

# ROADMAP TO QUALITY

**STARTING AND SUSTAINING A SUCCESSFUL  
FAMILY CHILD CARE BUSINESS**

BY GLADYS HAYNES & CAREN CALHOUN

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# INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care providers have the potential to significantly influence the health and development of young children, greatly impacting their success in school and beyond. Caring for young children is more complex than merely baby-sitting, as it involves providing holistic care that will ultimately shape children into competent, caring individuals. This guide is designed to provide information, resources, and tools to support your ability to offer children and families high quality early childhood care and education services in your home.

Family child care (FCC) is non-parental care provided to children in a child care provider's home. FCC offers many benefits to families. For example, FCC is provided in a family-style environment which allows siblings to be cared for together. Often, a FCC provider is located in the same neighborhood as the family and care is provided by individuals who share the same culture, language, and child-rearing practices. In comparison to center-based care, FCC providers are more likely to be able to accommodate family members working nontraditional hours or schedules subject to change from week to week. Because children often remain with the same FCC provider for numerous years, providers have the opportunity to develop caring, trusting relationships with the children and family members they serve.

The role of an early childhood care and education provider is incredibly rewarding yet challenging. As a FCC provider, you will wear many different hats, including:

- Educator
- Caregiver
- Child development specialist
- Social worker
- Nutritionist and cook
- Janitor
- Recruiter and public relations specialist
- Business manager, accountant, and human resources manager

High quality care makes a positive impact on children and families. As a child's care provider, you'll likely have the most influence on their development outside of their parents. This is a great responsibility — one that you must intentionally plan for and then strategically implement.

As you begin your journey to becoming a FCC provider, you'll need to first become knowledgeable about operating an early childhood care and education program, as well as running a small business. Like most programs serving the public, there are rules and regulations that will guide how you operate your program.

At the very start of your FCC planning, we recommend that you review your state's licensing regulations and quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) guidelines. The licensing regulations will provide minimum expectations and act as a foundation for determining your future plans and strategies. Building on that, the QRIS guidelines will outline expectations for higher quality care. Additionally, you should plan to follow professional organizations — like the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Office of Head Start (OHS), and local child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) — as they can also provide standards to guide the delivery of child care services to young children, plus current information and news about developments in the field.

This manual offers a roadmap for your journey to becoming a high quality FCC provider. Our definition of "family child care" includes licensed and license-exempt providers as well as family, friend, and neighbor care. Overall, this manual attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of how to establish a licensed FCC home that can become financially viable. If you are not interested in becoming licensed or will not be receiving income for the care you provide, sections of this manual may not apply to your situation. However, other sections including Health, Safety and Nutrition, and Promoting Children's Development, will offer helpful guidance regardless of your licensing status.

## 1

# ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY FAMILY CHILD CARE

## WHY QUALITY CARE?

Many studies indicate that high quality early learning experiences not only impact the immediate success of children in school, but also have positive effects on their eventual success as adults. As you consider launching a FCC business, you'll need to assess how you will establish and maintain a high quality of care. The following discussion is based on the research paper, A Conceptual Model for Quality in Home-Based Child Care (Blasberg, Bromer, Nugent, Porter, Shivers, Tonyan, Tout & Weber, 2019). The model describes quality in these three broad areas:

- Foundations for Sustainability of Care
- Lasting Relationships
- Opportunities for Learning

## FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF CARE

The elements that contribute to a foundation for sustainability of care are not necessarily indicators of quality care, but rather practices that make it possible to provide quality care, such as:

- Creating and maintaining a safe environment. As a FCC provider, you are obligated to protect the health and well-being of the children in your care. As such, it is crucial that you're aware of the local health and safety regulations addressed in your state's child care licensing regulations.
- Promoting providers' health and wellness. In order to be emotionally calm and able to respond in a positive manner to children, providers need to be physically and emotionally well themselves.

- Identifying and engaging with community resources. Community resources are a valuable source of support to a FCC provider and the families enrolled in their program.
- Accessing support for caregiving and teaching. Caregiving activities can be enhanced through a wide range of support systems, including coaching, professional development, and/or early childhood toys and materials.
- Demonstrating reflection and openness to change. Providers who consistently self-reflect and examine their practices are more likely to seek out ways to improve and change their instructional practices and interactions with children.
- Managing business and finances. Good business practices — including developing an annual budget, reaching full enrollment, keeping good financial records, preparation and payment of taxes, and collection of fees — can contribute to the stability of your program and ensure a steady income.

## LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Positive emotional relationships form the basis of a child's social-emotional foundation — a foundation from which all further development occurs. Continuity of care, where a child remains with the same care provider throughout his or her early childhood years, contributes to the development of consistent and predictable patterns of interaction. FCC providers can build lasting relationships by:

- Developing nurturing relationships with children. Caring, responsive relationships encourage each

child's sense of individual worth and help children understand and manage their emotions.

- Facilitating children's relationships with each other. In FCC settings, children can interact with same age peers as well as older and younger children. Siblings are also able to interact in the same space.
- Building responsive relationships with families. FCC providers can be a source of parenting and/or child development information for parents. They can contribute information about support services that promotes family well-being. FCC providers are also more likely to be flexible and sensitive to family needs for care during non-traditional hours and/or provide flexible payment schedules.
- Maintaining healthy relationships with other adults/family members in the FCC home. Relationships between the care provider and their other family members in the home (and/or an assistant) will also impact a child's sense of safety and security in the care provider's home. Relationships that are respectful and kind will create a sense of warmth and safety, while negative interactions (for example, verbal arguments, slamming of doors, etc.) may create an environment where children are fearful and insecure.
- Fostering relationships in the community. FCC providers are embedded within neighborhoods. As such, the children you care for have the potential to develop relationships with your neighbors, postal carrier, local business employees, and others. They may also have access to nearby resources such as the public library, neighborhood park, etc.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

The learning opportunities and interactions a care provider engages in with the children they serve will influence children's learning and development. Supportive learning opportunities and interactions include:

- Promoting children's well-being. This includes protecting them from illness and injury, understanding their developmental trajectory, and providing appropriate behavior guidance. Some helpful resources regarding these practices include:
  - Health and Safety — Caring for Our Children Basics, (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015) at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/caring-for-our-children-basics>.
  - Child Developmental Guidelines, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020) at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/facts.html>.
  - Behavioral Guidance — Pyramid Model (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning, n.d.) at <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>.
  - National Child Traumatic Stress Network, <https://www.nctsn.org>.
- Capitalizing on available materials, equipment, and other resources. Materials — including toys, books, and art materials — should be safe and appealing to children's interests and should encourage children to experiment and learn. Likewise, outdoor play equipment should be age appropriate and accessible to children of all abilities.
- Supporting each child's development through responsive activities, including routines. A commercially available curriculum can be an invaluable resource in planning and designing engaging, stimulating activities for children from different age groups.
- Building on children's familiar and culturally relevant experiences to promote learning. Children's every day experiences are the foundation of their learning. These experiences are more likely to occur in a family home setting where children engage in routines like those they would engage in within their own homes.
- Supporting children to learn with and from each other. Caring for children of mixed ages gives the FCC provider the opportunity to set up meaningful interactions among multi-age children, often where older children can assist younger children in learning new skills.

As you can see, running a successful early childhood care and education program requires more than just a love for children. FCC providers must be able to run a small business that engages in continuous growth and improvement, to develop supportive relationships with parents and children, and to provide children with the experiences necessary to prepare them to succeed in school and as adults.



# 2 DEVELOPING A BUSINESS PLAN

## IS A FAMILY CHILD CARE BUSINESS RIGHT FOR YOU?

As a FCC provider you'll be sharing your family's home 10 or more hours each day with outsiders, so it's important that all household members support your efforts. Here are some questions to consider when deciding if it's best for you and your family to start a FCC business:

- Are all members of your family comfortable with your decision to start your FCC business?
- If you have children of your own, how will they be affected by having other children present in the home? To what extent will they be expected to share their personal toys and/or space?
- Will starting your business cause any changes to family members' household responsibilities?
- Will you be using family living space as part of the child care space? If so, how will this impact your family members?
- How will your hours of operation impact your family members' schedules/routines?
- If you have older children in your home, will they assist you with your business? If so, in what way?
- How will you balance your household responsibilities with your child care responsibilities?
- How will your family benefit from your child care business? (Nebraska Department of Education, Relationships in Family Child Care, 2011)

Once you are confident that a FCC business will not negatively disrupt your family dynamics, you'll need to



develop a business plan that identifies the goals and objectives necessary to successfully accomplish your mission. A good business plan must address how you will:

- Conduct a community child care needs assessment
- Develop work plans and timelines
- Identify auxiliary consultants (for example, early childhood, licensing, architectural, accounting)
- Determine your program model
- Make facility decisions
- Identify funding for the project
- Calculate revenues
- Calculate expenses
- Detail tax benefits
- Establish a recruiting and enrollment plan
- Establish human resources systems

*Disclaimer: The following information is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to substitute for obtaining professional services.*

Opening a FCC home is more than taking care of children and collecting money from parents. You must determine if you need to be licensed and, if so, which child care, health, and fire regulations you'll need to follow to open and operate in your city and state. The best place to start is to contact your state child care licensing department and/or local child care resource and referral agency. Each state has their own licensing regulations, which usually begin with regulating the number of related/unrelated children you will be able to care for and/or the number of hours you will be caring for children in your home.



## COMMUNITY CHILD CARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

To determine if there is a need for child care services in your neighborhood/community, you will need to identify the current number of child care enrollment opportunities (slots) in available programs compared to the number and ages of children who need care. You will also want to research the current trends in your area to determine if there is a growing need for slots (many young families are moving to the neighborhood) versus a declining need for child care (an aging population who will not need child care).

The following table outlines some information that can help you determine the level of community need, plus a list of sources for gathering this data.

INFORMATION CATEGORY	QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED	SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Existing Family Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many child care centers and licensed/license-exempt FCC homes exist and where are they located in your community?</li> <li>How many children are they serving?</li> <li>How many children are on their waitlists?</li> <li>Are these children you could serve?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State child care licensing agency, typically under the Department of Health and Human Services.</li> <li>Statewide early childhood advocacy organization.</li> </ul>
Hours of Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What days and hours do parents in your community need child care?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey of parents in the neighborhood where you plan to locate.</li> <li>Survey of local businesses regarding their hours of operation and employees' child care needs.</li> <li>School schedules of school age children or young parents who may be in high school or college.</li> <li>Statewide early childhood advocacy organization.</li> </ul>
Parent Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What parent fees and/or other fees do other early childhood programs/providers charge in the neighborhood?</li> <li>What fees can parents afford to pay?</li> <li>What are the child care subsidy reimbursement rates and regulations in your community?</li> <li>Will you include meals and other services in your rates?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State child care licensing agency, typically under the Department of Health and Human Services.</li> <li>Survey of parents in the neighborhood where you plan to locate.</li> <li>Statewide early childhood advocacy organization.</li> </ul>

BUSINESS STRUCTURE	OWNERSHIP	LIABILITY	TAXES
Sole Proprietorship	Sole Owner	Unlimited Personal Liability	Self-Employment Taxes Personal Taxes
Limited Liability Company (LLC)	One or more people	Owners are not personally liable	Self-Employment Taxes Personal Taxes

(Small Business Administration, 2017)

## DETERMINE YOUR BUSINESS MODEL

Once you feel confident that there's adequate need for additional child care slots in your community, you can begin thinking about establishing your business model. Since you will be operating a FCC home business, you will need to:

- Determine the name of your business
- Register it as a business
- Select the best business structure for your needs
- Obtain a federal employer identification number (EIN), if appropriate

These four steps will enable you to take tax deductions for business-related expenses. Your business structure will impact your tax responsibilities, your personal liability, and the state paperwork you will need to file. If you are an existing program and are expanding or improving upon quality, your legal business structure is most likely already established. However, if you are new you will need to choose the structure that gives you the right balance of benefits and legal protections.

The table above features the most common business structures used by family child care homes.

We recommend contacting an attorney, certified public accountant (CPA), or your local small business association for additional information regarding how to establish your legal business structure.



## DEVELOP WORK PLANS AND TIMELINES

We recommended that you start by developing work plans for the main tasks you need to complete for your program to become operational. Work plans will allow you to complete the tasks efficiently. Examples of such tasks include:

- Determining your program operations (hours of operation, number and ages of children, etc.).
- Developing an operational budget.
- Designing your indoor and outdoor environments.
- Making renovations to your home or facility.
- Obtaining your child care license and/or business permit.
- Marketing to and recruiting families.
- Developing policies and procedures (including a family handbook).
- Completing required training.
- Purchasing materials, books, and furniture.
- Setting up your home or facility for children and families.
- Engaging parents in your program.

You must establish realistic timelines for completing your work plans in order for your program to start on a given date. You may also want to identify any specific resources and/or materials needed to complete your plans. It should be noted that you will often be working on several plans simultaneously. It will be critical to periodically monitor your plans to ensure progress is being made and to address any challenges that might have emerged. Putting your work plans and their associated timelines in a spreadsheet that you can regularly update will help you monitor your progress.

The table on the right demonstrates a work plan for the task of obtaining your FCC home license.

