

Implementing Child Care Resource and Referral Call Centers: A Guide for CCDF Lead Agencies and Their Partners



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Acknowledgments

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ADMINISTRATION FOR
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NATIONAL CENTER ON
Parent, Family and Community Engagement

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Implementing Child Care Resource and Referral Call Centers: A Guide for CCDF Lead Agencies and Their Partners

This resource offers guidelines and exemplary practices for implementing child care resource and referral call centers. The resource is intended for Child Care and Development Fund Lead Agencies and their partners working to set up or improve call centers as part of their consumer education and consumer engagement efforts.

Child care resource and referral call centers refer to agencies or offices that provide families with information and referrals to programs that offer early childhood and school-age care and education. Call center staff provide families with referrals to comprehensive services for family well-being. Call centers help families with health and safety or abuse complaints.

Introduction

The 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act expanded consumer education requirements for Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies. This resource and its companion training guide, **Child Care Resource and Referral Call Centers: Training for CCDF Lead Agencies and Their Partners** address two parts of the expanded requirements:

Section 98.32(a) requires Lead Agencies to establish or designate a hotline or similar reporting process for parents to submit complaints about child care providers.

Section 98.33 requires Lead Agencies to provide:

- (a) A consumer education website
- (b) Additional consumer education information, including

- The availability of child care services through CCDF, other early childhood education programs for which families might be eligible, and the availability of financial assistance to obtain child care services
- Other programs for which families receiving CCDF may be eligible, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Research and best practices concerning children’s development, including meaningful parent and family engagement and physical health and development
- Policies regarding the social-emotional and behavioral health of children, including policies to prevent the suspension and expulsion of children from birth to age 5

(c) Information about developmental screenings

- Must be provided to families during the CCDF intake process, and to early childhood or school-age care and education programs through training and education
- Must include the existing resources and services the State, Territory, or Tribe can provide in conducting developmental screenings and in providing referrals, and a description of how a family or provider may use those resources

(d) Consumer statements that include

- How subsidies are designed to promote equal access
- How to submit a complaint through the hotline (98.32[a])
- How to contact local child care resource and referral or other community supports
- Health and safety, licensing, or regulatory requirements met by programs
- Date of last program inspection
- Voluntary quality standards met by programs

Find information about the 2014 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act and 2016 CCDF Final Rule at the Office of Child Care.

The requirements for hotlines, call centers, and consumer education website are interrelated. And early childhood and school-age care and education systems are complex. In response, States, Territories, Tribes, and communities are providing consumer education in new and different ways. Lead Agencies may need to realign and update their call center practices—for managing calls related to health, safety, or abuse concerns from parents and others, and for delivering comprehensive child care consumer information.

Each State, Territory, and Tribe has its own structure for delivering these services. Some Lead Agencies deliver consumer education on child care and process complaints about child care health and safety within their own agency. Others may contract with child care resource and referral agencies or other organizations for a combination of service delivery methods.

While methods for service delivery vary, all call centers have the opportunity to provide families with direct, personalized information. Call center staff often are the first live contact parents have with early childhood and school-age care and education professionals and services. These staff open the door and create a first impression for families.

How This Guide Is Organized

This guide is organized into eight sections:

Call Center: Overview. Explains information that call center staff need to know and be able to share, and describes types of referrals.

Call Centers: Building Rapport With Families. Explains consumer engagement, strengths-based communication, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and listening to families.

Call Centers: Referral Process From Start to Finish. Describes the essential elements of making a referral.

Phone Systems and Phone Etiquette. Includes how to use scripts and voicemail, and how to return calls.

Considerations for Other Methods of Contact. Offers considerations for providing referrals face-to-face and by website, email, chat, and instant messaging.

Considerations for Developing Consumer Education Resources. Includes plain-language tips.

Operational Considerations. Lists operational aspects to consider when setting up or enhancing a call center.

Tools. Features a full range of tools for operating an effective call center.

Look for these icons to find guidance and tools to share with call center contractors, supervisors and staff.



Call Center Overview

Call center staff need to know and be able to share important information and make several types of consumer referrals.

Parents contact call centers for a variety of reasons. For example, families may be interested in general consumer education information about child care, such as what to look for in a child care program and how to search for a program. They may be seeking information about financial assistance programs or other supports for family well-being. Or they may be calling to report health and safety or abuse allegations. Call center staff must be prepared to respond to all of these requests with information tailored to each family's specific situation.

