

Child Care Centers

Child Care Aware® of America
Provider Resources

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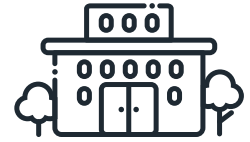
There are many things to consider when starting a new child care center.

Read through these resources to help you think through the steps you need to take to operate a successful child care program.

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Child Care Centers

Child care centers often group children by age and are generally operated out of non-residential, commercial buildings. Centers are larger and enroll more children with a dedicated director and numerous staff. Some child care centers operate as a non-profit and may be owned by an individual, faith-based organization, public school, or a government agency. Other child care centers may operate as a for-profit and may be owned by an individual or a corporate chain.





Opening a Child Care Program

Are you interested in opening a child care business? This section will help you learn more about what you need to do to start a child care business.

There are different resources for you to complete to help you build your business plan throughout these sections. These resources are meant to help you think through important questions. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency and your local [licensing agency](#) can help you understand the specific rules and regulations you need to follow to operate a quality program. They will be important resources for you as you begin your child care business.

Before you begin your new career path, find out if [child care is the right choice for you](#) to help you evaluate why you want to start a child care business. It will help you think through some important considerations before you open a child care center.

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Resource: Are You Ready to Start a Child Care Business?

This resource is meant to help you think about the reasons why you want to open a child care center and if it is the right choice for you. There are both personal and professional considerations for you to think about as you start your journey.

Professional Considerations

	Yes	No	Unsure
Are you a self-starter?			
Do you have the required education needed in your state to operate a child care center?			
Do you have knowledge and previous experience to run a child care business?			
Do you know where to go to for training or help in running your child care business?			
Are you comfortable working with licensing requirements and government regulations pertaining to child care?			
Do you have the time to learn the skills you need or are you willing to hire people with different skill sets that you need to have a successful child care business?			
Are you able to plan and organize well? Think about managing staff, planning for children, and ensuring parents receive timely communication from you.			
Do you have experience in hiring, training, and supervising employees?			
Are you comfortable with the potential legal, professional, and personal risks associated with starting a new business?			
Have you undertaken similar responsibilities that have demonstrated you have the drive and determination needed to make your business successful?			
Do you have access to funds you may need to start your business?			
Are you aware of the required amount of business and professional liability insurance you need for your business?			

Are You Ready to Open a Child Care Business *continued*

Personal Considerations

	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you have a passion for helping children and their parents?			
Do you enjoy being with young children and have the patience to care for them for many hours each day?			
Are you able to manage conflict successfully if it arises with staff and/or parents?			
Are you able to get along with multiple types of parents and children, even if their parenting style or culture is different than yours?			
Do you have the physical and emotional strength to run a child care business?			
If you have children or other people in your life that need you during child care hours of operation, have you identified someone to care for them if they become sick or need something?			
Do you have a positive attitude, even when things don't go your way?			
Does your family support your decision?			

Next Steps:

If you checked **“Yes”** to all the items, you are probably ready to continue exploring the next steps in starting your child care center business!

If you checked **“No”** or **“Not Sure”** to some of the items, reach out to your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for help.



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Complete a Needs Assessment

Understanding the community need for child care is critical for your business to be successful. Use this needs assessment to get started and call your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for help in answering some of these questions. This is an important first step in building your [business plan](#).



Resource: Child Care Center Needs Assessment

As you think about opening a child care business, take the time to do a complete and thorough needs assessment. This is a critical step in determining whether your community needs your services. One of the reasons that business owners of all types fail is because they have not considered the needs of their consumers.

There are three parts to the needs assessment. First, you need to have data on what type of child care is being offered in your community. Second, you will want to understand more about families that you might serve through your child care business. Finally, you will want to know what other providers in your area charge for child care. This will help you build your budget.

You may need help completing your needs assessment. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral agency \(CCR&R\)](#) will be able to help you with much of this information. Your first step will be to learn which CCR&R agency serves your area.

Name of Local Child Care and Resource Referral Agency:

Contact Person: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Many of the questions in this resource can be answered by your local CCR&R. Have this checklist handy when you contact them and fill in answers or comments as you speak with a representative.

Child Care Center Needs Assessment *continued*

Part 1: Current Child Care Landscape

Question	Answer/Comment
<p>Who else is providing child care in your area?</p> <p><i>Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency about the number of providers in your area.</i></p>	<p>Number of licensed child care centers: _____</p> <p>Number of family child care homes: _____</p> <p>Number of school-based providers: _____</p> <p>Other: _____</p>
<p>Who are your main competitors?</p> <p><i>In the geographic area of where you want to open your business, who provides child care services? Think about churches, local YMCAs, and schools as well as traditional child care providers.</i></p>	
<p>Is there a child care need for a specific age group?</p> <p><i>Think about the current providers in the area and what age groups they are serving. Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency if there is a need for infant/toddler care or other age groups.</i></p>	<p>Infants (birth-12 months): _____</p> <p>Toddlers (1-2 years): _____</p> <p>Preschool (3 years): _____</p> <p>Pre-K (4-5 years old): _____</p> <p>Before/after care for school-age children: _____</p>
<p>Is there a need for child care during a specific time of the day?</p> <p><i>Think about whether you might provide before/after school care to school-age children or children enrolled in part-time pre-k programs.</i></p>	
<p>Is the need for child care in your area likely to change in the next 5-10 years? Why?</p> <p><i>Think about whether there are local companies that are expanding or closing, whether your local schools may be providing child care services, or other factors that could influence the need.</i></p>	

Child Care Center Needs Assessment *continued*

Part 2: Family Demographics

Question	Answer/Comment
<p>How many families with young children live in your area?</p> <p><i>Consider families with children birth-5 years, as well as families with school-age children if you want to serve that age group.</i></p>	
<p>How many of the families with young children in your area will need child care?</p> <p><i>Ask your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency for current statistics on the number of families that may need care.</i></p>	
<p>Where do local parents work? What are typical working hours?</p> <p><i>Think about the parents who might use your program. Some businesses, such as hospitals, factories, emergency services, etc., are open during non-traditional hours. Or, some parents may work for organizations that have more typical work hours. You will want to think about parent needs in designing your program.</i></p>	
<p>How long is the typical commute?</p> <p><i>Do parents live in suburban areas and commute to a more urban area for work? Are you in a rural area where commute times may be longer? You will need to think about these things as you think about your hours of operation.</i></p>	