EXAMPLE TIMELINE TO LICENSURE	TIME PRIOR TO PLANNED OPENING DATE	COMPLETED DATE
Contact your city or county office to determine if zoning laws will need to be addressed or if you need to obtain a business license.	Six months	
Contact your state's licensing agency to understand the steps required to complete a FCC home license, request an application and related forms, and find out the name of the licensing specialist for your area. State licensing specialists and/or QRIS coaching specialists may be available to walk you through the process.	Six months	
Learn about your state's QRIS program. Determine if you can apply for this at the same time you apply for licensure. If yes, and your state's QRIS program is tied to tiered reimbursement, you may receive a higher reimbursement by enrolling earlier. Increases in reimbursement rates vary by state.	Five months	
Based upon licensing requirements, identify renovations required, secure contractors, and begin renovations as needed.	Five months	
Complete state and/or federal required verification and background checks (criminal felony/misdemeanor and child abuse) to complete your licensing packet. (You should check with your state's child care licensing department regarding the time needed to process criminal record checks as it may impact your timeline.)	Five months	
Determine any furniture, materials, and supplies needed and order them.	Four months	
Complete your licensing and QRIS packet, and submit as required.	Four months	
After you have your furniture, materials, and supplies in place, contact your licensing specialist and set up a visit for your initial inspection and approval.	Two months	
Ensure all fire and health inspections are completed.	Two months	
After license is received, fill out the application for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and child care subsidy, if applicable.	One month	

## IDENTIFY YOUR CONSULTANTS

When starting a new program, you'll most likely need a team of individuals with a range of expertise to assist you in your endeavors. Resources may be available through programs in your state including FCC networks, child care resource and referral agencies, and shared services programs. Depending on your level of expertise, we recommend you consider consulting/contracting with the professionals in the table to the right.

## PROGRAM DECISIONS

Two of the earliest decisions you'll need to make involve determining how many and what ages of children you wish to enroll and the days/hours you will operate. Home-based child care providers are categorized into two levels. Small FCC homes usually have a single FCC provider caring for 3-8 children with larger homes having a provider and an assistant who can care for up to 12 children. The number of children you decide to serve will directly impact the space you will need, your staffing, and your annual budget.

When thinking about the number of children you wish to serve, it's imperative to review your state's child care regulations, as requirements regarding the number and ages of children who can be cared for at one time (including your own children) vary by state. Typically, states also limit the number of infants you can care for in a FCC home.

The table at the right can be used when calculating the number of children you wish to serve, as recommended by the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) (2017).

## FACILITY DECISIONS

Most FCC providers operate in their own homes, but others choose to rent a separate home for their

TEAM MEMBER (IF APPLICABLE)	AREA OF EXPERTISE
Child Development Consultant	Assist with development of program policies and practices.
Child Care Licensing Specialist	Provide guidance on implementation of your state's child care regulations.
Business Consultant/Accountant	Assist with determination of business structure. Assist with budget development and startup costs. Assist with developing efficient staffing pattern. Assist with setting up accounting and payroll systems.
Banker/Accountant	Advise on financing the costs associated with starting your program (renovations, purchase of materials and supplies, etc.).
Insurance Agent	Advise on the cost of insurance (property, liability) associated with your new business.

(Sussman, Gillman & Larson, 2006)

NUMBER OF CARE PROVIDERS	TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE	UNDER 2 YEARS	2 YEARS & OLDER
1	6	0	6
1	6	1	5
1	6	2	4
2	7-12	0	7-12
2	7-12	1	7-11
2	7-12	2	7-10
2	7-12	3	7-9
2	7-12	4	7-8

business. To determine the amount of space you need, you should calculate the space requirements based on the number of children you propose to serve and also determine what additional space is necessary to support your program. The child care regulations in your state will dictate the minimum indoor and outdoor space requirements per child. Most guidelines used in state licensing, Head Start, and the NAFCC require a

minimum 35 square feet per child for child care space. This space is exclusive of the bathroom area, storage space, and counter space.

# 3 FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS

To achieve strong fiscal management, you must efficiently and effectively manage the funds that support your business. The significance of this function is not seen in the educational component of your program, but it is reflected in the sustainability and overall financial health of your business. Once you have determined where to locate your program, the space you will need, and whether to renovate or rent, you will need to estimate the costs of getting your FCC home compliant with the required regulations or standards — and you'll need to identify funding sources to achieve this.

## CAPITAL COSTS

Capital costs are fixed, one-time expenses incurred for changes to the property that will house your FCC program. Costs include tangible items like the purchased land and/or home (if applicable), the construction improvements to the land and home, furnishings, and equipment. These costs also include intangible items like professional services, permit fees, taxes, and insurance. Capital costs may be minimal if you plan to use your current home and only need to renovate or reallocate use of existing space. However, if you need to modify your outdoor space (fence, playground equipment) or will be renting or purchasing a separate property for a larger child care program, you may incur greater capital improvement costs.

Costs typically associated with new early childhood projects include:

- Purchase of land and/or building(s) if you're not using your personal home, plus related purchase



fees like attorney's fees, insurance, closing costs on a loan, etc.

- Construction/renovation costs to the home, including materials and labor.
  - › Modifications to existing home structure
  - › Interior finish materials (flooring and wall treatments)
  - › Plumbing, mechanical, or electrical systems
  - › Smoke detectors and/or other safety devices
  - › Signage
  - › Storage
- Construction/renovation costs for site improvements, including materials and labor.
  - › Demolition and removal of materials (for example,

physical structures, lead, and/or asbestos) to prepare for new improvements

- › Playground, landscaping, and fencing
- Building permit and inspection permits, if applicable.
- Indoor and outdoor furnishings for children.
- Regulatory fees (child care licensing, fire inspections, etc.), insurance, and other expenses incurred prior to the program's generation of revenue.
- Professional consulting fees, if applicable.
- Equipment and appliances for kitchen/laundry room.

The preparation of a capital budget is a fluid process that goes through many revisions. You typically start with an initial estimate and then revise the budget once you have accounted for specific costs.

## CAPITAL FUNDING SOURCES

Financing for a FCC facility project typically requires tapping into several funding sources, including your personal financial assets (existing real estate and accumulated savings), grants and gifts, and loans. Both state and federal agencies might be possible sources of funding; however, public funding may involve requirements related to those eligible to attend your program. To the right are possible sources of funding for capital expenses.

## BOOKKEEPING SYSTEMS

Every FCC provider needs to develop bookkeeping practices to manage their financial operations. A system of practices includes the various activities a business owner undertakes to track and summarize their revenue, expenses, and all financial activities needed for tax purposes. When you launch a program it's critical to develop a budget and create a chart of accounts. To ensure accuracy and the level of specificity needed in your financial reports, it's recommended that you use a computerized software system to track, classify, and summarize individual transactions into related categories. Keeping good financial records will provide you the information necessary to make decisions regarding your day-to-day operations, project future needs of your program, and document purchases for tax benefits. (See Appendix A for sample chart of accounts.)

As a small business, the FCC provider may be able to complete most of the fiscal tasks, especially with the assistance of a consultant/mentor. A FCC provider whose time is taken up more and more with day-to-day operations may want to use a knowledgeable and experienced part-time bookkeeper to produce payroll checks and pay necessary payroll taxes for your business, as well as complete your taxes each year.

FUNDING SOURCES	PROS	CONS
Child Care Licensing Grants — State and/or Tribal	May assist with some of the start-up costs for materials associated with new programs depending on state guidelines.	Varies by state.
Loans — local community bank, U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Facilities Program, Small Business Association, Community Development Lenders, Personal (Equity) Loan, Family Members	Funds can be used at owner's discretion and loans spread the cost of the project over several years.	Requires good credit history and you must ensure you can make monthly payments.
Community Development Block Grants (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)	Grants support community revitalization projects, including early childhood programs.	Grants must be applied for by the community. Projects must primarily benefit low- and moderate-income people.
Small Businesses and/or Community Service Organizations	Provide modest grants, discounts, and/or donations as a way of gaining goodwill in the local community. Business leaders may also play a role in assisting with fundraising.	

Another resource which is beginning to emerge in numerous states is an early childhood shared services agency. A shared services agency is able to provide some of the backroom administrative services (such as human resources, accounting, technology assistance, etc.) to FCC homes at a minimal cost. It is recommended that you contact your local child care licensing department to determine if one is available in your area. Many states also have access to an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Shared Resources webpage. ECE Shared Resources is a password-protected web platform that provides extensive information and tools that support the needs of early childhood education and care professionals. Hundreds of easily editable resources are available, including fiscal reporting

resources. You can find a list of states with the ECE Shared Resources platform here: <https://www.ecesharedresources.com/working-with-us/partners-impact>.

## DEVELOPING A BUDGET

An operating budget is an annual fiscal year projection or plan for the amount of revenue a FCC provider will receive and the amount of money that will be spent to operate the business. It is critical that you plan accurately and with sufficient detail regarding the sources and amounts of revenue available to you as well as your anticipated operating expenses. In order to maximize profits or break even and keep your doors open, your revenue must equal or exceed your

expenses. The best way to ensure this is to begin with the development of an annual budget with anticipated revenues and expenses.

Your goal as a FCC provider is to give the highest quality of care possible for the children you serve while also making a profit so that your business has long-term sustainability. You'll need to make sure that you have systems in place that provide for adequate cash flow and that you summarize your revenue and expenses on at least a quarterly basis to compare to quarterly cash-flow projections. To assist you in determining the revenue and expenses of your program, we've included an example of a budget template — see Appendix B for sample FCC home budget template.

### CALCULATING REVENUE (INCOME)

Revenues will primarily come in the form of private parent fees, child care subsidies for children whose families are determined to be eligible based on their income, and/or Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimbursements. The amount of the fees and/or child care subsidy reimbursements typically vary depending on the age of the child. It's best to consult with your local licensing specialist to determine the current child care subsidy rates allowable for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in your locale. Subsidy rates may also vary based on the state's QRIS rating of your FCC home —the higher the rating, the higher your rates of reimbursement may be. Revenue from parent fees will also vary depending on your policies as they relate to enrollment fees, payment for holidays and child absences, minimum/maximum hours per week, etc.

Following are example charts for determining your estimated annual income. These calculations are based on a hypothetical number of children and ages. Dollars used were chosen for simplicity of calculation and are not necessarily representative of any one state.

#### EXAMPLE: Small Family Child Care Home Revenue (6 children)

CHILDREN IN EACH AGE GROUP	PRIVATE WEEKLY FEE RATE/50% OF CHILDREN	SUBSIDY WEEKLY RATE/50% OF CHILDREN	CACFP DAILY RATE/100% OF CHILDREN	WEEKS	TOTAL
Infant (2)	(\$200/1 Child) \$200	(\$175/1 Child) \$175	(\$4.56/2 Children) \$45.60	50	\$21,030
Toddler (2)	(\$180/1 Child) \$180	(\$150/1 Child) \$150	(\$4.56/2 Children) \$45.60	50	\$18,780
Three-Year-Old (2)	(\$170/1 Child) \$170	(\$135/1 Child) \$135	(\$4.56/2 Children) \$45.60	50	\$17,530
Calculated Revenue					\$57,340
10% Uncollectable Fees or Absenteeism					(\$5,734)
Net Total Revenue					\$51,606

#### EXAMPLE: Large Family Child Care Home Revenue (12 children)

CHILDREN IN EACH AGE GROUP	PRIVATE WEEKLY FEE RATE/50% OF CHILDREN	SUBSIDY WEEKLY RATE/50% OF CHILDREN	CACFP DAILY RATE/100% OF CHILDREN	WEEKS	TOTAL
Infant (2)	(\$200/1 Child) \$200	(\$175/1 Child) \$175	(\$4.56/2 Children) \$45.60	50	\$21,030
Toddler (2)	(\$180/1 Child) \$180	(\$150/1 Child) \$150	(\$4.56/2 Children) \$45.60	50	\$18,780
Three-Year-Old (4)	(\$170/2 Children) \$340	(\$135/2Children) \$270	(\$4.56/4 Children) \$91.20	50	\$35,060
Four-Year-Old (4)	(\$170/2 Children) \$340	(\$125/2 Children) \$250	(\$4.56/4 Children) \$91.20	50	\$34,060
Calculated Revenue					\$108,930
10% Uncollectable Fees or Absenteeism					(\$10,893)
Net Total Revenue					\$98,037

For purposes of this example, we have calculated income on a weekly basis with children attending full-time, 50 weeks per year.

We have also determined that 50 percent of the children to be enrolled will be from private pay families and 50 percent will be recipients of child care subsidy funds. CACFP reimbursement for breakfast, lunch, and/or snack for FCC homes is based on the highest tier reimbursement rates. Please also note that it's likely you may not always be fully enrolled or have all children in attendance, nor be able to collect all of your fees. As a result, it's recommended that you reduce your estimated income by 5-10 percent to allow for uncollectible fees and/or days where you are not generating revenue.

## REVENUE SOURCES

It's expensive to operate a quality FCC home program and unfortunately there's no one funding source that will cover all costs. As a result, you will most likely need to rely on more than one revenue source to cover your expenses. This is often referred to as blending and/or braiding funding streams. However, prior to developing your budget, it's critical to understand the regulations regarding the blending and braiding of funds with each source of funding. Depending on the funding source, there may be restrictions that require you to document which fund is paying for which cost.

Following are the funding sources available to FCC homes, each with detailed descriptions and guidance.