Information That Call Center Staff Need to Know and Be Able to Share

Call center staff must be knowledgeable about a variety of topics that may be of interest to families, including:

- The availability of child care services provided through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and the availability of financial assistance to obtain child care services.
- Information about quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), accreditation, and other quality improvement initiatives or research-based indicators families should look for when choosing a high-quality early childhood and school-age care and education program.
- Information about other assistance programs that families may be eligible for, including Head Start and Early Head Start; State, Territory, Tribal, or local pre-kindergarten programs; energy assistance; Medicaid; housing assistance; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP); Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food and nutrition program; Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); Supplemental Security Income (SSI); and support for children with special needs (Part B Section 619 and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]).
- Links to information about state licensing and local requirements that programs must meet, as well as program monitoring.
- Research and best practices concerning children's development, including social-emotional development, early childhood development, family engagement, and physical health and development (particularly healthy eating and physical activity).
- State, Territory, and Tribal policies regarding the social-emotional and behavioral health of children, which may include models of positive behavioral interventions and support for children birth to school age or models that are age appropriate, and policies to prevent the suspension and expulsion of children birth to age 5 in child care and other early childhood programs.

- Procedures for referring callers who want to report a health, safety, or abuse violation to the proper agency.

A first step for Lead Agencies and/or agencies contracted to provide call center services is to compile and equip call center staff with the above information to ensure call center staff are prepared to respond to requests for any type of referrals.

Types of Referrals

Consumer referral refers to providing parents with information and resources to best meet the needs of their children and family, respond to their interests, and build on their strengths. Referrals may include helping parents identify and find high-quality child care, connecting parents to family support services for which they may be eligible (such as TANF, Medicaid, and CACFP), or linking parents to resources to lodge and file concerns about health, safety, and abuse violations.

There are three primary types of consumer referrals provided by call center staff: standard referrals, enhanced referrals, and referrals for health and safety concerns.

Standard referrals provide families with customized information about child care programs. The information is tailored to the family's individual interests, strengths, and needs. A standard referral typically includes a list of programs filtered according to families' preferences (hours, days of the week, location, program philosophy, etc.), along with relevant consumer education information. Most requests from families will result in a standard referral. A referral may take place through a call center, onsite, or at a co-location with other support services, such as a Head Start outreach program, TANF, or child care subsidy services.

Enhanced referrals provide families with additional services and information beyond a standard referral. The main difference between an enhanced referral and a standard referral is that with an enhanced referral, call center staff perform searches and confirm vacancies in programs before they offer referrals to a parent. Not all call centers offer enhanced referrals.

Some companies and organizations contract with call centers to provide enhanced referral services to their employees. Lead Agencies sometimes require enhanced referrals to assist families with high-priority needs, such as finding a program for an infant or toddler, a child experiencing homelessness, or a child with special needs.



See Tools 1 and 2 on pages 26 and 28 for more information about enhanced referrals.

It is important to emphasize that consumer referrals (standard and enhanced) are not endorsements of specific programs. Referrals are not recommendations. Through referrals, call center staff are providing information to help families make informed decisions about programs—with the goal of making the highest possible quality of care available to all families.

Referrals for health and safety or abuse concerns provide information that connects families to the appropriate authorities to make a formal complaint about health and safety violations or child abuse in an early childhood or school-age care and education program. Handling this type of referral is an important service done by call centers.

Because each State, Territory, and Tribe designates its own official complaint contact to receive these reports, call centers must work with Lead Agencies to identify the official contact and to know the preferred reporting process. Find State, Territory, and local child care complaint contact numbers at ChildCare.gov. Find contact numbers for complaints about Tribal programs at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development.

Regardless of whether your agency serves as the State's, Territory's, or Tribe's designated health, safety, and abuse violation call center, it is important to have procedures in place to facilitate how these types of calls are handled. See Tool 3 for exemplary procedures.

Call center staff also may receive complaints or concerns from families about specific program policies or practices that do not impact health or safety. These complaints may be, for example, about program policies related to family visits during scheduled nap times, or continued tuition charges during absences.

When handling these types of concerns, staff can encourage parents to discuss their concerns directly with program staff. Depending on the concern, offering the parent related resources, such as articles and brochures, sometimes can be helpful.