Child Care Center Needs Assessment *continued*

Part 3: Determine Costs

Question	Answer/Comment
<p>What are the typical fees (the market rate) for child care in your area?</p> <p><i>Check with your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency for this information.</i></p>	<p>Licensed child care center rate:</p> <p>Infants: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Toddlers: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Preschool: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Pre-K: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>School-age: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Licensed family child care rate:</p> <p>Infants: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Toddlers: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Preschool: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Pre-K: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>School-age: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Other:</p>
<p>Do parents in your area typically get help (subsidies) to pay for child care?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>
<p>Will your program be eligible to accept subsidies?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>
<p>What would your program need in order to be eligible to accept subsidies?</p>	

Child Care Center Needs Assessment *continued*

Question	Answer/Comment
<p>Based on the number of children you plan to enroll, what is your per child cost?</p> <p><i>Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency for help in calculating this information.</i></p>	<p>Infants: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Toddlers: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Preschool: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Pre-K: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>School-age: \$ _____ /week</p>
<p>What fees do you need to charge parents to have a profitable program? Can parents in your area afford the fees?</p> <p><i>Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency for help in calculating this information.</i></p>	<p>Infants: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Toddlers: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Preschool: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>Pre-K: \$ _____ /week</p> <p>School-age: \$ _____ /week</p>
<p>How much will it cost you to start a new child care business? How much will it cost you to operate on an ongoing basis?</p> <p><i>Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency for help in calculating this information or use the Provider Cost of Quality Calculator.</i></p>	
<p>Will you need to hire staff? What will you pay the staff? Will you be able to offer any benefits?</p>	



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Learn about Licensing and Background Checks

What is a child care license?

A child care license addresses the minimum acceptable health, safety, and program standards for the legal operation of child care programs. Child care licensing regulations vary by state. Contact your [state licensing agency](#) or your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for information on your state's licensing requirements.



What does a child care license cover?

There are a variety of standards covered by a child care license. Although states will vary, most will cover the following topics:

- The maximum number of children allowed in the group (group size), and the minimum number of adults required for a specific number of children (adult-child ratio) depending on the age of the children
- Health and safety standards, such as immunizations, handwashing, diapering, medications, reporting of accidents and illnesses, safe sleep procedures, playground safety, and emergency preparedness plans
- Nutrition and food preparation
- Fire and safety drills
- Record keeping
- Minimum education requirements and ongoing training for providers
- Family involvement

How does my child care center become licensed?

Each state has a different process for becoming licensed. Contact your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or state child care licensing office by visiting our [State by State Resource Map](#) for information on your state's licensing requirements. Use this [resource](#) when talking to your local CCR&R agency to help you understand your state's licensing regulations.

Most states will require an application, background checks, licensing and fire inspections, and certain training hours to be completed before a license is issued. Some programs may be exempt from licensing, depending on the type of program, where and when it operates, and the number of children in care.

What type of background checks do I need?

New federal law requires states to conduct criminal background checks on all child care employees that work at a licensed, license-exempt, regulated, and registered child care provider. This will include not only the staff that work directly with the children, but it will also include staff that work in the building such as the cook, janitor, bus driver, or any other individual that you employ. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency can update you on where your state is with implementation of this new law.

Use this [resource](#) when talking to your local CCR&R agency to help you understand the steps you need to follow to obtain a background check for yourself and your employees.

Resource: Licensing and Background Checks

Check with your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or your local or state child care licensing office by visiting our [State by State Resource Map](#) for information on your state’s licensing and [background check requirements](#). Every state has different licensing requirements and your local CCR&R can help you learn about the regulations for child care centers in your state. Over the next several years, new federal law will require states to conduct [criminal background checks](#) on all child care employees as well as other adults who have regular unsupervised access to children that work at a licensed, license-exempt, regulated, and registered child care provider.

Use this checklist to ask questions of your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or your state licensing consultant to help you think through the steps you will need to take to become a licensed child care center business and to obtain a background check.

Question	Response	Comment
Do I need to have a license to open a child care center?	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Yes No </div>	
If I choose not to become licensed, have I contacted my local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency to help me provide quality care?	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Yes No </div>	
Is there a fee to get licensed, and if so, how much?	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Yes No </div>	
Does my program have to be inspected? <i>Who conducts the inspections and how frequently do they occur?</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> Yes No </div>	
How many children can my program care for at one time?	Infants: _____ Toddlers: _____ Preschool: _____ Pre-K: _____ School-age: _____	

Licensing and Background Checks *continued*

Question	Response	Comment
<p>Do I need to get a background check?</p> <p>How much does it cost?</p> <p>How often will I need to do a background check?</p>	<p>Yes No</p> <p>Cost: \$ _____</p>	
<p>Will my staff need to have a background check?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>Will volunteers in my center need a background check?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>How often will my staff and/or volunteers need a background check?</p>		
<p>Do I need a degree or special certification to operate a center in my state?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	

Licensing and Background Checks *continued*

Question	Response	Comment
<p>What type of training do I need to open up a child care center? Who offers the training? What costs are associated with the trainings?</p> <p>What ongoing training will I need to do?</p>	<p>Required initial trainings:</p> <p>Health and Safety</p> <p>Food/Nutrition</p> <p>Inclusive Child Care</p> <p>Other: _____</p> <p>Required ongoing trainings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>What training requirements will my staff need?</p>		
<p>What type of equipment and supplies do I need?</p>		



Opening a Licensed Child Care Center *continued*

Research Legal, Tax, and Insurance Considerations

Choose a Legal Structure

Decide on the legal structure of your business. You may need legal advice to decide how to set up your business. Some local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agencies may have trainings or information to help you with these business practices.

Here are some ways in which you can structure your child care business:

- **Sole proprietorship.** You own an unincorporated business by yourself.
- **Incorporation.** Your business is set up so shareholders exchange money, property or both for the corporation's capital stock. This structure protects your personal assets.
- **Partnership.** You join with two or more persons to own your child care business. You divide your profits and losses among partners.
- **Tax-exempt organization.** As a tax-exempt organization, any money after expenses is returned to the operation of the program. To claim this status, you must meet Internal Revenue Service (IRS) eligibility requirements.