### *Parent Fees*

If you're going to charge parents a private pay fee, you must determine a market rate. You will want your fees set high enough to cover your expenses but not so high that parents will go elsewhere and/or not pay them. First, collect information regarding other providers' rates in your recruitment area. Next, you can decide if you

want to charge a low-, mid-, or high-range fee based on the services and quality of the program you will be providing. Typically, programs can also charge parents an enrollment fee and/or activity fees for special events or field trips throughout the year. Fees will vary by age group, with higher fees typically charged for infants and toddlers than for preschoolers. You'll also need to determine if you'll require parents to pay a daily, weekly, or monthly fee. A daily fee will result in income fluctuations as fees will be based on children's attendance. A weekly fee ensures that absences during a given week won't impact your revenue for that week. Providers may also limit how many weeks they will allow families to take vacation with no weekly charge. Asking parents to pay ahead for the coming week may ensure better collection of fees and setting up an online payment system may make payment more convenient for parents. Keeping your break-even point in mind, you will want to balance how many private pay and/or children whose care is paid through child care subsidy you'll need to enroll.

Typically, private pay rates are higher than child care subsidy rates. However, one of the challenges with private pay fees is collecting the fees on a timely basis. It is critical to have systems and procedures in place to ensure that parents pay on time. We suggest you have parents sign a FCC contract holding them accountable for paying agreed upon fees. (See sample contract in Appendix C.) An FCC contract needs to outline clear policies and procedures regarding fee payment expectations and/or penalties for delinquent payments, including non-sufficient funds checks, provisions for families to make direct deposits or electronic payments, and procedures regarding termination of contract due to non-payment of fees.

### *Child Care Subsidy and State Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)*

Although contracted child care subsidy rates are typically lower than the fees for private pay families, you are, for the most part, guaranteed payment. To participate in the child care subsidy program, you will need to enter into a contract with the appropriate state and/or tribal department and will be required to prepare billing paperwork monthly. Typically, reimbursements are based on children's attendance, although many states now allow payment for a number of absences a month. Children's eligibility for the subsidy program may also fluctuate as their family income fluctuates. Collection of copayments (where parents are responsible for part of the cost) can also be challenging. As with private family fees, programs can bill an enrollment and/or activity fee for special events and field trips throughout the year. It's recommended that you contact your state's child care licensing department for additional information regarding the child care subsidy program.

Many states have a QRIS that links program quality to child care subsidy reimbursement rates. This means that if you receive a higher quality rating in your state's QRIS system, you will receive additional subsidy funding per child. Again, it's recommended that you learn more about the child care subsidy and QRIS regulations in your state and/or talk to other providers receiving subsidized payments for information regarding how to best manage the subsidy billing and paperwork demands.

### Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The CACFP program is designed to reimburse child care programs for serving nutritious meals and snacks and promoting healthy eating habits. To participate in CACFP, FCC providers are required to work with a CACFP sponsor who is responsible for collecting and maintaining program records and preparing and submitting the monthly reimbursement claims. The FCC provider will also have to participate in training related to the CACFP program. Program requirements include serving meals that meet program guidelines, keeping records of menus and meals served, and education of children regarding healthy eating habits. Each state's guidelines for participation in the CACFP may vary, so it's important to check your state's guidelines.

### Head Start and Early Head Start

If you are located in an area where there are children living under the federal poverty level, you may be able to partner with your local Head Start/Early Head Start program. Head Start is a federally funded program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. In particular, the Office of Head Start supports partnerships between Early Head Start and community providers. Child care partnership funding opportunities have only been available sporadically in the past; however, if funded they provide a stable funding source. Challenges to receiving funding include specific eligibility criteria and extensive regulations regarding program implementation. Contact the local Head Start program in your community for more information.

## CALCULATING EXPENSES

Operating costs are the expenses related to the day-to-day operations of your program. While it's not critical to have exact costs, it's recommended you estimate your expenses as realistically as possible. The first-year budget is often the most difficult as you're projecting what you estimate your costs will be. In future years, you can look at the previous year's actual expenses as a baseline for the next year's projections.

Your greatest expenses will be wage and benefits costs. Whether or not you require an assistant will depend on the number of children you have enrolled, the teacher-to-child ratios you'll operate under, and your hours of operation. In addition, you may want to consider whether you want to hire a substitute teacher to provide coverage when you are ill or on vacation. It's recommended that you base your wages on the average wages of other FCC providers/staff in your community. Based on the prior example of serving six children, you'd most likely not hire an assistant but might make arrangements for an on-call substitute. However, if you are serving more than 6-8 children, you'll need to hire a teacher assistant and make arrangements for a substitute.

While benefits are an additional expense, they are essential to ensure that you are at your best physically and mentally each day and can be a recruitment and retention incentive if you are hiring an assistant. Benefits can include a limited number of days of paid vacation, sick leave, and holidays. They can also include health insurance and retirement plans. Benefit costs can vary greatly depending on the benefits offered and/or the percentage of benefits paid by the provider (employer) — this especially applies to health insurance costs. It may be worthwhile to check with a shared services agency or child care resource and referral agency, if one is available in your area, to determine if they have access to pooled insurance benefits.



Your operating expenses will typically be calculated on an annual basis as some costs only occur sporadically throughout the year. Operating costs generally fall within the following categories:

- **Wages:** This includes your salary and the salary of those you employ on an ongoing or on call basis. You'll need to identify each position, the percentage of time or hours each person will work, and their hourly wage.
- **Benefits:** Benefits typically include FICA taxes (Social Security and Medicare), state unemployment insurance (only for employees as applicable), health insurance (if applicable), personal coverage for business owners or worker's compensation for employees, and long-term disability if mandated in your state.
- **Contractual:** Contractual costs are costs you pay another person/agency to provide services to your program. Their costs are usually set as a specific



amount per month or per event. Examples of contractual services include custodial, bookkeeping, human resources, professional development, and/or lawn maintenance.

- **Supplies:** This category can include office, educational, health and medical, kitchen, and cleaning supplies needed by the program.
- **Rent/Mortgage Payment:** This includes rent or mortgage based on the percentage of space used by your child care program.
- **Utilities:** This typically includes a percentage of gas, electric, water, garbage, telephone, and/or internet services based on the percentage of time/space used by your child care program.
- **Home Maintenance & Repairs:** This includes maintenance equipment (tools, lawnmower, vacuum, etc.) and anticipated home repairs.
- **Furniture/Equipment Costs:** This includes child care furniture and office equipment, etc. Depending on

the cost of these items, they may be placed under the supply category.

- **Auto Expenses & Mileage:** This category is used if you transport the children enrolled in your program. If you plan to provide transportation, you'll also need to estimate costs related to vehicle maintenance.
- **Child & Parent Services and Activities:** This category includes costs associated with field trips, parent meetings, and other special events, for example, kindergarten graduation, holiday parties, etc.
- **Miscellaneous Costs:** This category might include food costs, marketing and promotions, printing, postage, dues and subscriptions, training/conference costs, and property and liability insurance. (Note: You'll want to make sure that you purchase liability insurance to protect your family and your business against legal costs in the event of a lawsuit. Accidents happen, and even if you are

not at fault, you want to ensure you are financially protected.) While these costs cover the majority of your expenses, it's also wise to add in an additional 5-10 percent of your budget to cover unanticipated expenses.

On page 15 you'll find several tables estimating the operational costs (for ease of calculation, numbers used are rounded estimates) for FCC homes used in the previous revenue examples (page 11). In the example below, unfortunately, the adjusted expenses are somewhat higher than your estimated revenues (\$51,606 and \$98,037 respectively). Unless you can show revenues in excess of expenses, your project is not viable. As a result, you will need to make adjustments. Adjustments to consider on the revenue side include increasing your fees or changing the number/age of children served. Adjustments on the expense side might result from reviewing your salaries/wages, reviewing your staffing patterns, and reviewing the level of other expenses.

*EXAMPLE: Small Family Child Care Home (6 children)*

CATEGORY	FTE NEEDED	LINE ITEM	WAGE COST	SUBTOTAL/ TOTAL
Wages & Benefits	1	Owner/Provider	\$40,000	\$40,000
	.1	Substitute @ \$9/hour	\$1,872	\$1,872
		Provider Benefits — FICA (7.65% of salaries)	\$3,060	\$3,060
Contractual		Payroll (bookkeeper), Human Resources, Maintenance, etc.		\$1,000
Supplies		Office, Health, Educational, etc.		\$800
Rent/Mortgage Payment		Percent of Rent/Mortgage or Loan Repayment if Purchased Site		\$1,200
Utilities		Percent of Utilities — Gas, Electricity, Water, Phone, Internet, Garbage		\$1,000
Facility Repairs & Maintenance		Repairs and Maintenance to FCC Home		\$800
Other Program Costs		Food, Insurance, Professional Development, Curriculum Materials, Printing, Special Events, etc. — if applicable		\$800
Total Anticipated Expenses				\$50,532
10% to Cover Unexpected Costs				\$5,053
Adjusted Total Expenses				\$55,585

*EXAMPLE: Large Family Child Care Home (12 children)*

CATEGORY	FTE NEEDED	LINE ITEM	WAGE COST	SUBTOTAL/ TOTAL
Wages & Benefits	1	Owner/Provider	\$50,000	\$50,000
	1	Teacher Aide @ \$10/hour	\$20,800	\$20,800
	.25	Substitute @ \$9/hour	\$4,680	\$4,680
		Benefits — FICA (7.65% of salaries)	\$5,774	\$5,774
Contractual		Payroll (bookkeeper), Human Resources, Maintenance, etc.		\$2,000
Supplies		Office, Health, Educational, Household, etc.		\$1,200
Rent/Mortgage Payment		Percent of Rent/Mortgage or Loan Repayment if Purchased Site		\$3,000
Utilities		Percent of Utilities — Gas, Electricity, Water, Phone, Internet, Garbage		\$2,000
Facility Repairs & Maintenance		Repairs and Maintenance to FCC Home		\$1,500
Other Program Costs		Food, Insurance, Professional Development, Curriculum Materials, Printing, Special Events, etc. — if applicable		\$1,000
Total Anticipated Expenses				\$91,954
10% to Cover Unexpected Costs				\$9,195
Adjusted Total Expenses				\$101,149

## TAX BENEFITS

Since you're self-employed, you won't have state and federal taxes withheld from your paycheck, however, you will owe the IRS money for self-employment taxes. You'll need to check with a tax specialist to determine the optimum schedule for payment of these taxes. The good news is that you can take tax deductions for some expenses in your business. To take full advantage of tax deductions you must be aware of what is deductible and save your receipts. Doing this correctly will reduce what you owe in taxes. Some of your expenses are solely expenses for your business or a percentage of the expenses for your FCC home, and others are for your personal household. You will need to divide your expenses into these categories and keep the receipts separate.

There is a time/space percentage (T/S%) used to determine the shared expenses allocation. This calculation is based on the proportion of your time or home's space used for your business. You can find more information about how to calculate the T/S% at <http://tomcopelandblog.com/calculate-your-own-time-space-percentage>

Here are some examples of items that may be deductible:

### *Home Expenses (% because they are shared)*

- Property tax
- Mortgage interest
- Real estate taxes
- House depreciation
- Home repairs
- Yard service
- Home insurance
- Appliances purchased
- Utilities

### *Household Supplies (% because they are shared)*

- Paper products
- Cleaning supplies
- Dish and laundry soaps
- Garbage and food storage bags
- Light bulbs

### *Health and Safety Supplies (some could be a shared expense)*

- Hand sanitizer
- Gloves
- Disinfectants
- Smoke detectors
- Fire alarms
- Electrical outlet covers
- Safety door/latches

### *Office Supplies (some could be a shared expense)*

- Paper
- Pens
- File folders
- Scissors
- Printer
- Toner
- Computer

### *Child Educational Related Supplies (100% FCC)*

- Manipulatives
- Toys
- Games
- Books
- Materials
- Curriculum and required materials

### *Child Furniture/Equipment and Supplies (100% FCC)*

- Cribs
- Changing tables
- Cots and/or nap mats
- Tables
- Highchairs and seating
- Cups/plates/silverware
- Sheets and blankets
- Décor for FCC areas

### *Consultant/Expert Fees (some could be a shared expense)*

- Bookkeeping
- Payroll
- IT services
- Facilities expert
- Tax preparation

### *Other Expenses (some could be a shared expense)*

- Professional development/credentials
- Background checks
- Liability insurance
- Child and/or parent activities (field trips, parent events, etc.)
- Advertising/marketing
- Childcare related automobile expense/mileage
- Bank fees
- Dues and professional fees
- Food

# 4 RECRUITMENT & ENROLLMENT

One of the most important factors to a successful and sustainable FCC home is keeping it fully enrolled with a waitlist. If you don't have full, consistent enrollment, your business is losing money. Monitoring enrollment and attendance is key to fiscal stability as well as continuity for staff and children. There must be careful planning/timing for the recruitment and transitioning of new children in as children "age out" or leave your program for other reasons.

Many companies offer software programs designed to simplify the marketing and management of your enrollment. There is software for supporting the marketing and advertising of your business, managing your waitlists, scheduling tours, tracking children's attendance, collecting payments, communicating with parents, and/or connecting with other providers. A list of available software programs is available at <https://www.capterra.com/sem-compare/child-care-software?qclid>.

## MARKETING, INQUIRIES, AND WAITLIST

A marketing or recruitment plan is much more than advertising. Marketing is about positioning yourself in a way that shows you offer a unique service that will meet your potential customers' needs and/or provide them additional benefits. Good customer service also gives people a reason to choose your FCC home.

