

**Maryland State Department of Education
Office of Child Care, Licensing Branch**

Customer Service

Background

The provision of Customer Service is one of the behavioral elements that is rated under the State of Maryland's Performance Planning and Evaluation Program (PEP). To meet the State's standard you must:

1. Strive to meet customer requirement
2. Be courteous to customers and co-workers
3. Provide timely, accurate and appropriate information to internal and external customers.
4. Present a professional image to customers in attire and maintenance of workspace
5. Keep commitments and follow through on customer requests.

You have an obligation to offer the best service to your providers. Customer service refers to all aspects of interaction with our providers and advocates and creates our organization's image in their minds. On the other hand, our providers and advocates are our most valuable advertising tool – word of mouth advertising. As you know this can be good or bad. Good word of mouth advertising will only happen if our providers and advocates are happy and satisfied.

We will always be ahead of the game if we approach the licensing process with thoughts of how you can make it happen for the provider – not how it cannot happen. Sometimes we encounter situations where you may have to be creative and think outside of the box to find solutions to challenges. Our variance process was established for that purpose and we need to become skilled in using it.

Providing Good Customer Service

The following is expected of all staff in the Licensing Branch:

Give Memorable Service – Providers want to feel special. Give them the same service that you would expect, and then go beyond. What do you want them to remember you by? That you did not answer the phone because it was past 5 p.m., or that you went that extra mile when they really needed you? When you are inspecting the provider's home, be courteous – use Please, Thank You, and say things like, How are you doing? Is there anything else I can do for you today? Be respectful to the provider's home. If asked to remove your shoes, do so. This will show your providers that you care and respect them. Be truthful and diligent as you work. Only promise what you can deliver – don't overpromise. Your excellent customer service will create long-standing good relationships.

Return all phone calls within 48 hours. - When speaking with a customer, focus and listen – make sure the caller have all of your attention. Say, "May I help you?" While on a telephone conversation use the person's name at different points in the call. Be courteous and use "Please"

and “Thank You”. And where appropriate you could end the conversation saying “Is there anything else I can do for you today?”

Respond to emails within 48 hours - Read your emails daily and “star” those that require responses. Once you’ve responded, remove the “star” and file in an email folder if desired.

Listen Intently to Complaints – it is feedback of the highest order. Many program improvements have been made as a result of receiving complaints.

Be Curious – ask questions and ask for feed back information from your providers. While we no longer use the survey cards, you could ask the provider, on a scale of 1 to 10 how would I score on providing service to you today?

Difficult Providers - For irate providers, let them vent and do not interrupt till they complete their talk. You can diffuse their anger by saying that “I apologize” or “It’s unfortunate that” Understand that the situation is real to the provider. It may seem elementary to you, as the professional, but to the provider, this may be a new process and the uncertainty of the outcome is the most bothersome thing to the provider.

Certainty is one of those innate human needs that we all must have. Uncertainty can create anxiety that manifests itself with anger, accusations or the charge that you are unprofessional.

Again, allow them to vent their feelings. It allows you to get a broader perspective of the challenge and more information to create a solution. Just put it into perspective and do not take it personally. See it as a situation or an event, not as a definition of you or the provider. React fast. Get the facts and actively solve the situation. Confer with others for assistance if necessary. Remember, only promise what you can deliver – don’t over promise.

Let’s put our best foot forward and become Experts in Customer Service!