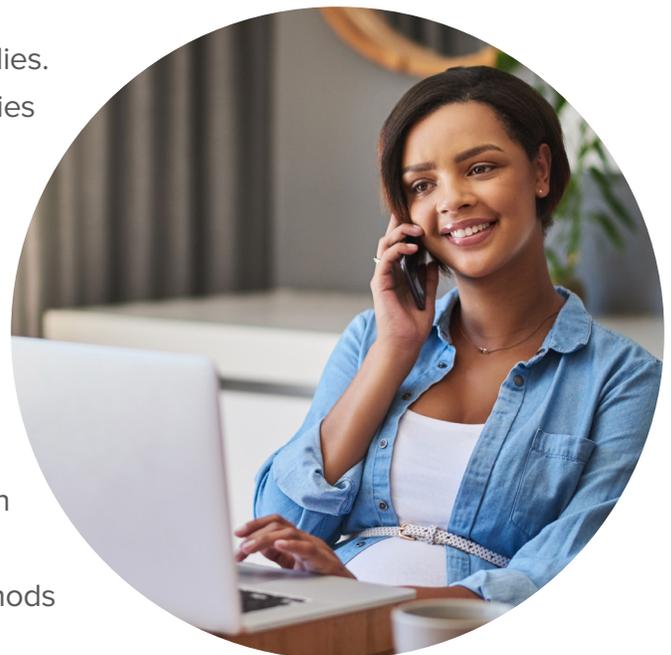
Call Center: Building Rapport With Families

Call center staff are an important first contact for families. Staff can enhance that first contact by engaging families as consumers, using strengths-based communication practices, demonstrating cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and listening thoughtfully and carefully.

Building rapport with parents encourages families' trust and confidence in the ability of a call center to assist them to make informed decisions about programs. Building rapport with parents, however, can be challenging for a variety of reasons, including time constraints and priorities. Virtual communication methods like online chat and email may seem impersonal.



See Tools 3, 4, and 5 on pages 29, 31, and 33 for more information about Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns.



Any time or any way a parent interacts with call center staff presents an opportunity to build on the parent's current knowledge and reinforce their role as the experts on their child and family. It is important to recognize that one-way information sharing, a typical component of consumer education, is an essential step towards building rapport.

Building true rapport, however, goes beyond providing information to families. Building rapport means developing mutually respectful relationships in which call center staff and parents share information with one another. They communicate well enough to understand each other's ideas, values, and opinions.

Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement relies on two-way, relationship-based interactions between families and program-level or system-level professionals, including call center staff.

Families and professionals share information with one another and work together to build each other's knowledge and capacities.

When parents and families are engaged as consumers of early childhood and school-age services, they act as:

- **Decision makers** who are equipped with information and seek access to quality early childhood and school-age care and education for their children.
- **Resourceful users** of information and early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services that support child and family well-being throughout early childhood and beyond.
- **Trusted peers** who help their friends and families understand and connect with the highest quality options available.
- **Leaders** who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child's program and their community.

As families expand their knowledge and leadership capacities, they can become more effective in finding and applying research-based information that, for example, informs their choices about a program for their child, guides them in monitoring their child's experiences in a program, or strengthens their ability to use their voices to advocate for higher quality and equitable access to services.

Similarly, as professionals expand their knowledge and capacities, they, too, can become more effective in inviting and responding to families' interests and values, and in supporting and partnering with families and other stakeholders.

For example, after talking with call center staff, parents may feel more prepared, as consumers, to make an informed choice about a program for their child. After talking with parents, call center staff may have a better understanding about what information is most valuable to parents and how parents prefer to receive such information (e.g., phone, email, text).

Learn more about consumer engagement in *Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care & Education Professionals*. Find this resource on the Child Care Technical Assistance (CCTA) website.

Using Strengths-based Communication

Call center staff can enhance rapport and promote consumer engagement by using a strengths-based approach and including strengths-based key messages in their interactions with families. A strengths-based approach involves the following:

- Acknowledging the strengths of families first
- Respecting and learning from differences
- Showing openness to adapting practice based on family preferences
- Sharing decision-making
- Approaching families as equal and reciprocal partners

Adopting a strengths-based approach does not mean avoiding challenges. Instead, a strengths-based approach shows families that we want to work together with them to find a solution. In contrast, when we approach our interactions with a fixed or negative attitude, we may convey our distrust or judgment. As a result, families may feel that they can't trust us. We may be putting up barriers to engaging families without realizing it.

Strengths-based messaging within the call center referral process conveys a value for and appreciation of parents. This kind of messaging also can include a helpful suggestion for action. Examples of key consumer messages include:

- “You are your child’s first and most important teacher. As you search for an early childhood or school-age care and education program, consider which program best matches your family’s and child’s approach to learning.”
- “You are the expert on your child and family. Look for an early childhood or school-age care and education professional who asks for and respects your input.”
- “You have a critical role in your family’s development. Talk with your early childhood or school-age care and education professional about your family’s strengths, needs, and goals.”