A good marketing plan includes these components:

### *Program Mission and Identity*

- What makes your program unique or special?
- How does your program meet the needs of the parents and their children?

- What's the key message you want to share about your program?

### *Marketing Goals*

- How many children do you want/need to enroll and at what ages to meet your budget goals?
- What percentage of children will be private pay versus subsidy pay?
- How many children do you want to maintain on a waitlist?

### *Target Customers/Audience*

- Who are you trying to attract?
- How can you persuade families to enroll their children in your FCC home?
- What type of services do you offer? (Transportation, evening care, etc.)
- How much are parents willing to pay for the quality of services you offer?
- Are your prices in line with other programs in the area?

### *Marketing Activities*

Marketing materials should reflect the language(s) of the families you hope to recruit. Ways to promote your program include:

- Signage outside the program.
- Asking local businesses to refer employees.
- Letting other providers and schools know you have openings.
- An up-to-date recorded greeting on your phone.

- A well-designed Facebook page highlighting your program's benefits.
- Paid ads through social media, like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Well-designed business cards, flyers, and brochures with an identifiable logo to disperse at businesses that your potential clientele visit. (For example, neighborhood stores, laundromats, doctor/dentist offices, parks, indoor birthday party venues for young children, youth sporting events, etc.)
- A referral bonus/credit for current or past parents who refer families to your program.
- Discounts for parents for the first week of tuition as an incentive to enroll their children in your program.
- Providing tours of your FCC home.
- Advertisements like elementary school parent bulletin board postings, paid newspaper ads, a banner in your yard, etc.
- Creating a scrapbook/photo album for parents to view.
- Becoming involved in a local FCC provider network and speaking at community events.

It's true that you never have a second chance to make a first impression. Since you're an FCC home, a parent's first contact with you will most likely be via telephone. Make sure you have an answering machine/voicemail with a friendly outgoing message that includes a timeframe for returning calls when you're available and not currently interacting with the children you serve. When you return a call to the potential client, be sure to

use their name. Ask the child or children's names and use them throughout the conversation. Find out what the parent wants in an FCC home and ask them if they'd like to set up a time to tour your space. The tour should be offered at a time when the parents can observe the educational activities of the day and not during a transition time, such as lunch to nap or nap to snack. If the parent does not enroll their child at your FCC but you feel like it was a good fit, follow up with them the next day to ask if the parent has any questions. Make sure to keep a record of all prospective clients who inquire and what follow-up action you took. (See Appendix D for sample tour guide.)

Once you've reached your licensed capacity, you should begin a waitlist. Having a waitlist helps ensure that there's always someone who can take the place of any child who leaves your program. You'll need to set up a system to keep your waitlist up to date, such as contacting families quarterly to gauge their ongoing interest. Factors to consider when establishing a waitlist include:

- Will you charge an enrollment fee to hold the slot and ensure a commitment from the parent? If so, what amount is the fee? Will it be non-refundable if they decide not to attend your FCC home? Will the fee be considered a credit towards the first week of tuition if they eventually enroll?
- How will you determine who is prioritized for selection off the waitlist when a slot becomes available? Factors to consider in your decision include using a first-come/first-served basis, if you are already caring for another child in the family, and the age of child/children.

## ENROLLMENT PROCESS

Once the parent has toured your home and you both determine it's a good fit, you'll need the parent to complete an enrollment packet for their child to officially enroll in your FCC program. State licensing and other funding sources (for example, CACFP) requirements will determine the information you need to collect regarding each child. In addition to the required information, you may want to gather more information about the family and the child including the child's developmental history, strengths, likes and dislikes, and family preferences regarding childrearing practices — for example, eating, sleeping, discipline, toileting, etc. Depending on your community and clientele, you may need your application to be in English, Spanish, or another language. (See Appendix E for sample child application.)

## FAMILY CONTRACT AND HANDBOOK

Clear communication and a solid understanding of the expected roles and responsibilities of the parent and provider are essential for a smooth partnership with parents. We suggest providers create a contract addressing hours of operation, services to be provided, and payment arrangements which you will review with each parent and have them sign during the enrollment process. (See Appendix E for sample FCC parent contract.)

In addition to the contract, it's recommended that you provide the parent with a family handbook explaining your program's child care policies and procedures. Topics to address in your handbook include general information (hours of operation, schedule, closures), registration and fees, curriculum approach, daily activities and routines, emergency procedures, family involvement, and health, safety and nutrition practices. (See Appendix F for sample family handbook.)



## WELCOMING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Parents and children should always feel welcome and comfortable as they enter your facility. Developing a plan with the parent for the child's first day will ensure an easier transition into the program for everyone. Prior to the child's first day in the program, it's suggested that the child have an opportunity to visit the program with his/her parents. This allows you the opportunity to introduce the child and parents to other children in your care, as well as your family members.

On the child's first day it's important to be prepared — you should ensure that the child has a space labeled for his/her personal belongings and that you are familiar with his/her routines. It's also beneficial to reassure the parent that they are welcome at any time and that your open-door policy allows them to come and go as they please. Because parents are typically anxious about leaving their child in a new setting, it's suggested that you call the parent during their child's first day or send them a text and/or picture of their child happily engaging with you and/or the other children in your care.

# 5 HUMAN RESOURCES

## ESTABLISHING A HUMAN RESOURCES SYSTEM

After you determine how many children you'll be serving, you should plan for your staffing needs. Depending on the number of children you're caring for, you may be a sole provider with only an occasional need for a substitute. However, if you will be caring for more than 6-8 children at a time, you will need an assistant. You may also need someone to assist with lunch or with school age children in the afternoon. Your state's child care licensing regulations will guide you regarding the number of staff you'll need based on the ratios set by age of the children in the program — including your own children, if applicable.

When you contract with a substitute or hire an assistant, you become an employer. This section contains steps to consider, based on your program structure, when hiring staff.

New and existing employers should consult the IRS Employer's Tax Guide to understand all federal tax filing requirements. For information regarding state tax requirements for employers, visit your state's tax (revenue) website.

Here is a checklist of accounting procedures that must be established to support the hiring and payment of staff:

- Obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN)
  - The EIN (or Employer Tax ID or Form SS-4 as it is also called) is required for reporting taxes to the IRS and reporting your employees to state government. You can apply online for your EIN



from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service website.

- Establish processes for:
  - Having employees fill out a W-4.
  - Reporting to the federal government wages paid and taxes withheld for each employee (W-2 Form).
  - Paying state income taxes if required by your state.
  - Filing Form 941, the Employer's Quarterly Federal Tax Return, which must be filed regarding federal taxes paid each quarter for your employees. For more information, visit the IRS website at <https://www.irs.gov>.
- Post the required posters in your workplace
- informing employees of their rights and employer responsibilities under labor laws. These can be obtained from your state's Department of Labor.
- Set up a payroll system or method of payment for your staff.
  - Determine a pay period and pay day. Typically, pay periods are set up weekly or bi-weekly, although this may be determined by state law.
  - Develop a process for documenting your employee's compensation, paid time off, and possible deductions — like health insurance premiums, if applicable.

BENEFIT	DESCRIPTION	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Social Security and Medicare Taxes	Required for business owner and employees.	For assistance, contact the Social Security Administration. (Information and Resources for Employers)
Unemployment Insurance	Not required for business owner. Required by most states for employees.	Check with your state's Department of Labor and register as necessary.
Workers' Compensation	Optional for business owner. Workers' compensation for self-employed business owners and independent contractors is considered to be personal coverage. With this coverage, a business owner can access wage replacement if they are injured while working.  Required for employees. Compensates employees for lost time and medical expenses due to a work-related illness or injury.	Typically, personal coverage is recommended for individuals working in a profession with a higher rate of injury and it's available through commercial carriers.  Available through commercial carriers.
Disability Insurance	Required by some states. Provides partial wage replacement coverage for non-work-related illness or injury.	Most states do not require disability insurance. Check with your state's Department of Labor regarding the requirements in your state.

## EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

The application should include statements identifying the program as being an equal opportunity employer as well as being compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Typically, the application asks for information regarding the following:

- Applicant name, address, and contact information
- Citizenship
- Education/vocational training
- Employment history
- References.

(See Appendix G for sample application for employment.)

## JOB DESCRIPTION

Job descriptions serve as the foundation for recruiting, hiring, and evaluating staff and are a guide in determining compensation and training needed. You will need to follow state and/or funding guidelines

regarding qualifications for the position you are hiring. A job description describes the major responsibilities of an employee's position and informs applicants of the expectations to which they will be held accountable. (See Appendix H for sample job description.)

## INTERVIEW

You'll need to decide if you will do a question and answer interview or if you will include a behavioral interview (in which the candidate is asked to demonstrate his/her skills), or a less formal interview. Depending on which process you choose, you'll need to develop a set of questions to ask and/or tasks the applicant must complete. (See Appendix I for sample interview questions.) Once you evaluate the results of the interview and decide upon a candidate, you must conduct a criminal background and child abuse record check.

**Criminal Background Check** — All state licensing regulations require you to run a criminal felony/misdemeanor history check. This involves sending

identifying information and/or fingerprints to a local, state, and/or national law enforcement agency to determine if the applicant has ever been convicted of an offense that would place the program or children enrolled at risk. Please check your state's child care licensing department for specific requirements. It's recommended that you investigate the time and costs needed to process criminal record checks in your state to allow you to most thoughtfully plan around a staff vacancy.

**Child Abuse Record Check** — State licensing regulations also require you to run a child abuse and neglect record check. Typically, each state has a standardized form which must be completed and sent to the state department overseeing child care licensing to determine if the applicant has been involved in the abuse or neglect of a child in the past.

## HIRING

Once the individual clears all required checks, you can offer them a position and notify them of their hourly



wage and start date. In addition to verbally offering an applicant the position, it's recommended that you provide a letter to the individual outlining the date of hire, starting wage, and expected hours of work (the latter can be stated as "flexible" or based on the children's attendance/hours).

## EMPLOYEE PERSONNEL FILE

It's important to review your state's child care regulations and the regulations of other funding sources to ensure your personnel files contain the required information. Here's a list of information most likely to be required or included in an employee personnel file:

- A sheet with personal information including emergency contacts (may be part of the application form)
- Tax related forms (W-4)
- Criminal history record report
- Child abuse record report
- TB and health physical results
- Evidence of qualifications, if applicable

- Evidence of training completed (documentation needed for child care licensing and/or QRIS system)
- Performance appraisals (to be done at regular intervals)
- Original application

## WAGES

The wage and benefits offered to prospective employees can be a strong incentive to work at your FCC home. You'll want to offer wages and benefits comparable to those provided by similar programs in your community yet ensure that your budget can support these costs. It should be noted that a higher wage can often compensate for a less robust benefits package. Conversely, a strong benefits package (vacation, health insurance, etc.) can offset lower wages.

## BENEFITS

Each state has laws regarding required benefits. It's recommended that you contact your state Department of Labor to ensure that you're aware of your state's

current requirements. In addition to required employee benefits, businesses can provide optional benefits and incentives. On the previous page, you'll find a list of benefits typically required in most states.

FCC providers may also offer other optional benefits. Many FCC homes do not have the means to offer benefits like health insurance, retirement, or tuition assistance but are able to offer paid time off (vacation and sick leave). You may want to calculate the cost of paying for a certain number of days off per year that increases with years of experience for staff retention.

## EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

An employee handbook communicates your expectations for your employees and describes what they can expect from you as an employer. It should also describe your legal obligations as an employer and your employees' rights. (See Appendix J for sample employee handbook.)

# 6 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING

## FAMILY CHILD CARE AS A PROFESSION

As professionals, FCC providers require a specific knowledge base and skill set. Essential elements of being a professional FCC provider include acquiring knowledge and information, developing communication and relationship building skills, and promoting work and professional ethics.

As a FCC provider you must acquire the skills and knowledge needed to work with children of mixed ages and their families. A FCC provider must understand the following:

- How to set up an environment where children are safe and healthy.
- How to respond in a manner to ensure children feel emotionally safe and secure.
- How to ensure children have opportunities to build positive relationships with you and the other children in your care.
- How to ensure your care respects and honors the diversity and cultures of the children in you serve.

This information can be accessed through:

- Developmental handouts available through various online resources. One such source is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>.
- In-service training opportunities offered free or at a minimal fee through state child care licensing departments.

- Child Development Associate (CDA) credential training, which is often offered through state child care licensing departments and/or local community colleges. Typically, participants can also earn credit at a local community college for completion of this credential. While there is a fee for earning this credential, funding may be available through your state's child care licensing department.
- AA or BS degree in child development, early childhood education, or a related field.

We wish to acknowledge the publications of the Ohio State Virtual Lab School <https://www.virtuallabschool.org> in influencing the following content in this section.

## ONBOARD TRAINING

Many states require employees to complete specific child care trainings prior to providing care for children. For planning purposes, you will need to ask the following questions:

- What trainings are required by your state's child care licensing regulations? Are they required prior to staff being left alone with children or counted in ratio? When are these offered? Who provides these trainings and what is the cost?
- What specialized professional development opportunities are available for me or my assistant? When are these offered? Who provides the trainings? How much do they cost?
- If you hire an assistant or use substitute providers, how will you ensure they understand your philosophy, your policies, and procedures to support



the continuity of care for the children in your program?