Taxes

As a small business, you will need to file business income tax information with local, state, and federal agencies unless your business is tax-exempt. Taxes should be a part of any budget for a child care business. You may want to consult with a tax professional, such as an accountant or a lawyer that specializes in business practices, to help you.

Purchase Insurance

Insurance requirements will vary by state. Contact your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or your [state child care licensing office](#) for information on the type of insurance that is required in your state.

Insurance protects you when emergencies or natural disasters occur. There are different types of insurance that you will want to investigate, even if it is not required by your state's licensing regulations.

Business Owner's Insurance generally is a combination of liability and property insurance. Buying the package is usually less expensive than buying two separate policies.

- **General Liability Insurance** covers bodily injury or property damage that occurs during the course or because of your business.
- **Property Insurance** covers all of your business equipment inside and outside of your program.

Professional Liability Insurance insures you and your staff for losses due to your negligence while performing your business. Coverage for sexual abuse and molestation is generally included in professional liability insurance but verify this with your insurance agent. **Sexual or physical abuse coverage** insures you for loss if one or your employees or others with access to children in your program abuses a child in your care.

Worker's Compensation Insurance is required in many states. This insurance pays benefits when an employee is injured while working.

Resource: Legal and Insurance Considerations

Starting a business will require you to think about legal and insurance issues to make sure you are covered in case of an accident or injury. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or your local or [state child care licensing office](#) will be able to help you think through some of these considerations.

These questions will help you think about some of the important legal and insurance questions before you open your child care business. You may also want to consult a lawyer and a tax professional before you start your child care business.

Legal Considerations

	Yes	No	Comments
Have you consulted a lawyer to help set up the legal structure of your business?			
Have you decided whether to operate as a non-profit or a for-profit?			
Have you decided on a business structure? Sole proprietor (self-employed) Partnership Limited Liability Company (LLC) Corporation			
Have you created a business name?			
Have you registered the business name with your state/county/city?			
Do you need to obtain a business license number, if required?			
Have you consulted with a tax professional to help you with payroll taxes and business income taxes?			

Legal and Insurance Considerations *continued*

Insurance Considerations

	Yes	No	Comments
Have you talked to your state licensing agency or your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency to understand what insurance coverage you might need?			
Have you obtained at least two quotes from insurance agents that represent different insurance companies for comparison?			
Have you purchased business liability insurance, which should include general liability and property insurance?			
Have you purchased professional liability insurance and does this insurance cover you if one of your employees or others with access to the children in your program abused a child in your care?			
If you are providing transportation, have you purchased commercial automobile coverage?			
Have you purchased worker's compensation insurance?			



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Prepare a Budget

Preparing a budget gives you a picture of whether your projected income will meet your expected expenses. You will need to think about how many children you plan to serve, tuition fees, staffing costs, start-up costs such as application fees, equipment, materials, marketing, and other items you may need to purchase before your child care is even open.

Use these [budgeting worksheets](#) to help you think through how much cash you expect to come into your business compared to how much cash you expect to spend. Your business plan will help you define how much money you will need to start your business. You may be eligible for loans or grants to get you started.

Explore Funding Opportunities

Check with your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for ideas on possible funding opportunities to open or sustain your business. The most common federal sources of funding for child care include:

- [The Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) is a food reimbursement program that allows qualified child care providers to be reimbursed for a portion of their child care food costs.
- [Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\)](#) is a federally funded grant to states to support child care subsidies. The [State by State Resources](#) can connect you to your local program.
- [U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#) offers a wide variety of information on loans, grants, and other funding opportunities for small businesses.



Resource: Budget Tool

[Click here](#) for an interactive budgeting tool that includes additional fields such as a budget builder for next year.

Business Name: _____

Current Year
Fiscal Year Ending: _____

Revenue and Support

Revenue	Child Care Fees:	
	Parents Pay	\$
	Child Care Assistance Program	\$
	Food Subsidy Program	\$
	Registration Fees (per child)	\$
	Activity Fees (per child)	\$
Support	Foundation and Corporate Grants	\$
	United Way	\$
	Activity Fees (per child)	\$
Other	Events and Fundraising	\$
	Interest	\$
	All Other	\$
TOTAL INCOME		\$

Expenses

Personnel	Payroll	\$
	Payroll Taxes	\$
	Health Benefits	\$
	Other Benefits	\$
SUBTOTAL PERSONNEL		\$
All other expenses	Food (per week per child)	\$
	Transportation	\$
	Child Care Supplies (per week per child)	\$
	Office Supplies	\$
	Utilities	\$
	Marketing and Promotions	\$
	Insurance: Business/Liability/Real Estate	\$
	Accounting/Legal	\$
	Repairs/Maintenance	\$
	Printing	\$
	Postage	\$
	Rent or Mortgage Interest	\$
	Dues and Subscriptions	\$
	Training/Education - Staff	\$
	Taxes/Licenses	\$
	Depreciation	\$
Miscellaneous	\$	
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$
NET SURPLUS (DEFICIT)		\$



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Find a Location

Once you have completed the [needs assessment](#) and determined there is a need for child care in your area, think about [finding a location](#) for your child care business. Check with your [state licensing office](#) to learn more about the specific requirements in your area before you start your search for a location for your child care center.

Before you buy, rent, or build a space for your child care business, check your local zoning laws and covenants to make sure you follow local laws. If you decide to buy a franchise, the parent company may have specific guidelines regarding where you can locate your child care business.

Check Zoning Laws

Zoning laws may limit small businesses in your community. They can set restrictions and charge fees for permits for the businesses they do allow. Local governments pass zoning laws to make sure businesses fit in with the local community. They are used to keep most business activities out of residential areas. These laws may affect where you can locate your child care business.

If zoning laws do not allow businesses, you cannot open a business unless you get an exception. This is true even if a child care program meets all state licensing requirements.

Check with the local government in your area to find out about zoning regulations or call your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency.



Check Restrictive Covenants

If you want to locate your child care business in a residential setting, check to see if there are any restrictive covenants before you rent or purchase the property. Housing developers can include restrictive covenants in deeds and homeowners' association agreements. These restrictive covenants may limit business activity in the community. The homeowners' association will have information on any restrictions. If you rent your property, you will need to check with the property owner or your community's homeowners' association about any rules.