- Your contributions in decision-making for your child are important and valuable. Work with your early childhood or school-age care and education professional to find ways that make it possible for you to work together to support your child’s learning in child care and at home.”
- “If you have a school-age child, look for before-school, after-school, and summer programs that provide learning opportunities, promote health and safety, and welcome your involvement.”

Training and Technical Assistance Resources Available on Child Care Technical Assistance Website.

Consider using these resources to complement your call center training procedures.

- **Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices** explores practice strategies for building relationships with families.
- **The Relationship-based Competencies to Support Family Engagement** series (RBCs) is a comprehensive set of resources that describe the knowledge, skills, and individual practices that early childhood professionals need to engage families effectively in positive, goal-oriented relationships. The series includes an overview and three application resources, one each for family service professionals, teachers and child care providers, and home visitors.

Ensuring Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

As a welcoming partner for families, call centers can ensure all families have access to information about early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable.

When building a collection of consumer education resources, consider the diversity of the community in which you and your staff work. Language, ethnicity, literacy, and geography all are important considerations. Develop (or identify) and provide resources that recognize, affirm, and showcase families’ diverse cultures, knowledge, and experiences.

Ensure that your call center has multiple ways for families to access information and referrals, and that materials and services are provided in the languages spoken by the families you serve.

With proper training and by implementing effective skills, strategies, and guided practice, you and your call center staff will be well equipped to assist families in a manner that is consistent with families’ preferences and cultures.

Listening to Families

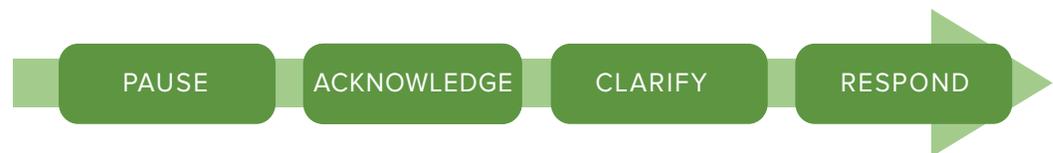
In typical call center interactions, a parent is trying to communicate a situation, express emotions, be understood, or solve a problem. A call center staff's first reaction can encourage a parent to open up about a situation—or not. Call center staff can promote rapport first by listening to understand through active listening. Then, when the parent is finished speaking, call center staff can think about their response.

Active Listening. Understanding the type of assistance a parent needs is essential to responding appropriately. Through active listening, call center staff can determine if a parent is looking for a referral, reporting a health and safety violation, or upset due to a program's policy. Active listening has four main steps: pause, acknowledge the parent's concern, clarify information, and respond. There are also several steps you can take to respond to a parent's concern.



Guidance for
Call Center Staff

Active Listening: Steps to Follow



1. **Pause.** This allows a parent to express thoughts and emotions. Interrupting and adding statements during this period can create stress for the parent.
2. **Acknowledge.** This is your opportunity to show empathy and to demonstrate that you are listening. Use phrases that demonstrate your understanding of the problem the family member is expressing—for example, “I understand that it’s hard to balance work and family.”
3. **Clarify.** Clearly understanding the parent’s situation puts you in a better position to seek more information and to provide appropriate support. Repeating key statements with respect will make it possible for you to work together with the parent towards a solution. The event or situation that prompted a parent to call can make it difficult for the parent to articulate his or her needs.

Use statements that seek confirmation of what they are looking for or asking—for example, “I understand that you are looking for a program available on the weekends.”

4. **Respond.** Be positive and encouraging while setting realistic and achievable expectations. Do not promise something that cannot happen. For example, if call center staff are not able to follow up, don’t commit that a follow-up will occur.

Focus on what can be done within the constraints of the call center. For example, if a parent wants to file a formal complaint and your agency cannot accept complaints, connect the parent to an organization that does. If your agency has the appropriate phone capabilities, offer to connect the family member directly to the organization. This type of connection is often called a “warm handoff.” A warm handoff saves the parent from making additional phone calls.

Responding to a parent's concerns involves three steps: apologize, solve, and thank.

- **Apologize.** When a parent has a concern, the concern is often about someone or something else other than the call center. It is important to recognize that the parent is experiencing a difficult situation. Like anyone else, a parent under stress may come across as difficult or confrontational. Your role is to help the parent. Acknowledge the emotion by saying, "I'm sorry to hear that. I can see how you would be frustrated," or "I'm sorry that happened. I am here to help connect you to the appropriate office that is responsible for receiving your health and safety concern."