- If you have an assistant, what kind of follow-up, support, and mentoring will you be able to provide to help them put what they have learned into practice?
- If you have an assistant, what kind of feedback/support will you provide them to assist in improving their skills?

On the following page is a table of trainings typically provided to a new employee.

GENERAL TOPIC	SUB-CATEGORIES	MANDATORY/COMMENTS
Introduction to your Family Child Care Home	Philosophy, values, goals, and objectives	Provide general information and history regarding your program.
Employee Job Description		Review role and responsibilities of the employee.
Employee Handbook	Standards of conduct	Review expectations of the employee.
Health and Safety Policies and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ First aid and/or CPR</li> <li>▪ Blood-borne pathogens</li> <li>▪ Administration of medication</li> <li>▪ Exclusion due to sickness</li> <li>▪ Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) regulations</li> <li>▪ Safe sleep</li> <li>▪ Shaken baby syndrome</li> <li>▪ Child abuse and neglect — identification and mandatory reporting</li> <li>▪ Active supervision</li> <li>▪ Child care ratios</li> <li>▪ Behavior guidance/discipline</li> <li>▪ Limited restraint training</li> </ul>	Typically mandatory
Emergency Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fire</li> <li>▪ Tornado</li> <li>▪ Hurricane</li> <li>▪ Flooding</li> <li>▪ Loss of power</li> </ul>	Typically mandatory
Curriculum & Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overview</li> <li>▪ Lesson plans</li> </ul>	Ongoing
Daily Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom daily schedule</li> <li>▪ Observations/assessments of children</li> <li>▪ Diaper changing routines</li> <li>▪ Family-style meals and toothbrushing</li> <li>▪ Naptime routines</li> <li>▪ Teacher/child interactions</li> <li>▪ Sanitizing procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> <li>▪ Typically mandatory to meet CACFP requirements</li> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> <li>▪ Indicator of quality</li> </ul>
Engaging Families	Developing relationships and sharing information with families.	Ongoing

As you or your staff participate in training provided or endorsed by your state's child care licensing department, it's critical to maintain documentation of your participation. You must check with your child care licensing regulations and/or licensing specialist to identify the required documentation.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing training provides the additional support you and/or your assistant need to gain the skills and experience to master job responsibilities, enhance job performance, and support your program's quality. Ongoing professional development can take many forms, including:

- Library materials (videos, books, CDs, and/or access to early childhood articles on the internet)
- One-on-one training/coaching
- Group training presentations in person or online
- Coaching, modeling, and videotaping with feedback
- Conference attendance
- Continuing post-secondary education

Most state child care regulations and state QRIS systems require that early childhood care providers complete a minimum number of hours of training each year.

## NETWORKING

Many early childhood communities have created family child care networks designed to support local FCC providers. Services provided through such networks can include training, coaching, and participation in communities of practice. Communities of practice allow like-minded providers to meet regularly to network, reflect on the work, and share resources. Together, successes can be celebrated, and challenges can become opportunities for group solutions. Additionally,

on the national level, the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) serves as a source of information for guiding the delivery of FCC services to young children, as well as information about current developments in the field.

## PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Professional ethics guide the behavior of FCC providers, much as they do in other professions. Ethics outline how we should act as well as what we should refrain from doing when interacting with children, families, and community members.

Here are some examples of ethical behaviors that apply to FCC providers:

- Information about families and children must always be kept confidential. This applies to written records as well as conversations you have with other parents and children in your care.
- Confidential information you have access to regarding the children in your care and their families should never be used to judge them. Instead, you should attempt to offer help whenever appropriate.
- Individual differences of children and parents are acknowledged, respected, and incorporated into planned activities.
- Bias-free experiences and materials are provided in your home.
- Achievements of children and parents are recognized and celebrated.
- Caregiving is responsive, reliable, and consistent.
- Preparations are in place each day for the children.
- Child care regulations are followed to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the children.

## CARING FOR YOURSELF

Being a FCC provider can be extremely rewarding but can also be very exhausting. Not only are you providing 10-12 hours of care a day, at the end of the day you must clean, disinfect, and plan activities for the following day. In addition, you most likely have other family and social responsibilities like preparation of family meals, assisting with homework, volunteering in the community, etc. Nonetheless, in order to provide the best care for children you must always be at your best physically and emotionally.

Self-care involves choosing to engage in activities that will allow you to maintain an optimal level of overall physical and mental health. This requires you to attend to your physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being while you work to create an environment that promotes the well-being of the children in your care. Suggestions for taking care of yourself include:

- Keeping a journal to reflect on each day's events. What went well that brought you joy? What did you struggle with that brought you frustration?
- Establishing boundaries with parents and realizing it's OK to say no to requests for additional services that may interfere with your personal life.
- Arranging for a substitute or hiring an assistant.
- Reaching out to talk to family members and friends.
- Exercising regularly.
- Eating healthy.
- Engaging in meditation and deep breathing.

## 7

## CREATING A CHILD CARE ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR HOME

## PLANNING

How you set up your FCC program will be influenced by the space and design of your residence. Having your program within your home will require you to consider the needs of the children in your care, yourself, and your family members. FCC programs can be established as a separate area of your home or as a shared space within the home. You'll need to determine how to turn your private home into a child care program during the day and back to a family home in the evening. Your program may also be established in a separate residence — this is often true of programs with a second provider serving up to 12 children.

We wish to acknowledge the publications of Teaching Strategies (Dodge, Rudick, Colker, 2017) and the Reinvestment Fund and Public Health Management for the Bainum Foundation (2018) in influencing the following content of this section.

Designing your early childhood space requires intentional planning. Whether renovating or using your existing space, you must be aware of the child care licensing and health regulations, building and fire safety codes, and zoning and/or neighborhood home owner association covenant regulations in your community that may impact your decisions. The guidance that follows is designed to provide a roadmap for you to follow as you make decisions regarding your child care program. To assist you in the decision-making process, it's recommended that you visit other FCC homes, interview other providers, talk with parents about their preferences, and review best practices in the field to determine the best design for your program.

If making significant structural changes to your home, we recommend that you consult with an architect.

Here are some specific questions you may want to ask when considering changes to your residence:

- What structural changes can you make to your home without changing its designation as a residential dwelling?
- Are there child care, health, and/or fire regulations regarding children being cared for in a basement or on a second floor?
- How many square feet per child must be designated for the indoor and outdoor spaces?
- How will you designate and secure the areas of your home that are open to the children from those that are off limits?
- Are there two exits from the child care area that lead directly outdoors?
- Will the layout of your designated child care area allow you to adequately supervise the children in your care at all times?
- Will your kitchen area meet the current health regulations regarding the storage, preparation, and serving of food?
- Are toilets and sinks easily accessible to children of different ages?
- Where will you diaper the infants and young toddlers?
- Are doors and windows protected with guards that will prevent a child from exiting the house or accessing steps?
- Are there childproof locks on cabinet doors and drawers?
- Are the methods you use to heat and/or cool your home safe for children?
- Will you be able to maximize natural light and ventilation in your home?
- Do you have a safe space for weather emergencies?
- Do you have areas where you can store indoor and outdoor equipment, furniture, and materials? For example, cots/mats, classroom toys, diapers and wipes, baby strollers, outdoor riding toys, etc.
- Are there areas of your home that can be designated for large group and small group interactions?
- How will you accommodate gross motor play during inclement weather?
- Are all play areas of your home accessible to children and/or parents with physical disabilities?





## INDOOR PLAY SPACE

The most significant spaces within your child care program are the play areas where the children will spend most of their day. Because you are caring for mixed ages of children, your environment will need to address a wide developmental age span. Space will be needed to allow infants to freely explore their environment without any possibility of finding toys that would be considered choking hazards. Older toddlers and preschoolers will need to be able to freely engage in play activities without posing a safety risk to the infants. School age children will need an area to interact in social and creative activities as well as a quiet space in which to do their homework.

How you set up your child care environment must ensure that each child — regardless of age and ability — has the opportunity to safely interact with their environment and one another. When determining the amount of space needed for your child care area, you should consider the number and ages of the children you intend to serve. Most licensing standards require a minimum of 35-50 square feet per child. However, you will need to review your state's licensing regulations to

determine the minimum amount of space required per child in your state.

The entry area into your home and/or play areas should be warm and inviting and provide a space where parents and children can easily separate. This area should allow parents to help their children out of their coats and include a place where children can store their personal items. This area might also include a bulletin board which can be used to provide parents with information and display children's photos and artwork.

Your play area will need space to accommodate individual children as well as small groups of children in a variety of activities, including:

- Quiet activities — games, puzzles, books
- Creative play activities — blocks, dramatic play
- Messy activities — sand, water, sensory table, art
- Movement and music activities
- Discovery activities like cooking
- Computer activities

It's recommended that activity areas be placed near needed resources. For example, messy activities should be placed in an area with appropriate flooring and within reasonable distance to a sink for easier clean up. Toys and materials needed for each activity area should also be placed in proximity to the area. Toys may be stored in baskets, crates, plastic storage containers, and/or recycled boxes. It's recommended that you use child-size furniture (toy storage shelves, table, chairs, etc.) to designate and separate activity areas to the extent possible, keeping in mind the need for supervision.

Depending on the ages of the children in your care, you may need to set up different napping arrangements. Most state's licensing regulations require infants under 12 months of age to sleep in individual cribs

and are very specific regarding safe sleep procedures and what materials are allowed in the cribs. Children older than one year are typically allowed to sleep on waterproof cots/mats with a blanket. However, there are often regulations that guide the distance between the cots/mats. Should you provide care for children in the evenings or overnight, there are usually specific regulations for overnight sleeping arrangements as well. In addition to sleeping accommodations, there are typically guidelines regarding the level of supervision needed while children sleep. It will be critical for you to review your state's regulations regarding safe napping/sleeping guidelines for young children.

## OUTDOOR PLAY SPACE

Outdoor play allows children to learn about and enjoy the beauty and science of nature. These areas provide children the opportunity to move — to run, jump, climb, and pedal. Within your outdoor play area, you'll need to identify age-appropriate play spaces for all age groups in your program. Each playground area should be designed so that all children are easily supervised by sight and/or sound at all times.

Most state licensing and NAFCC regulations require a minimum of 50-75 square feet per child for outdoor play spaces. It's recommended you check with your state child care licensing regulations to determine the requirements regarding the outdoor play space needed per child. It's also recommended you review these regulations to determine if there are additional requirements regarding:

- Handicap accessibility of the playground
- Access to and from the playground
- Enclosure (fencing) of the playground
- Age ratings and appropriateness of playground equipment
- Anchoring of playground equipment

- Need for a “fall zone” under higher equipment
- Provisions for shaded play areas
- Water play and sand boxes

Just as with your indoor play areas, the outdoor playground needs to provide areas designed to promote children’s development. The outdoor learning environments should allow for a variety of activities including:

- Small group activities
- Space for individual children to seek out solitude
- Open spaces where children can run
- Areas where children can climb
- Smooth surfaces where children can use riding toys
- Elements for dramatic play
- Areas where children can dig or plant
- Water play areas

## BATHROOMS

The children’s bathroom will need to accommodate the developmental needs of each age group of children in your care. For example, a step stool may be needed by younger children to access the toilet. Potty chairs may be an option for children who are toilet training. The handwashing sink, soap and paper towels will also need to be accessible to the children. And finally, if children cannot be diapered in the bathroom, it’s suggested that the diaper changing station/mat be as near as possible to the handwashing sink. A covered container will also be needed for soiled diapers. It’s recommended that there be separate bathrooms for the children and care providers when possible.

## KITCHEN

Decisions will need to be made regarding how you’ll serve meals to the children in your program. Will you



serve them in your kitchen area at an adult sized table with booster seats and/or highchairs? Or will you serve children in a nearby play area at child size tables and chairs? You’ll also need to invest in child size dishes and cutlery. If you plan to promote family-style dining, you’ll need to purchase child-size pitchers, serving dishes, and utensils. Depending on the number of children you care for, you may also need an additional refrigerator, freezer, and/or pantry storage space. Finally, to ensure the health and safety of the children, you must be aware of health regulations regarding the preparation and disposal of leftover food.

If you are providing care for infants and young toddlers, you’ll need to plan for baby formula, breast milk, baby food, bottles, sippy cups, and bibs. If your program plans to do cooking activities with the children, you may need additional materials to accommodate their participation in these activities — for example, utensils that children can easily manipulate.

Your kitchen may also be the place where you sanitize/disinfect the children’s toys. Options for your sanitization process include spraying toys with a bleach solution and letting them air dry, using a

dishwasher, or washing toys in the kitchen sink using a three-step process of cleaning, rinsing and sanitizing. (See additional information on cleaning, rinsing and sanitizing on page 32.)

Finally, it’s critical that you check with your state’s child care licensing, health, and fire departments to ensure that your kitchen meets the required standards for equipment and materials.

## LAUNDRY, CUSTODIAL, AND MAINTENANCE STORAGE SPACE

Keeping your home — specifically your child care area — clean and sanitary is critical to the health of the children and families you serve, as well as your family. In order to clean the play areas daily, you’ll need a dedicated space for storing cleaning supplies and equipment like a mop and vacuum. While you want to store cleaning supplies and equipment close to where they will be used, they will need to be stored in a locked location which is not accessible to the children. It will also be necessary to have access to a washer/dryer to wash soiled linens from cribs and cots, the bibs and cloth toys of infants and toddlers, and kitchen towels.