If covenants do not allow businesses, you cannot open a business unless you get an exception. This is true even if a child care program meets all state licensing requirements.

Evaluate the Space

Once you've found the perfect location, you need to [evaluate the space](#) surrounding your location to make sure it is suitable for child care. Because each state has different regulations, check with your [local Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency and your [state licensing agency](#) for more information.

Resource: Finding a Location

Before you start the search for a location for your child care business, take the time to complete the [needs assessment](#). This information can help you think about the best location for your child care business. Starting a business is a big investment, and you want to make sure there is a need for a child care center in your area before you search for a location.

Once the need has been established, contact your local [Child Care Resource & Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for help in determining the best location for your child care business. If you are considering building, purchasing, or renting a space for your child care business, think about establishing your business in an area where families live or along their route to work. You may also want to contact a local realtor that can help you locate properties that would be suitable for a child care center business.

Check local zoning laws and restrictive covenants to make sure you are able to open a child care business before you build, purchase, or rent a building. Some states may also require the child care to have a business license. If you need help with finding this information, contact your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\) agency](#).

	Yes	No
I have completed the needs assessment and identified the best location for my child care business based on the most recent data available to me.		
I checked with my state licensing office and ask about any building requirements for child care centers.		
I checked local zoning laws to make sure I can open a business in this area.		
I checked neighborhood covenants to make sure I can open a business in this area. (This will apply if you are planning on opening a child care center in a residential area.)		
I checked with my state licensing office or my local Child Care Resource and Referral agency to see if I need a business license to operate a child care center in my area.		
If I am renting a space, I checked with the lease agreement to make sure that I can operate a child care business in the rental property.		

If you have not checked **“yes”** to the above questions, please take the time to find out the state licensing requirements for child care centers, zoning laws, and restrictive covenants before you go any further.

Resource: Evaluate Your Space

The following questions can be used as a guide to help you think about the space you are considering for your child care business. Check with your [state licensing agency](#) and your local [Child Care Resource & Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency regarding specific requirements for your state. Those requirements are the ones you need to follow.

Structural Questions

	Yes	No
Have you reviewed your state's licensing requirements regarding structural requirements needed to operate a child care business in your state?		
If you are renovating an existing space, have you checked with your state licensing requirements regarding needed updates?		
Have you checked with your state licensing agency to make sure you can legally operate the child care program on the level of the building you wish to operate? (Some states may have restrictions on whether the child care can be located on an upper or lower level of a building.)		
Are there at least two exits on your ground floor that lead to the outside?		
Does the space have hand-washing and toileting areas in the rooms occupied by the children?		
Is there sufficient storage and janitorial space that are not accessible to children?		
Does the center have space for staff to take a break away from the children?		
Is there adequate parking for parents and staff?		
Are parents easily able to enter and exit the parking lot?		
Does the space have an adequate kitchen to meet the size of the program planned and does the kitchen meet required licensing and health standards?		
Does the kitchen meet fire safety standards?		

Evaluate Your Space *continued*

Physical Space

	Yes	No
Have you reviewed your state's licensing requirements to learn about the indoor and outdoor space requirements that are required for child care centers?		
Review your state's child care licensing requirements to learn how many square feet are required per child indoors and outdoors. Does your space meet these requirements?		
Is there enough space for each child to move freely?		
Will you have a space for each child's personal belongings?		
Can you maintain adequate air flow and comfortable room temperature?		
Are you able to keep your hot water heater at no more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit so that children are safe from scalding?		
Is the physical layout arranged so caregivers can view all areas at all times?		
Will you have places for children to play, rest, and eat?		
Is there room for storage of cleaning supplies, staff belongings and additional items where they are not accessible to children?		
Do you have a safe outdoor play space, or is there a playground nearby that you will be allowed to use? Check with your state's licensing agency to determine what constitutes an outdoor play area for child care centers.		
Is the surface under outdoor play equipment soft and free from dangerous objects to prevent injury?		
Is there a fence or natural barrier around your outdoor play space?		
If you have a swimming pool, is there a locked fence around it that meets the height required by your state?		
Have you checked the area surrounding your child care center for other potential water safety hazards (lakes, ponds, creeks, fountains, etc.) and consulted your state licensing agency regarding safety protocols?		

Evaluate Your Space *continued*

Health and Safety

	Yes	No
If you rent or purchase an older building (built before 1975), has it been tested for lead, asbestos, or other toxic materials? (Your community health department or child care licensing agency can refer you to experts who can take samples of paint and other materials for testing.)		
Is the air quality in and around the child care center adequate?		
Is the source for drinking water regularly tested, and does it meet required health standards?		
Is the child care center located in an area away from gas stations where there are underground or above ground gas/oil storage tanks?		
Is the child care center located away from other known environmental hazards?		
Have you been in contact with your local fire station or other state fire officials to learn about local fire safety rules ?		
Have you reviewed the Americans with Disabilities Act to make sure you understand how to plan an accessible design?		



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Develop Policies and Procedures

It is important to outline your policies and procedures for operating your child care business for your employees and families. It is also important to have your policies and procedures reflect the [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) for the early childhood field.

Your policies and procedures will include a number of important topics and are designed to help your business run smoothly. Many states require you have written policies for families. Check with your state licensing agency or your local [Child Care Resource and Referral](#) agency to find out what you need to include.

Staff Handbook

The staff handbook outlines the expectations you have for your employees. If you want your staff handbook to be a binding agreement between you and your employee(s), make sure you review it with each staff member. Consider having them sign a document stating they read and understand the contents.