Apologizing to the parent is not claiming responsibility. It is expressing a concern for the circumstances or the actions of others that have caused the family hurt and distress.

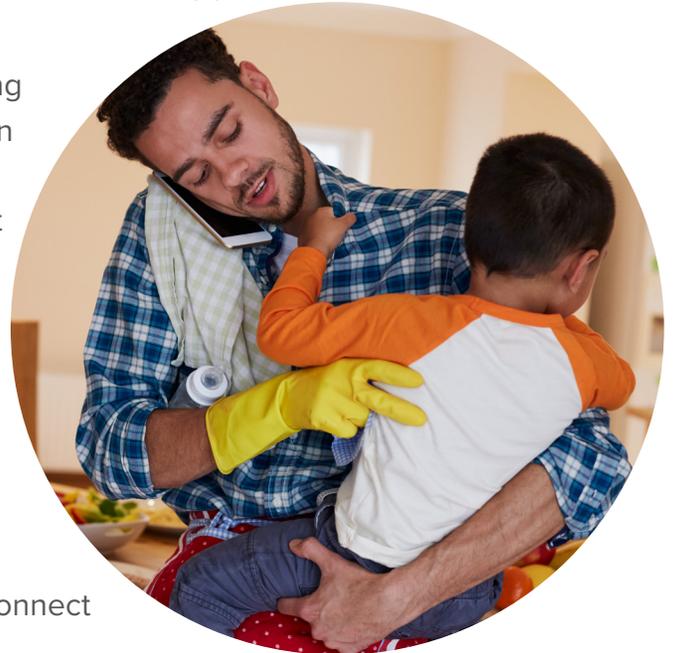
An apology conveys the message that you are sorry the parent is going through this unfortunate experience. Apologizing shows that you value the parent and want to help the family address their concerns.

- **Solve.** This step is the opportunity to connect parents to a solution.

Whether a parent is calling to find a program or consumer education information/resources, or is reaching out with a health, safety, or abuse concern, providing the appropriate resources is critical to effectively responding to families' needs. Communicate how you will assist in solving the problem. Do not overcommit. Be realistic. Keep your promises, and follow up if you said you would.

- **Thank.** Call center staff may end the call by thanking the parent for his or her time, patience, and understanding throughout the referral process.

Follow with an explanation to parents about what they can expect. For example, if the call center staff is sending a referral packet and information, explain what is included in the packet. Remind parents that they may receive a follow-up survey or phone call to request their feedback about the usefulness of the information provided during and after the call.



Call Centers: Referral Process From Start to Finish

The referral process involves a set of important and interconnected moments and opportunities—from the time a family member makes the first contact to the time that follow-up is conducted and the family’s immediate request has been met.

When contacting a call center, families may display a variety of emotions. Sometimes, based on the challenges they have experienced, parents may feel angry, concerned, or fearful. As a result, they may be yelling, crying, uncommunicative, or seemingly unable to provide essential information during an interaction.

First and foremost, call center staff must ensure that the children and parent are currently safe. If children or parents are in immediate danger, the parent should be directed to hang up and dial 9-1-1.

Exemplary Referral Practices from Start to Finish

Key elements of a high-quality standard referral from start to finish include these steps:

1. Greet families.

- Answer requests in a courteous and polite manner.
- Maintain a positive conversational tone, especially when using a decision tree or checklist.
- Ask about the family member’s time constraints as the conversation starts.

For example, “We want to be respectful of your time and be sure that your immediate concerns are met. These calls often take about 15 minutes to complete. Do you have 15 minutes right now for me to learn more about your interests and to share some information that may be helpful to you?” Follow the family member’s lead for the time and availability.

- Ask the family member for his or her preferred method of follow-up communication: phone, fax, mail, or email.
 - Explain the process that you will use to respond to the family member’s request: collect information about what type of program the family is looking for, share information about call center policies (fees, confidentiality, and disclaimers), and provide customized consumer education and referrals based on the family’s needs and preferences.
- #### 2. Clarify the strengths, needs, and interests of the family.
- Use sensitivity when collecting information. Never make assumptions about a family’s strengths, needs, or interests.
 - Use effective communication techniques (such as restating, active listening, probing questions, validating, and focusing) to clarify information shared by the family member.



Guidance for
Call Center Staff

Exemplary Referral Practices from Start to Finish, cont.