## OFFICE AREA

It is recommended you plan for an office area that supports you in operating your business. The office area should be outside of the child care area and provide space where you can develop lesson plans, prepare newsletters/communications for your parents, manage financial responsibilities, and maintain required records and documentation. Furnishings might include a desk, file cabinet, computer, printer/scanner, and paper shredder.

## FAMILY PARKING AND ENTRY AREA

To ensure the safety of children and families as they drop off and pick up their children, you will need to create an area for parents to park and safely escort their children to and from your residence.

Questions to consider when identifying this area might include:

- Will parents be able to park in your driveway or on the street close to your home?
- Is there a covered entry that provides shelter for parents if it there is precipitation?
- Does your entry area provide for secured access to your home?
- Do you have a direct view of the door into your home?

## INDOOR EQUIPMENT, FURNITURE, TOYS, AND MATERIALS

As a FCC provider, you'll need furniture and materials to accommodate children's sizes and ability levels over a wide age span. Depending on the number of children at each age/developmental level, you will need adequate furniture and sufficient materials that are of interest to the children. To ensure children and families feel welcome and comfortable in your home,



it's recommended that the furniture and materials in your home reflect the diversity and culture of the children being cared for. Following are some guidelines for the selection of furniture and materials for your FCC program:

- While initially it may be more expensive, purchasing high quality, durable materials will ensure the product will not need to be replaced as frequently. Even purchased as second-hand, high quality furniture that is 3-5 years old, may still have another 10-15 years of life. Please note that older furniture must be checked to ensure it meets current consumer product standards. This is especially true of cribs.
- Furniture needs to be smooth, have rounded corners, be nontoxic, and be easy to clean and sanitize. It must also be sturdy and provide stable support to the children.
- You may also want to consider furniture that's adjustable and can grow with the children. For example, tables with adjustable legs or storage shelves that allow young children to access toys

on lower shelves while at the same time allowing preschoolers to access materials on higher shelves will allow you to continue to use the same furniture as the children grow.

- Strollers, carriages, and highchairs, if used during meal time, must be sturdy and have appropriate restraints.
- Furniture will also need to accommodate children with special needs who are enrolled in your program and any special equipment they might have, like a wheelchair.

### Furniture

Here's a list of furniture to be considered as you set up the care areas in your home:

- Cribs
- Cots or mats for napping
- Changing table/mat for infants/toddlers
- Child size tables and chairs
- Soft seating area with pillows/sofas/chairs
- Adult rocker for infants/toddlers

- Storage shelves/toy storage units with containers for holding materials
- Storage for coats and backpacks
- Locking cabinet for classroom supplies like paint, glue, scissors, etc.
- Floor rugs or vinyl mats
- Water/sand table or dish tubs
- Computer center/tablet for preschool/school age children
- Child-size gates if needed to secure stairs or close off doorways

### *Toys, Books and Materials*

Classroom toys, books and materials must be chosen with the children's ages and abilities in mind. They should be colorful, safe, and of interest to the children. The toys, books and materials you choose can have a significant impact on children's behavior. If children cannot play independently, they will be more demanding of your time. Too few toys may result in children fighting over them, while too many toys may over-stimulate children. Toys that are not of interest to the children can lead to them wandering or inappropriately using available toys. Toys may be purchased new or used from thrift shops and/or garage sales. Should you purchase used toys it is important to ensure they are in good working condition with no loose or broken parts that could pose a choking hazard.

Here are some recommendations regarding classroom toys and materials to gather for your program:

- Purchase materials and toys that can be used in different ways based on the developmental levels of the children. Wooden blocks are a good example. Young children may bang the blocks together or knock down "towers." Toddlers may begin to build basic structures, towers, and walls. Preschoolers can

build much more complicated structures, like houses and garages, and may need props to include in their block building, like people, cars, animals, etc.

- It's recommended that you have more toys than you will plan to use at any one point in time so they can be rotated in and out. This will keep children's interest. However, this also requires you to have storage space for the toys not in use.
- Toys need to be durable and easy to clean/disinfect.
- It is recommended that you have multiples of children's favorite toys to avoid potential conflicts.
- Toys need to reflect the diversity of the children in your program, as well as in your community. This includes children with disabilities.
- Maximize the use of natural items in your environment for the children to explore. Large cardboard boxes, plastic containers to stack and nest, and wooden spoons with pots and pans are common household items children can engage with in play. Empty food containers can represent real foods in a dramatic play area. Halloween costumes and clothes from thrift shops make great dress up clothes.
- Sets of toys will need to be stored in tubs or other containers on storage shelves where they can easily be seen and accessed.
- For children under the age of three years, it is critical to avoid materials that are possible choking hazards.
- Ensure that children, including those with disabilities, can independently access and interact with the materials.
- Select a wide variety of books based on the interests and ages of your enrolled children.

A list of activity areas and suggested materials for each area is included in Appendix K. Reviewing this list may

provide you with ideas of materials to look for in retail stores, garage sales, thrift stores, and/or in your home.

## **OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT, TOYS, AND MATERIALS**

Here is a list of outdoor equipment and materials to consider based on the ages of the children in your care:

- Climbing structures which are adequately anchored with an appropriate safety surface (like mulch) as a fall zone
- Paint or chalkboard easels
- Riding toys and helmets
- Musical instruments
- Building blocks and materials made of natural and/or waterproof materials
- Water table and/or water toys
- Parachutes
- Gardening equipment
- Water hose
- Balls
- Bubbles
- Sidewalk chalk

## 8

## CHILDREN'S SAFETY, HEALTH, AND NUTRITION

A child's safety, health, and nutrition must be a primary consideration of every child care provider.

We would like to acknowledge the work of the Ohio State University Virtual Lab School (<https://www.virtuallabschool.org>) for many of the following recommendations.

### SAFETY

Safety involves ensuring that the home environment is free from dangers or risks that could result in injury to the child. You can take many actions to minimize the likelihood of accidents. Safety within a FCC home can be promoted through the following features and actions:

- Provider-child ratios are maintained daily.
- Active supervision of children — children are within sight, sound, and/or reach at all times. Because standards vary across states, it's recommended that you review your specific state's guidelines and definitions of adequate supervision.
- Emergency numbers are posted in an easily viewed area.
- Areas of the house that are off-limits to the children are securely locked.
- Furniture and toys are sturdy and in good repair.
- Toys/materials have been checked to ensure they do not have pieces that are potential choking hazards.
- Cabinet doors and drawers have child safety locks installed to prevent children's access.
- First aid kit is well stocked and available. (See Appendix L for recommended first aid kit contents.)
- Medications, cleaning materials, and all other hazardous equipment and materials are kept in a locked storage area out of reach of children.
- Heating and cooling systems (for example, radiators, hot pipes, heater, furnaces, air conditioners, fans, etc.) are not within reach of the children.
- Window blind and electrical cords are out of reach of children.
- Water temperature is under 120 degrees.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are installed and inspected annually to ensure they are working.
- There is an easily accessible fire extinguisher on site.
- The home is free of lead or radon.
- Any licensed firearms and ammunition and other weapons are placed in a locked storage container and are inaccessible to children.



### Supervision

Active supervision is perhaps the most important action you will take to ensure children's safety. In 2017, the National Associate for Family Child Care published the following guidelines regarding supervision:

- 4.1: Children under the age of three are always in the provider's line of sight, except when attending to personal needs for up to five minutes. The provider assures the safety of all children while attending to her personal needs.
- 4.2: Children age three and older may be out of the provider's line of sight for short periods of time if the provider is close by and listens carefully to assure all children are safe.
- 4.3: Children under the age of six are never inside or outside by themselves. When children are inside, the provider is inside. When children are outside, the provider is outside.



4.4: When children are sleeping:

The provider can hear them (monitors are permitted).

The provider visually checks on infants under the age of eight months every 15 minutes (visual monitors are not permitted as a substitute for a visual check).

The provider's own children may sleep in their own bed regardless of age.

4.5: The provider is particularly careful supervising children in high-risk activities including, but not limited to, swimming, water play, woodworking, cooking, field trips, and other pursuits that could be potentially dangerous to the children involved.

4.6: Children are not left in equipment that restrains their movement for more than 20 minutes at a time and no more than half the time in care, except when eating or sleeping. Such equipment includes, but is not limited to, cribs, playpens, swings, baby seats, highchairs, and exercisers. Back and front packs are excluded.

4.7: If children are transported, take walks, or go on field trips, the provider has a comprehensive plan which

addresses potential safety issues and strategies for keeping children from being separated from the group.

4.8 A qualified assistant is present when there are more than six children in care and no more than 12 children are in care at any one time.

4.9 When there are six or fewer children present, no more than two are under the age of two years. When there are seven or more children present, no more than four are under the age of two years.

### *Daily Safety Checklists*

FCC providers are encouraged to develop daily indoor and weekly outdoor safety checklists to ensure your home and outdoor play areas are safe for all children in your care. (See Appendix M and Appendix N for sample indoor and outdoor safety checklists.)

### *Disaster Plans*

While you hope you never find yourself in an emergency situation, you should have a plan for responding in a calm, reasonable, and timely manner. Some emergencies to prepare for include:

- Fire
- Weather — storm, tornado, hurricane, earthquake, flooding, etc., as appropriate for your location.
- Intruder
- Interruption of utility services like gas, electric, or water.
- Child injury

We recommend you consult with the relevant authorities in your community (fire, public health, police departments, etc.) to develop your emergency plans. Emergency phone numbers and evacuation routes should be posted in an easily viewed location in your child care area. Your plans should include where you and the children will go for safe harbor or care, a schedule for planned drills, how family members will be

notified of emergencies, and preparation of emergency kits including food, diapers, and medical supplies as appropriate. All individuals who may be assisting you should be trained in the procedures to follow for each identified emergency. (See Appendix O for sample disaster plan.)

## **HEALTH**

Your health as a provider and the health of the other members of your home will have a direct impact on the children in your care. As a result, state licensing regulations typically require that you and members of your household have an annual physical examination to ensure that all members of the household are free of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases.

Pets may be present in the FCC home. However, if present they must be clean, healthy, and in compliance with all applicable government registration and vaccination requirements. All pet supplies, litter boxes, and waste should be inaccessible to children in your care.

When working with young children, it's also critical that you have routine requirements and/or practices that promote the health and well-being of the children in your program. Such requirements and practices include:

- Children are in process or up to date on all immunizations required by your state's licensing regulations.
- Provider and children wash hands frequently.
- Toys that are mouthed by infants and young toddlers are cleaned and disinfected/sanitized prior to being accessible to other children.
- Changing table and eating area surfaces are cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- Children's health status is checked daily upon arrival.
- Safe sleep practices are implemented.

- Toothbrushing is implemented appropriate to the ages of the children in your care.
- Health policies address when a child needs to be excluded due to illness.
- Sick children are isolated from other children to the extent possible to wait for their families to pick them up.
- Families are notified of health concerns, accidents or other unusual incidents affecting their child.
- An emergency contact list is maintained and updated regularly for use when family members cannot be reached.
- Provider is trained in first aid and CPR.
- Procedures for the administration of medication to the children are followed and documented.
- Appropriate child safety seats are used if transporting children.
- Universal precautions are implemented, and gloves are worn when cleaning up blood or body fluids.
- Suspected incidents of child abuse are identified, documented, and reported to the proper authorities.

### Health Supplies

Materials will be needed to ensure the health and safety of the children in your care. In addition to disposable items (vinyl gloves, tissues, paper towels, etc.), other equipment and materials needed include:

- First aid kit.
- List of emergency numbers posted by each phone.
- Epi pen for children with severe allergies (parent typically provides).
- Toothbrushes and toothbrush holder.
- Spray bottles for sanitizing furniture and changing table.
- Fanny packs with first aid supplies which can be



taken outdoors.

- Posters for handwashing and emergency preparedness.
- Spill kits for hazardous spills, vomit, or other body fluids.
- A locked cabinet and/or refrigerator storage out of the reach of children, for storage of medication.

### Sanitizing and Disinfecting

An effective cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting schedule is one of the best ways to reduce the spread of infectious illnesses within your child care setting. Routine cleaning with soap and water will remove dirt, grime, and some germs. Sanitizing refers to the further reduction of germs on hard surfaces (toys, nonporous kitchen counters, children's tables) to levels considered safe by public health standards but does not eliminate them. Disinfecting refers to the process of destroying germs on hard objects or nonporous surfaces (door handles, diapering/toileting surfaces). Most state's child care licensing regulations identify specific times when child care materials, furniture, and surfaces must be cleaned, sanitized, and/or disinfected. (See Appendix P for

sample cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting guidelines.)

Bleach is widely used as an effective sanitizer and disinfectant. Bleach will kill most germs very quickly and does not require rinsing as it will evaporate and become harmless. Bleach is also very economical. When bleach is used as a sanitizer/disinfectant, it must be diluted with water and placed in a clearly labeled spray bottle. Your local health department can provide guidance regarding how to dilute the bleach and how to use and store the solution. However, you must remember that bleach in its concentrated form is a poison and must always be stored in an area that's locked and inaccessible to children.

There are commercial alternatives to using bleach. All products meeting the requirements as a sanitizer/disinfectant must include an EPA registration number on the product label. Again, it is important to follow the directions for using these products and storing these products in an area that is inaccessible to children.