The following topics are often included in staff handbooks:

- Mission and philosophy of your program
- Benefits and pay scale
- Job descriptions, evaluation procedures, and hiring and termination policies
- Information on child abuse prevention, identification, and requirements for reporting
- Child behavior and guidance policies
- Health and safety procedures
- Family communication and involvement
- Professional development requirements

Family Handbook

The family handbook outlines your program's policies and procedures and includes other important information for families. Encourage families to read the handbook and ask questions. Family handbooks often include the following topics:

Family handbooks often include the following topics:

- Mission and philosophy of your program
- Description of your program, including your operating hours and the ages of children you serve
- Information on whether your program is part of your state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) or nationally accredited
- Information on when payment is due and a policy regarding late payments
- Description of the curriculum and daily schedule for children
- Description of family involvement activities
- Required forms for families to complete such as the registration form, health forms, medication administration forms, emergency contact information, and field trip permission forms
- Information on policies regarding communication with families, guidance and discipline, drop-off and pick-up procedures, emergency closings, fee and payment arrangements, food and nutrition, program closings, and transportation policies
- Description of your disaster and emergency plans - [this manual](#) from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness can help you develop your plan

Resource: Staff Handbook Template

Use this outline as you are developing your staff handbook. Below are some items that are typically included.

Welcome & Introduction

- Welcome letter
- History of your child care business
- Mission
- Values

Employment Practices

- Equal opportunity
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) & reasonable accommodations
- Commitment to diversity
- Harassment and complaint procedure
- Consensual relationships

Conflict of Interest Policy

Confidentiality Policy

Personal Conduct and Performance

- Collaboration
- Performance management
- Whistle-blowing protection
- Child abuse reporting

Employment Relationship

- Employment classification
- Work week and hours of work
- Time records
- Overtime
- Compensation
- Payroll deductions and garnishments
- Access to personnel files
- Promotions
- Professional development
- Employment of relatives
- Separation from employment

Workplace Safety

- Drug-free workplace
- Smoke-free workplace
- Background screenings
- Workplace violence prevention
- Commitment to health and safety
- Emergency procedures

Workplace Guidelines

- Attendance
- Outside employment
- Dress and grooming
- Acceptable social media use
- Computers, internet, email and other resources

Time Off and Leaves of Absence

- Holidays
- Paid time off
- Family & medical leave
- Military leave
- Bereavement leave
- Jury duty / court appearance
- Worker's compensation

Employee Benefits

- Medical, dental, vision insurance
- Group life insurance
- Health savings account
- Flexible spending account
- Retirement plan
- Short /long term disability
- Consolidate Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)
- Tuition reimbursement
- Child care discount

Resource: Family Handbook Template

Use this outline as you are developing your Family Handbook. Below are some items that are typically included.

Welcome

Center Information

- Contact information / chain of command
- Mission statement and philosophy
- Hours of operation
- Attendance policy
- Holiday closure schedule

Curriculum Approach

Registration and Fees

- Enrollment policy
- Enrollment procedure
- Fee policies and procedures
- Activity/special program fees
- Late tuition fees and late pick-up fees policy
- Returned checks
- Absence and vacation time
- Sibling discount

Center Activities and Routines

- Daily schedule
- Special program activities
- Nap time schedule / policy
- Weather policy
- Spare clothing

Emergency Preparedness

- Fire drills
- Tornado drills
- Emergency evacuation procedures
- Emergency medical procedures
- Utility interruption

Health, Safety, and Nutrition

- Preventative care
- Immunization records
- Physical examinations
- Illness
- Contagious illness/Exclusion from child care
- Medication policy
- Nutrition / Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) participation
- Sample menus
- Food allergies/special food issues
- Child abuse
- Safety/security of center

General Policy Information

- Termination of services

Family Involvement

- Open door policy
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Communication
- Family resources
- Family workshops and meetings / family advisory council
- Volunteers

Parent Forms

- Parent agreement and acknowledgment of receipt of family handbook
- Publicity release form (to use photos of children in promotional material)



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Hire Staff

Most states have requirements regarding minimum education and experience qualifications for child care providers and ratio requirements. It is important to contact your local [Child Care and Resource Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency or your local [licensing agency](#) to understand the minimum qualifications needed to be a child care provider.

Provider Qualifications

Because requirements vary state by state, check with your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency or your state licensing agency for minimum qualifications for child care staff. Generally, these requirements for staff include:

- Minimum age, usually 18 years
- High school diploma or equivalent
- Initial and ongoing training

Provider Training Options

You may want to earn additional qualifications in order to prepare yourself to work with children. Child Care Aware® of America recommends all child care center staff have at least 40 hours of initial training, including CPR, first aid and other basic safety and health training, and training on child development and 24 hours of annual training. You may want to check out trainings through your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency and local universities if you are interested in or need to earn additional training hours.

You may also want to think about earning a degree or credential in the early childhood field. One option for earning a credential is the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. The CDA is a nationally accepted early childhood credential awarded by the [Council for Professional Recognition](#). There are different options to earn your credential, including taking classes with an instructor or online. Child Care Aware® of America offers an [online version](#) of the CDA credential in both English and Spanish.

Staffing Needs and Ratios

The minimum number of staff you need depends on the ages and number of children in your program.

Your state licensing regulations will have very specific requirements on:

- Staff to child ratios, which is the number of staff needed for a specific number of children
- Group size, which is the maximum number of children allowed in the group.
- The number of usable square feet, which will tell you how many children you can have in your program.

Best practice recommendations for ratios and group size for a child care center:

- 0-12 months: 3-4 children per caregiver, max group size of 8 children
- 13-23 months: 4 children per caregiver, max group size of 8 children
- 2-year-olds: 4-6 children per caregiver, max group size of 12 children
- 3-year-olds: 7-9 children per caregiver, max group size of 18 children
- 4- and 5-year-olds: 8-10 children per caregiver, max group size of 20 children
- 6- to 8-year-olds: 10 children per caregiver, max group size of 20 children
- 9- to 12-year-olds: 12 children per caregiver, max group size of 24 children

Check with your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency and your [state licensing agency](#) to learn more about specific ratio and group size requirements in your state.



Opening a Child Care Center *continued*

Market Your Program

Developing a [marketing plan](#) will help you think about why families should choose your program over other child care providers in your community. It also gives your program a sense of identity or brand. Contact your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for help in creating your marketing plan. Many CCR&Rs may offer trainings specifically on this topic.

Know Your Mission

Think about what makes your program unique and how it can meet the needs of children and families. What benefits beyond the hours of operation and the ages of children you plan to serve will you offer to families? Think about how your program will meet the needs of children and families.

Understand the Child Care Market

Use your findings from the [needs assessment](#) to help you answer questions about the need for child care in your area, what age groups might need care, and where parents live and work.

