with all your important documents.
- Plan three months ahead — what is coming up, what needs to be paid, what needs to be done.
- Take one day off a week. A tired principal cannot lead well.

04 A gentle reminder

Sustainability is not a finish line. It is a way of working. Some months will be easier than others. What matters is that you keep showing up, keep learning, and keep building — one small step at a time.

> **You do not have to be perfect. You just have to be consistent.**