### Handwashing

Handwashing is your best protection against the spread of infections and disease. Throughout the day, your



hands come into contact with hundreds of surfaces. Washing your hands regularly is the best practice you can implement to keep yourself, your household members, and the children in your care and their families healthy. For handwashing to be effective, these basic steps need to be followed:

1. Turn on water.
2. Wet hands completely.
3. Apply liquid soap.
4. Lather hands well for 20 seconds, scrubbing the backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, and under fingernails.
5. Rinse soap off hands with running water.
6. Dry hands with disposable paper towel.
7. Turn off the faucet using the paper towel.
8. Throw paper towel away in a hands-free trash container. (Virtual Lab School, n.d.)

Depending on a child's age, you may need to hold the child and assist them in washing their hands. For older children, make sure they have access to an appropriate

height sink or provide them with a sturdy stepstool to reach the sink. You may also need to model the handwashing process for them. It's important that children wash for 20 seconds and many handwashing songs are available for the children to sing that will ensure they wash for the required time. (See Appendix Q for guidelines for when to wash your hands.)

### *Responding to Children's Injuries*

You have designed your child care area and outdoor playground to minimize accidents. However, even under the best of circumstances, accidents will happen. Some accidents result in minor injuries that will only require first aid. Other injuries are serious but not a threat to the child's life. (These injuries may require first aid with the parents being called to pursue additional medical attention as needed.) Other accidents may result in life-threatening injuries. Depending on the severity and type of injury, you must be prepared to provide CPR and/or call for emergency medical services. Regardless of the severity of the injury, parents should always be notified of all injuries their children sustain while in your care. It's also recommended that you keep a log of all the injuries children in your care experienced and the medical treatment you provided. Typically, most child care licensing regulations require you to be trained in first aid and CPR.

### *Administering Medication*

To the extent possible, parents should be asked to administer any required medication to their child outside of the child care hours. However, certain medications may be required prior to or after meals or three times daily. As a result, from time to time FCC providers may be called on to give a child medication. Typically, licensing regulations require child care providers to attend training regarding administration of medications. It is also recommended that you keep a log of all medications signed in and administered.

Here are some recommendations to follow when medications must be provided while a child is in your care:

- Over the counter and/or prescription medications must be checked in with the provider in the original childproof container which contains the child's name and instructions regarding the dosage and timing of the medication.
- Parents need to give consent to the medication being administered, as well as log in the dosage and time the medicine is to be given. Parents should demonstrate the administration of the medicine as necessary.
- All medication must be stored in a locked cabinet (or refrigerator as needed) out of the reach of children.
- Staff and children must wash their hands prior to and after administering the medication.
- Check the five rights:
  - > Right child
  - > Right medicine
  - > Right time
  - > Right amount
  - > Right route
- Provider needs to fill out the medication log indicating the dosage and time of administering the medication.
- Child should be observed to ensure the medication does not have adverse effects for the child. If the child has an adverse reaction, the parents must be consulted as soon as possible and emergency action taken as necessary. (Nebraska Department of Education, Policies and Procedures, 2011).

## NUTRITION

Good nutrition, exploring food choices, and the development of good eating habits are a cornerstone to the healthy development and wellness of children. Practices supporting these goals include:

- Following USDA guidelines regarding planning of menus that encourage healthy food choices.
- Following health regulations regarding the storage, preparation, and serving of food.
- Ensuring children with food allergies are not exposed to the allergen.
- Encouraging children to participate in family-style meals, as developmentally appropriate, where they learn to serve themselves.
- Providing children with meals that reflect their cultures.
- Promoting children's socialization and conversations during mealtime.

### *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*

The CACFP program is designed to reimburse child care programs for serving nutritious meals and snacks and promoting healthy eating habits. To participate in CACFP, FCC providers are required to work with a CACFP sponsor who is responsible for collecting and maintaining program records and preparing and submitting the monthly reimbursement claims. The care provider must also participate in training related to the CACFP program. Program requirements include serving meals that meet program guidelines, keeping records of menus and meals served, and education of children regarding healthy eating habits. Reimbursement for FCC homes is based on a two-tiered system. Tier one provides higher reimbursement for homes located in low-income neighborhoods, providers with low-incomes, and families with low-incomes. Each state's regulations for participation in the CACFP may vary,

so it's important to check your state's guidelines. You are not required to participate in the CACFP program. However, you should always serve healthy nutritious meals and snacks. (Food Research and Action Center, 2020)

### *Food Preparation*

Consistent, strong safety practices are the best protection from foodborne illnesses. It is crucial to use the following practices when preparing food in your home's program:

- Wash your hands and frequently clean and disinfect your work surfaces.
- Keep raw meat and their juices away from other foods.
- Cook food to the proper internal temperature.
- Keep food to be served at a minimum of 40 degrees.

Other considerations regarding food service include:

- Foods should never be used as a reward or withheld as a punishment.
- Infants should be fed on demand based on a flexible schedule.
- Infants should be held when being bottle fed. Bottles should never be propped.
- Older children will need to be fed a meal or snacks at least every three hours.

### *Family-Style Meals*

Family-style dining is an approach to serving meals to children in a way that promotes healthy eating and reinforces learning and development. Younger children are more likely to try new foods and develop good mealtime habits when they see their peers and the adults around them doing so. By serving themselves, children begin to understand and practice correct portion sizes. Family-style dining also encourages

mealtime conversations and interactions between children as well as adults (Scheibe and Lee, 2016).

### *Food Allergies*

Food allergies can be a matter of life and death. A food allergy happens when an individual's body overreacts to a harmless food protein — an allergen. The most common food allergens are milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, and shellfish. Children experiencing an allergic reaction demonstrate various symptoms including itching and/or swelling in the mouth and throat, a skin rash, cramps, nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting, difficulty breathing, a drop in blood pressure, and/or unconsciousness. To reduce the likelihood of a child being exposed to an allergen, it will be necessary to prepare menus that do not include the allergen, to read food labels, and to ensure there is no cross contamination during food handling and preparation. If, despite your best efforts, a child does come into contact with or consume a food causing an allergic reaction, it will be important to follow the child's individual food allergy plan and contact the child's parents as soon as possible. (National Food Service Management Institute, 2014)

## 9

## PROMOTING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

"When you work with children under age five, you witness more learning and development than anyone will observe during any other period of their lives. What and how children learn during this period becomes the building blocks for school readiness. ... Providers who know what kinds of experiences to offer children at each stage of development are able to help children build a strong foundation for lifelong learning." (p. 75, Dodge, Rudick, and Colker, 2017)

## CURRICULUM

A curriculum can be a useful guide in planning and designing learning activities for children representing different ages/ability levels. A good curriculum will address children's learning in the following centers/activities: blocks, dramatic play, toys and games, art, reading area, science/math area, sand and water play, music, cooking, and outdoor play.

There are many curriculums available on the market today that have been established specifically for FCC programs. Others, designed for center-based care, have been adapted by FCC providers. The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) has identified the following criteria as characteristic of an effective curriculum:

- Does it address all areas of learning including cognitive (math and science), language, social-emotional, and fine and gross motor development, as well as approaches to learning (learning styles)?
- Are there clear learning goals and objectives that define what should be taught?
- Does the curriculum include instructional activities

that are linked to the goals and objectives? Is information provided on implementing the activities? Are the activities of interest to the children and do they provide the opportunity to learn through active hands-on activities? Can the activities be adapted for a wide age range of children?

- Does the curriculum provide suggestions on teacher-child interactions that are responsive to the children and build on what the children already know and have experienced?
- Does the curriculum include activities that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the enrolled children?
- Does it offer suggestions on how to support children who are learning English?
- Does the curriculum provide ideas for adapting the materials and/or teaching strategies to allow for individualized instruction?
- Does the curriculum include an assessment to determine if children are making progress towards their learning goals?
- Are suggestions included for communicating and involving parents in their child's learning?
- Has the curriculum been successfully implemented by others? What level of teacher qualifications or professional development do you need to implement the curriculum? What are the costs associated with the curriculum? Does the curriculum reflect your program's values?

Providers searching for a curriculum are encouraged to seek input from other providers, FCC networks, and/or child care resource and referral agencies. See Appendix

R for a listing of available commercial curricula.

## DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING/ASSESSMENT

A developmental screening using a checklist or rating scale is designed to track a child's growth in the areas of cognition, language, social-emotional, and motor development. Screening results indicate if a child is on track developmentally. Typically, a screening is completed by either the provider or parent, who rate the child's behaviors based on their observations of the child. Information from the screener can assist you in planning activities to support the development of the children in your care. An informal assessment can also be completed over time by using a checklist of developmental guidelines such as those developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>. Commercial screeners have also been developed for this purpose. A listing of available screening instruments, many which are free, can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/toolkit/compendium-screening-measures-young-children>

## DAILY SCHEDULE

A daily schedule will allow you to plan your day and ensure children are provided opportunities to engage in activities across all developmental domains. Predictable schedules and routines will also help children understand expectations and reduce the likelihood of behavior problems. Yet, a schedule should offer some degree of flexibility to respond to the individual needs of younger children and to take advantage of learning

opportunities in your home/neighborhood that might arise during the day. It should provide opportunities for structured play guided by the FCC provider as well as unstructured “free” play. There should be time for individual as well as small and large group play. Additionally, children should have time to play outdoors each day when weather allows.

Despite its importance, creating a daily schedule for a group of mixed age children whose interests and needs vary can be challenging. It’s recommended that you gather basic information about each child upon their enrollment, including arrival and departure times and schedules for eating, napping, and diapering. While these may vary somewhat on any given day, you can use this basic information to begin to develop a general schedule. It is recommended that you post a daily schedule (including words and pictures) in the play area to guide the children’s behavior during the day. (See Appendix S for sample daily schedule.)

Transitions are an inevitable part of every schedule as you move from one activity to another. They do not have to be times of chaos or meltdowns. Several tips for smooth transitions include:

- Being prepared for the next activity so there is little wait time for children.
- Transitioning the children individually or in small groups. For example, preschoolers who have finished eating use the bathroom, wash their hands, and choose a book before moving to their mat to nap while you diaper the infants.
- Signaling the transition. For example, you sing a song about picking up your toys prior to going out to play.
- Limiting the number of transitions during the day to the extent possible.

## LESSON PLANS

Planning is key for any high quality early childhood care and education program. It gives the provider an intentional roadmap to follow regarding the types of activities to be implemented during the week. Using the results of a screening or assessment tool, providers can identify the learning objectives they believe the children are ready to achieve. Activities can then be planned to promote the learning of these objectives throughout the day. Lesson plans should include activities that reflect the children’s interests, attention spans, and preferences for solitary or interactive play.

Lesson plans are typically developed on a weekly basis and can be developed for individual children or groups of children. They will guide you in preparing for each day by identifying what materials will be needed for each activity. By reviewing your lesson plans at the end of the day/week, you can determine which activities were most successful and be sure that you have provided the children in your care with a variety of early childhood experiences across the developmental domains — cognitive, language, social-emotional, and motor. (See Appendix T for sample lesson plan.)

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Learning is dependent on the development of trusting relationships between you and the children you care for. When children feel emotionally and physically safe and secure and trust that the adults caring for them will meet their needs, they are more likely to explore, experiment with new behaviors, and gain confidence in their abilities. Developing trusting relationships begins with consistency in how you:

- Meet children’s basic needs.
- Demonstrate dependability and follow through on promises.
- Express affection based on each child’s uniqueness.

- Use a caring tone and words that express respect for each child.
- Get on the child’s eye level when talking or interacting with them.
- Soothe and support children who are upset.
- Allow children to make decisions as often as possible.
- Read children’s facial expressions and body language to determine how you will respond.
- Adjust your schedule as needed depending on the needs of the children.
- Understand why you struggle in your relationships with specific children and adjusting your attitude and approach accordingly.
- Are aware of and manage your own feelings.

## SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN DURING PLAY

Supervision of children will need to be adjusted based on the age of the child and their developmental level. To the extent possible, children should be within the sight and sound of the provider. However, an infant who is just beginning to walk, a toddler playing with materials with smaller pieces, or a preschool age child who is impulsive may also need to be within your reach. Providers who routinely circulate among the children will be able to resolve problems before they escalate by guiding the children’s behaviors. They will also be able to support children’s play by showing interest and/or extending the children’s play with new ideas.

## TEACHING PRACTICES

During play children learn about the world around them, engage in problem solving, explore materials, and practice new skills. You can set the stage for this learning by providing stimulating materials, offering

guidance to support children's efforts, asking questions to stimulate their thinking, and providing ongoing encouragement. Dodge, Rudick, and Colker (2017) have identified the following strategies to use to encourage children's active learning:

- Set up the indoor and outdoor play environments so that they promote safe explorations.
- Build on children's interests, starting with what they already know.
- Encourage children to make predictions, experiment, and draw conclusions.
- Encourage children to try the unknown — new foods, new materials, new activities, and new ways of doing things.
- Expect children to make mistakes and assist them in learning from their mistakes.
- Allow children time to discover and practice new skills.
- Take children's individual temperaments, preferred play activities, and learning styles into account when planning experiences.
- Listen to what children are saying and respond appropriately.
- Ask children questions that stretch their thinking.
- Observe each child, keep work samples, evaluate their skills based on your curriculum, and plan activities that support all areas of development.