Know Your Competitors

It's important to know who else is providing child care services in your area. You may want to visit other child care programs to get a sense of what they offer to children and families. Use this [resource](#) to help you compare other programs in your area.

Target Your Audience

Consider all the ways you can reach parents in your community. Think about where parents are likely to look for information, and reach out to other businesses to get the word out about your program. Also think about what type of families would benefit most from your program. Ask your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for help in reaching your target audience.



Develop Strategies

Think about the different [strategies](#) you can use to attract parents to your program. You may want to create a logo or a sign in front of your child care business for prospective parents, develop a social media presence, and distribute brochures/flyers about your program. Whatever strategies you develop, think about the budget you may need for each strategy.

Set Objectives

Implementing your marketing plan is a big step, but you also need to evaluate your plan to know what types of strategies work for you.

Create the Plan

Your [marketing plan](#) should highlight the unique aspects of your program, including your strategies to attract families to your program and your marketing budget. You should market your program whether you are just opening or if you have been open for years.

Resource: Marketing Plan Template

- 1. Program Mission:** Think about your program's unique identity. What makes your child care business special or unique? How are you different from other child care programs in your community? Your program mission should be 2-3 sentences long. Write your program's mission statement, keeping it to 2-3 sentences.
- 2. Market Analysis:** What are the demographics of the families in the area where you want to open your child care business? Is there a need for another child care program because of shifting demographics or new employers moving into the area? What is the need for your program in your area? Use information from the [needs assessment](#) to help you complete this.
- 3. Competitors:** What other child care programs are in the same area as your program? You may want to look at different types of child care programs, such as other licensed child care centers, family child care homes, YMCA programs, and other types of child care programs in your community. When you have an idea of the different types of programs in your area, you may be better able to define your program's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth.
- 4. Target Your Audience:** What other audiences do you want to reach? Is your child care business located near a major employer? What type of families do you want to attract to your child care center? Are you interested in serving children who are dual language learners or children with special needs?
- 5. Develop Strategies:** Do you have a logo to identify your child care center to prospective parents? What are some specific strategies you will use to draw parents to your program? Will you use social media or will you need printed materials? What specific steps do you need to take and how much money will it cost to implement your marketing strategies? Use the [marketing strategies and budget](#) to help you think through these steps.
- 6. Set Objectives:** How will you know if your marketing plan is successful? Set benchmarks for your marketing objectives so you know what types of marketing strategies work for you.

Resource: Marketing Strategies and Budget - Sample

Marketing Strategy	Person Responsible	Start Date-End Date	Budget

Resource: Marketing Strategies and Timeline

Action Step	Person Responsible	Start Date-End Date	Budget

Resource: Competitor Analysis

		My Business	Competitor #1	Competitor #2	Competitor #3
Program Name					
Street Address					
Website Address					
Days and Hours of Operation					
Tuition	Infants:	\$	\$	\$	\$
	Toddlers:	\$	\$	\$	\$
	Preschool:	\$	\$	\$	\$
	Pre-k:	\$	\$	\$	\$
	School aged:	\$	\$	\$	\$
Appearance: <i>(Are the space and materials/toys clean and well maintained? Do you see any health or safety hazards?)</i>					
Equipment and Toys: <i>(Are there age appropriate outdoor and indoor toys?)</i>					
Child Interactions: <i>(Do the providers interact well with the children?)</i>					
Adult Interactions: <i>(Is staff helpful and friendly to other parents?)</i>					
Environment: <i>(Does the program have an age-appropriate schedule with time for structured learning activities, playtime, and quiet time?)</i>					
Parent Involvement: <i>(What does the program do to involve parents?)</i>					
Notes: <i>(What aspects of this program that you observed make it unique?)</i>					



Operating a Successful Child Care Program

Once you open your Child Care Center, you will want to ensure that your program structure and practices provide a high-quality learning experience for children. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency can help improve the quality of your program through training, coaching, and connecting you to additional resources and supports.

Strengthening your program structure provides the foundation for your child care center business to be successful. In this section, you will learn about programs and practices that can strengthen the overall structure of your child care center.

Strengthening your program practices will address the curriculum, materials, resources, and daily interactions you and your staff have with the children and families in your care.





Operating a Successful Child Care Program *continued*

Program Structure

QRIS and National Accreditation

Some states have a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Child care programs earn ratings when they meet certain quality standards. Programs earn higher ratings as they meet more quality standards. In some states, QRIS is mandatory for licensed child care providers or for programs that receive state subsidies. Learn more about your state's QRIS by clicking on the [State by State Resource Map](#). Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency also can help you connect to your state's QRIS.

Some child care programs reach higher standards by becoming accredited by a national accrediting body. Achieving accreditation is a voluntary process for child care providers. Programs that choose to become accredited have to show they meet requirements above and beyond state licensing requirements. The main accrediting body for licensed child care centers is the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#).

Health and Nutrition Practices

There are a number of things you can do to help children receive healthy and nutritious food throughout the day and instill quality health practices in your child care program. The [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#) is a voluntary program that helps qualified child care providers serve healthy and nutritious meals and snacks for children in their care. CACFP reimburses child care providers for a portion of the costs for eligible meals and snacks served, depending on the income status of the families.

In addition to CACFP, there are other health and nutrition practices that you will want to implement. Practices such as record keeping, special infant and toddler feeding practices, proper handwashing, diapering and toileting procedures are all important elements of a high quality program. Many of these practices may be required by your [state licensing agency](#).

Supervision and Safety Practices

Supervision and safety practices are some of the most important features of your program. Not only do these practices keep children safe, but it also helps you provide higher quality care. Many of these practices may be required by your [state licensing agency](#). When programs are properly staffed and when staff actively supervise children at all times, the more likely staff are able to engage in warm and responsive interactions with children.

Staffing Practices

Not only is it important to have the adequate number of staff for your program, but it also is important to have staff that have an early education background and experience working with young children. Use the resource below to help you think about what type of training and education you and your staff may need to operate a high quality child care program. Keep in mind that some of these practices may be required by your [state licensing agency](#).

Child Care Policies and Procedures

Your child care policies and procedures will help you communicate your expectations to both your parents and staff. These policies will help you when questions arise. Some of these policies and procedures may be required by your [state licensing agency](#).