## SCREEN TIME

While the research is somewhat limited regarding young children, it has been found that excessive screen time negatively impacts a child's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development and contributes to childhood obesity and shorter sleep cycles. As a result, the American Pediatric Association (APA) has



discouraged screen time for children under 18 months of age other than video-chatting. For children between the ages of 18-24 months, the APA recommends that if children are engaged with digital media, that the adults in their lives participate with them. For children ages 2-5 years, it is recommended that children are limited to one hour a day of screen time. (Council on Communications and Media, 2016.) In your role as a FCC provider, it's also recommended that you limit the amount of time you use digital devices to set a good example for the children and ensure that you will not be distracted from caring and interacting with them. (Virtual Lab School, n.d.)

## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE

Children learn about the behaviors expected of them by observing the behaviors of the adults and children around them. Inappropriate behaviors often occur when children misunderstand and/or misinterpret the situation based on their past experiences and/or because they lack the appropriate response to meet adult expectations. They may also be confused, scared or angry. However, the good news is that children can

learn to recognize their emotions, express their feelings and demonstrate appropriate behaviors.

Positive behavior guidance involves encouraging and teaching appropriate behaviors and minimizing the possibility of unwanted behaviors. Children's behaviors are influenced by the design of the physical environment, the materials available, and the daily routines and schedule. Dodge, Rudick, and Colker (2017) suggest the following strategies to prevent undesired behaviors:

- Set up an appealing space where children can successfully engage in safe play.
- Follow a consistent daily schedule and routines.
- Provide a reasonable amount of time for transitions.
- Provide children with sufficient outdoor time to run and play.
- Allow children time for unstructured play where they can practice self-regulation skills.
- Take the perspective of the child in the situation and anticipate their physical and emotional needs.

- Read children's nonverbal cues as well as their verbal attempts at communication and provide them with the words to describe their feelings.
- Communicate acceptable behaviors using simple, clear language in a calm voice.
- Reinforce children's positive behaviors by specifically describing their appropriate actions.
- Guide children by telling them what you want them to do, versus what they may not do.
- Acknowledge children's feelings and provide them with the language to express their emotions.
- Share how you feel about particular behaviors.
- Avoid using the word "no" to the extent possible.
- Model appropriate behaviors, including kindness and respect.
- Individualize how you comfort and soothe each child.

## SPECIAL POPULATIONS

### *Children with Special Needs*

All children are entitled to a safe child care environment that promotes their health and development.

The skills that you apply to your care for typically developing children are just as applicable to children with disabilities. As you assess each child's level of development, your care and guidance can then be individualized to meet each child where they are at. The following guidance is helpful when working with children with disabilities:

- Do not make assumptions about a child based on their identified disability.
- Identify each child's strengths and interests first before focusing on each child's special needs.
- Determine how each child's special needs impact their ability to learn and plan for how to make

accommodations in your environment, schedule, and routines.

- Work with family members, who know their child best, to gather information about how to successfully meet the child's needs.
- Seek out guidance from special education service providers regarding what teaching strategies to use to promote the child's development.
- Set up the environment to encourage each child's independence in engaging with the indoor and outdoor play areas and interacting with their peers.
- Consider using a peer buddy who can socially interact with the child and serve as a model and mentor. (Dodge, Rudick, and Colker, 2017)

### *Children Who are Dual Language Learners*

Families whose children are English language learners may have differing expectations for their children. While some want their children to learn English as soon as possible, others desire that their children retain their native language. Fortunately, families do not have to choose one or the other. As the FCC provider, you can support the parents in encouraging the children's language development in both languages. Here are some ways to support families of children who are learning two languages simultaneously:

- Encourage families to continue to talk, sing, and read in their native language with their children.
- Understand that language is an important component of each family's culture.
- Provide children with opportunities to hear their native language in your home either through natural conversations or recorded songs or books.
- Seek out information about the learning stages children move through while learning English.



- To the extent possible, speak to families in their preferred language during daily interactions. As needed, use pictures, objects, gestures, and other body language to provide visual cues to support your conversations. (Dodge, Rudick and Colker, 2017)

# 10 PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

## WHY FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

“Research indicates that children’s lifelong health, development, and academic success is impacted by their families’ active engagement in their children’s learning. When families and their children’s early childhood care providers partner in meaningful ways, children develop more positive attitudes toward school ... and are more likely to experience school success.” (Porter, Guzman, Kuhfeld, Caal, Rodrigues, Moodie, Chrisler, and Ramos, 2012)

Families are the key factor in their child’s development and well-being. However, every family is different. Families may be two parent households or one parent households, parents of the same sex, grandparents or extended family members, or unrelated foster parents. To best meet the needs of all families, FCC providers are encouraged to take a family-centered focus that includes the following beliefs:

- Families are the most important decision-makers in a child’s life.
- Families are unique and their differences enrich the experiences of the children.
- Families are resilient.
- Families are central to development and learning.
- Families are our partners (Source: Virtual Lab School, n.d.).

Recently, Dodge, Rudick, and Colker (2017) offered the following suggestions for FCC providers to use to promote partnerships with family members of the children enrolled in their programs.

## INITIAL CONTACTS AND ENROLLMENT

Seeking out child care for most parents — and especially first-time parents — is a frightening and daunting task. Parents are unsure what constitutes high quality care. They do not know how to ensure their child will be properly supervised and responded to in a positive manner. They want their child to be in a learning environment, but do not always know what that looks like. Families will have lots of questions and providers can gain their respect by providing honest responses and examples. (See recruitment, enrollment, and marketing section on page 27).

## GETTING TO KNOW FAMILIES

Trusted, respectful partnerships involve the provider sharing information with families as well as taking the necessary steps to learn more about the families and children in their care. Culture plays a role in a family’s beliefs about child-rearing, discipline, and nutrition. Each family brings life experiences that are unique to them. Your sensitivity to the unique characteristics of each family is essential to developing meaningful relationships. Understanding how a child is parented at home will help you understand the child’s personality and behavior in your home.

## COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Open communication with the child’s parents will serve as a foundation to build the trusting relationship necessary for understanding and respecting cultural differences and seeing each other’s perspective. Frequent, meaningful dialogue with the child’s parents will also allow you to share how the child is experiencing your child care program and developing

essential skills. Communication should be in the family’s home language if possible. Methods of communication may include:

- Daily greetings
- Summary of weekly activities which can be posted on a parent message board
- Photos of their children playing and interacting with others
- Children’s work samples with a photo and/or description of what the child is learning
- A written message in a daily journal or on a “daily form” that describes an accomplishment the child achieved that day
- Weekly newsletters
- Asking parents for advice regarding their child
- Text messages and emails
- Social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

In addition to daily communication with each family, it’s recommended that providers hold a conference with each parent twice a year. Conferences provide an opportunity for you to share your observations and child’s work samples with the parents to demonstrate their child’s growth and development, gather information from parents regarding their perceptions of their child’s strengths and needs, and, with the parents, identify areas of focus for their child for the next six months. This is also a time for parents to have an opportunity to give you feedback on the care their child’s been receiving, including recommendations for changes.



## PARTNERING FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Parents are their child's first teacher, and they will continue to guide their child's learning well through the teenage years. As such, partnering with you enables parents to best meet the needs of their child in their early years. There are endless ways to have parents and related caregivers (grandparents, significant others, etc.) interact with their children during your program hours — for example:

- Accompanying you and the children to the park or on a field trip.
- Joining their child for lunch or a snack.
- Sharing special activities from their culture, such as songs, dances, and/or foods with the children.
- Joining you for a cooking project with the children.
- Reading a special book and doing a related activity with the children.

- Helping with special projects such as building garden boxes or outdoor easels for the children.
- Participating in special celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, etc.

Parents are often looking for fun activities to do at home with their children to promote their learning, and you're in an ideal position to share activities you know their children will enjoy. You can also share information about community activities and educational technology applications they can engage in with their children.

## RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

### *Supporting Families Living in Stressful Situations*

Today's families are experiencing many more stressful situations than ever before, including poverty, joblessness, homelessness, food insecurity, domestic violence, and/or substance abuse, to name a few. Parents living in these types of difficult situations may not always have the physical and/or emotional ability to engage in positive interactions with you or their children. However, it's always best to assume that all parents are doing the best they can. Because they have a relationship with you, families may share their worries with you. Having information about community resources to share with parents will not only be helpful for families but also demonstrates that you care.

### *Supporting Families of Children with Special Needs*

As the FCC provider, you may be the first person to notice delays or concerns regarding a child's behavior. It will be critical for you to take notes and/or photos documenting what the child is able to do, as well as to share your concerns with the parents regarding possible delays in their child's behavior. Talking to parents about options and providing them with relevant contact information for the local education provider will empower parents to take the next steps in best meeting their child's needs. (Refer to page 38 in the "Special Populations" section for more on this topic.)

### *Supporting Families of Dual Language Learners*

Research suggests that children who continue to use and develop their home language will develop their English-speaking skills more quickly later. It's recommended that you work with the parents of a child learning more than one language to maintain the child's home language to the extent possible. As you share written materials with parents, it will be important for you to provide information in the home language of the parents. If you and the parents do not speak the same language, it is recommended you attempt to have another adult present at your meetings to interpret. (Refer to page 38 in the "Special Populations" section for more on this topic.)

## EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

AREA OF INVOLVEMENT	ACTIVITY EXAMPLES
Initial Contacts and Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide potential parents with a tour of your center.</li> <li>▪ Provide parents with a handbook including information about your operations, policies, and procedures.</li> <li>▪ Ensure you have a warm and welcoming home environment.</li> <li>▪ Provide a parent message board where you include planned weekly activities, information about community events, and other announcements of interest to your families.</li> <li>▪ Include photos of the children and displays of their work in your child care area.</li> </ul>
Getting to Know Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meet with families prior to the child's first day to gather background information about the child and family.</li> <li>▪ Ask each family to share family photos that you can display in the children's play space.</li> <li>▪ Ask families to share dramatic play materials, foods, etc. from their culture.</li> <li>▪ Celebrate families' cultural holidays with the children.</li> </ul>
Communicating with Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Greet each parent and child daily as they drop off and pick up their child.</li> <li>▪ Point out (take notes and/or photos of) examples of children reaching developmental milestones.</li> <li>▪ Share information about upcoming community events families might be interested in.</li> <li>▪ Partner with parents to address challenging behaviors.</li> <li>▪ Share information when you have concerns about a child's development.</li> </ul>
Partnering for Children's Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Survey parents regarding what care practices are important to them and consider their opinions in your decision-making.</li> <li>▪ Invite parents to participate in a special activity in your home. For example, celebrating a holiday, reading a book, sharing a favorite song, sharing a favorite food, etc.</li> <li>▪ Ask parents to consider donating materials for a center or activity — like dress up clothes, paper, etc.</li> <li>▪ Ask parents to help with a special project — like outdoor playground renovations.</li> </ul>
Responding to Challenging Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share materials regarding community resources with parents.</li> <li>▪ Invite special education service providers into your home to provide you with teaching strategies to use with children with special needs.</li> <li>▪ Provide written materials in the parents' home language or translate when needed.</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ***Business Administration Scale (BAS) for Family Child Care — Second Edition (2018).*** (Authors: Teri Talan and Paula Jorde Bloom.)

The scale was designed to measure and improve the overall quality of business and professional practices in FCC settings. This tool can be used as a self-assessment or by a trained assessor. Items assessed include qualifications and professional development, income and benefits, work environment, fiscal management, recordkeeping, risk management, provider-family communication, family support and engagement, marketing and community relations, and provider as employer (as applicable). The scale is available from Teachers College Press at [https://www.tcpres.com/search?search\\_term=business+administration+scale](https://www.tcpres.com/search?search_term=business+administration+scale).

### ***Opening and Running a Family Child Care — Child Care Aware of America***

This resource outlines the steps necessary for the establishment and maintenance of a FCC program. Available sections provide information and helpful resources for every step of the establishment and maintenance of a FCC program. This resource is available at <https://www.childcareaware.org/providers/opening-running-family-child-care-home>.

### ***Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) — Third Edition (2019).*** (Authors: Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, Richard Clifford, and Norreen Yazejian.)

The rating scale was designed to be used in FCC homes. An evaluator observes what's happening in the home and rates the FCC accordingly in terms of space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and books, activities, interactions, and program structure. The guide is available through Teachers College Press ([https://www.tcpres.com/search?search\\_term=family+child+care+environment+rating+scale](https://www.tcpres.com/search?search_term=family+child+care+environment+rating+scale)).

### ***ECE Shared Resources***

This resource is a password-protected web platform that offers an extensive knowledge hub of tools focused on supporting the needs of early childhood education and care professionals. Hundreds of easily editable resources are available, including materials to share with parents. Many states and the District of Columbia have access to the platform. The list of states with the platform is available at <https://www.ecesharedresources.com/working-with-us/partners-impact/>.

### ***The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)***

The Quality Standards for NAFCC Accreditation, Fifth Edition, outlines content areas that identify a program as high quality. Content areas include relationships, the environment, developmental learning activities, safety and health, and professional and business practices. Documents are available at <https://s3.amazonaws.com/elib-prod/files/pubs/Quality%20Standards%20-%202017%20Updates.pdf>

### ***Ohio State University Virtual Lab School***

The Virtual Lab School empowers professionals to build knowledge and skills around research-based practices in child and youth care and development. The lab school offers a distinct track for home-based care providers who typically care for mixed-age groups. The core content covers research-based, developmentally appropriate practices for working with children from birth to age 12 across all the functional roles in child and youth care and education settings.

Documents are available at <https://www.virtuallabschool.org>.

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