Resource: Child Care Center Program Structure

A successful child care center depends on a number of factors. Putting practices and resources into place to strengthen your program structure is one way to increase your chances of success. The topics below can help you think about how to do this in your program.

QRIS and National Accreditation

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The child care center is licensed.			
My state has a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and my child care program is enrolled and working on achieving higher levels of quality.			
I have researched what my program needs to do to become nationally accredited.			

Health and Nutrition

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program is enrolled in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).			
If the program is not enrolled in the CACFP, the food served to children meets nutritional standards.			
The program has a plan in place if a child has food allergies or dietary restrictions.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Program records show that the children enrolled are up to date on all of the required immunizations.			
Handwashing is a regular part of the program’s practices for both the providers and children, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.			

Health and Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The place where diapers are changed is clean.			
Caregivers always keep a hand on the child while diapering.			
Caregivers remove the soiled diaper without dirtying any surface not already in contact with stool or urine.			
Caregivers clean and sanitize the surface after finishing the changing process. Hands are scrubbed with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds and then rinsed and dried. The water faucet is turned off with a paper towel.			
Infants are fed on demand.			
Breastmilk is stored appropriately.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Health and Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
There is a place where mothers can comfortably breastfeed their child.			
New foods are introduced to toddlers appropriately.			

Safety and Supervision Questions

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
<p>The program follows best practices regarding ratio and group size.</p> <p>Best practice recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-12 months: 3-4 children per caregiver, max group size of 8 children • 13-23 months: 4 children per caregiver, max group size of 8 children • 2-year-olds: 4-6 children per caregiver, max group size of 12 children • 3-year-olds: 7-9 children per caregiver, max group size of 18 children • 4- and 5-year-olds: 8-10 children per caregiver, max group size of 20 children • 6- to 8-year-olds: 10 children per caregiver, max group size of 20 children • 9- to 12-year-olds: 12 children per caregiver, max group size of 24 children 			
The program follows the state licensing standards for ratio and group size. Check with your state licensing agency for this information.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Supervision of Children	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Children are actively supervised at all times, both indoors and outdoors, even when they are sleeping.			
All staff have completed comprehensive background checks.			
All staff have been trained on how to prevent, recognize, and report signs of child abuse.			

Safe Sleep Practices for Infants and Toddlers	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Infants are put to sleep on their backs.			
The infant sleep spaces consist of a firm sleep surface, such as a mattress in a crib, covered by a fitted sheet with no other bedding.			
The infant sleep spaces are kept free of soft objects, toys, crib bumpers, and loose bedding.			
All child care staff, volunteers, and substitutes are trained on safe sleep practices to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).			
All infants have their own designated sleep space that is the same every day.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Safe Sleep Practices for Infants and Toddlers	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
During rest time, staff can see and hear infants and toddlers at all times.			
Staff regularly checks on infants and toddlers when they are sleeping.			
Safe sleep infant practices are posted in the infant sleeping area as a reminder to all staff, volunteers, and substitutes.			
When infants are physically able to roll over, there is a sign posted by their bed indicating that the child can roll.			

Safety	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The indoor and outdoor environment is clear of safety hazards, such as cleaning supplies and tripping hazards.			
The child care center has been inspected for radon, lead, and asbestos.			
Toys are clean, safe, and within reach of children.			
If the program provides transportation, it is safe and reliable. All drivers are licensed and insured and children are properly restrained in the appropriate car safety seat that is appropriate for their weight and age.			
There are clear check-in and check-out procedures.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Safety for Infants and Toddlers	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Caregivers are trained in infant CPR and their certification is current.			
Infants and toddlers are within sight and sound at all times.			
Outlets are covered/protected.			

Emergency Plans and Drills	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program has a plan in place in case of an emergency or disaster, like a fire, tornado, flood, blizzard, earthquake or active shooter.			
The program practices safety drills once every month.			
The program has an emergency plan in case a child is injured, sick, or lost.			
The program has information about who to contact in an emergency.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

First Aid and Medication	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
All staff have been trained on CPR and First Aid and certifications are current.			
The program has first aid kits that are regularly re-stocked.			
All medications are kept out of the reach of children.			
All staff have been trained and medications are labeled to make sure the right child receives the right amount of medication.			

Staff Practices

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The center management staff have a bachelor's degree in an early childhood related field.			
The center management staff have worked in child care for at least one year.			
Teachers plan lessons and experiences for the children that help them learn and grow.			
Teaching staff understand what children need to learn and grow.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Teaching staff have a bachelor’s degree or credentials in an early childhood related field.			
Teaching staff, including the director, participates in ongoing training or continuing education programs.			

Child Care Policies and Procedures

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program provides a written contract before families enroll their child.			
The program provides a copy of the family handbook and reviews it with the family prior to enrollment.			
The program clearly outlines the cost of care, field trip or special program fees, and any other fees.			
The program has a policy regarding drop-off and pick-up times, including who can pick up children. Late pick-up fees are charged if parents are late.			
The program has a policy for times when it may close, such as for certain holidays, inclement weather, or in case of emergencies.			
The program has a policy regarding when children should stay home because of illness.			

Child Care Center Program Structure *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program has a policy regarding termination of a family's child care agreement.			
The program has a written policy for when staff are allowed to give medications.			
The program has a written supervision policy or plan that ensures children are supervised at all times.			
The program provides a written guidance and discipline policy to families.			



Operating a Successful Child Care Program *continued*

Program Practices

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

When designing your child care program for quality, you will want to incorporate practices that are developmentally appropriate for the children in your care. Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) means that you are using knowledge about how children learn and grow to design an appropriate learning environment and experiences for them. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency can help you with training and resources to incorporate these practices into your child care program.

Curriculum

Your curriculum is your plan or roadmap of what you want to teach and how you teach young children the skills they need to be prepared for kindergarten. Although there are a number of different curricula available on the market for you to purchase, make sure it includes a focus on each domain of development. Use this [resource](#) to help you think about choosing a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Family Engagement

Families are a key element in all child care programs. Building meaningful relationships with families shows you are a partner in their child's development. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency can help you develop and design family engagement opportunities for the families in your child care program.

Caregiver-Child Interactions

One of the most important features of your child care program will be how you and your staff interact with the children in your care. Use the resource below to think about how you and your staff can increase the quality of interactions with the children in your care.



Indoor Environment

Designing a high quality indoor learning environment for children will require you to have a number of different learning centers and experiences for children of different ages and abilities. You also will want to think about your room layout and design and where you will put different learning centers. Your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency can help you design a quality learning environment.

Outdoor Environment

Designing a high quality outdoor environment and experiences for children should include equipment of the right size and type for the children you serve. There should be plenty of space for children to move about and experience the fresh air. There are a number of safety considerations you will need to think about in order to provide a quality outdoor learning environment. Many of these practices may be required by your [state licensing agency](#).

Resource: Child Care Center Program Practices

You can take steps towards providing a high quality early care and education environment for the children in your program. Putting thought and care into the following areas of your program can help you to enhance your program quality.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Staff are knowledgeable about typical ages and stages of children’s development.			
Staff take the time to observe children in their play and develop learning opportunities that may interest them.			
The program has age appropriate learning experiences for all children.			
The program plans learning experiences that meet each child’s developmental needs.			
The program plans learning experiences that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for children and that reflect their family and community.			
The program plans for small group activities with children.			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program provides opportunities for children to choose with whom they work and play.			
The program helps guide children’s learning experiences by providing support to them when they need assistance.			

Curriculum

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The program uses a written curriculum that is based in theories of child development.			
The curriculum my program uses addresses all major domains of development including:			
Language/literacy			
Mathematics			
Science			
Social studies			
Social emotional development			
Physical growth and development			
Motor development (gross and fine motor)			
Approaches to learning			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The curriculum helps teachers think about how to teach children different skills in each of the major domains.			
The curriculum has specific learning goals for children.			
The curriculum has well-designed learning activities.			
The curriculum emphasizes observing children’s learning as a way of ongoing assessment.			
The curriculum allows teachers to individualize instruction.			
The curriculum has a family engagement component.			
The curriculum can be adapted to use with children with special needs.			
The curriculum is culturally and linguistically responsive to the families the program serves.			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Family Partnership

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Staff share and talk to families about their child’s daily activities, either at drop-off or pick-up.			
The program incorporates technology as a communication tool and shares information with families on how to access it and how the information is kept secured.			
Families are encouraged to visit at any time.			
There are multiple ways for families to be involved in the program and parent ideas are incorporated into the program.			
There are regular opportunities (at least twice per year) where families can meet with the staff, share their child’s strengths and hear how their child is developing skills.			
Staff often share observations and ongoing assessment information with families.			
Staff work to incorporate the family’s culture and values into the classroom.			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Caregiver-Child Interactions

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Children are comforted when needed through hugs, pats on the back, high fives, and other forms of affection.			
Each child is warmly greeted when they arrive.			
Staff consistently talk with children and seem genuinely interested in what the children are doing.			
Staff routinely have one on one back-and-forth conversations with each child every day.			
Staff routinely get down on children’s level and speak with them.			
Staff help children solve their own problems rather than solving problems for them.			
Staff is proactive and not reactive to children’s behavior.			
Staff encourages peer interactions with children who are of different ages and abilities. If infants are enrolled in the program, they routinely have an opportunity to interact with the older children.			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Indoor Environment

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
There is enough room in the environment for children and providers to move around.			
There are different areas for resting, quiet play, and active play.			
Materials are well-organized and on low shelves so children can reach them by themselves.			
The program provides the following interest centers:			
Book area			
Block play			
Sensory table (e.g., sand/water)			
Fine motor area			
Dramatic play			
Arts and crafts area			
Musical toys			
Writing area			
Large muscle activity area			
Space for children to relax quietly, away from the activity of the rest of the children			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
There are enough toys and learning materials for the number of children enrolled in the program.			
The program changes out the classroom materials based on interests of the children.			
The program limits the use of TV, computers, or other types of technology with the children.			
The environment is reasonably clean.			

Outdoor Environment

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
The drop-off and pick-up location is located in an area away from the playground and where children do not have access.			
There is a space for outdoor play.			
The outdoor play area is easily accessible.			
The outdoor play area is fenced in.			

Child Care Center Program Practices *continued*

Indicator	Yes	No	Ways to increase quality
Pools and other water features (fountains, rivers, streams, etc.) are not accessible to children at any time without adult supervision.			
The fence does not have any sharp edges or points. There are no openings between 3 ½ and 9 inches.			
The outdoor play area is regularly inspected.			
The outdoor area is clean and free from trash.			
The equipment is the right size and type for the age of children who use it.			
There are bicycles, balls, hoops, and other toys available for children to use.			
Learning centers such as art, nature/science, books, and others are available outdoors for the children.			
Children are taken outside on a regular basis.			
Children are actively supervised while outdoors.			



Training and Education Essentials

All child care providers need training and education in order to learn new information to help keep children healthy and safe. Ongoing training and education can also help child care providers learn and practice new teaching skills and can give providers ideas and resources on how to provide quality child care.



Required and Ongoing Training Essentials

Each state will have different training requirements for child care providers. Generally, certain health and safety topics such as CPR, First Aid, and safe sleep may be required. In addition to the required trainings, ongoing training helps reinforce best practices and helps you learn new information and skills. Check with your local [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agency for a list of required and ongoing training topics. Child Care Aware® of America's [Training Academy](#) also provides training topics.

Some trainings may be more in-depth, offered over a period of time, and may award certificates or a credential upon successful completion. Check to see if these trainings offer continuing education units (CEUs) for a fee. This might help you earn credits towards a college degree. Your local CCR&R can help you find these types of trainings that can help you earn a higher educational degree.

Education Essentials

Each state will have different educational requirements for child care providers. Continuing your education can help you provide quality child care and is an important hallmark of high quality programs. Different quality improvement initiatives, such as accreditation and state [Quality Rating and Improvement Systems \(QRIS\)](#) require higher levels of education in order to achieve accreditation or higher levels on the QRIS.

There are different ways you can continue your education in the early childhood field. Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency to learn more about different programs in your area that can help you earn your Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, associate's degree or bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Child Care Aware® of America's [Training Academy](#) offers an online CDA credential in both English and Spanish. Your local colleges and universities will also have information on earning your associate or bachelor's degree in early childhood education.