3. Provide information that is individualized to families.

- Explain clearly and understandably the availability of options across early childhood and school-age care and education settings.
- Cover the basics of your State's, Territory's or Tribe's regulatory requirements.
- Introduce quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) and accreditation as commitments to high-quality early learning, which provide evidence that standards have been met.
- Provide information specific to your geographic area, including the average cost of care and financial assistance options.
- Provide relevant consumer education information about program quality indicators: training requirements, health and safety indicators, group size, ratios, turnover rates, and levels of family involvement/family engagement.
- Provide consumer education information on early childhood and school-age care and education services and comprehensive supports for family well-being.
- Discuss child care licensing and how to get more information about the status of programs.



See Tool 6 on page 34 for more information on probing questions

Examples of comprehensive supports for family well-being include:

- Head Start and Early Head Start
- Developmental screenings
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Medicaid
- The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

These supports are included in the 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule, section 98.33 (Administration for Children and Families, 2016).

Exemplary Referral Practices from Start to Finish, cont.

4. Offer written materials in the primary languages spoken by local families.
5. Respond to additional information parents might share about their situation by affirming their statement. Ask specific questions, such as “Are there any special circumstances that you would like me to add to your search? You mentioned...(for example, wanting to keep multiple children together, special feeding needs, that you ride the bus to work).”
6. Offer families a list of early childhood and school-age care and education programs.
 - Provide a disclaimer about the referral list before sharing it. Clarify that referrals are not recommendations, and it is up to the parents/guardians to choose the highest quality care that is best for their child and family.
 - Provide a referral based on the family’s strengths, interests, and needs (free of your personal biases).
 - Provide at least three program referrals that include specific information about the licensing, monitoring, and quality rating (if available) of each program. If fewer than three options are available, think of creative solutions for care that may include: part-day, nontraditional hours, emergency care, and public school or out of school time care.
 - Be prepared to direct the family member to where they can access documentation about program concerns.
 - Offer a variety of methods for sending the referral packet to families: text message, postal mail, and email.
7. Discuss next steps and what to expect.
 - Summarize key points of the conversation with the family member so far. Next, review the recommended process for selecting programs: screening, interviewing, and the option of visiting programs as ways to collect information. For health, safety, or abuse concerns, summarize the conversation and then confirm with the caller that he or she has the contact information for the organization responsible for taking the complaint.
 - If you plan to send a packet of consumer education information along with a referral, explain what information will be included in the packet
 - Ask the parent to evaluate your services by completing a follow-up survey. Evaluation is part of a high-quality referral process. Let family members know they will receive an email, mailed survey, or phone call to collect information about their experience.



See Tools 7–10 on pages 35–41 for a sample cover letter, suggested topics to cover, and information to include in a consumer education/referral packet.

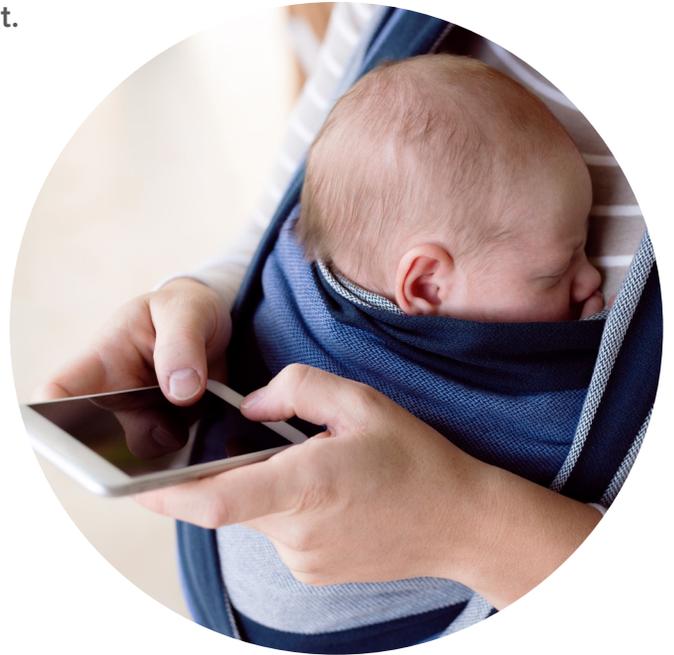
Exemplary Referral Practices from Start to Finish, cont.

- Follow up on your commitments to the family member. Send a referral packet and complete the evaluation and follow-up procedures your agency requires.

Ask for feedback about the quality of the service delivered, according to your agency's protocol.

Evaluation questions may include:

- Was the assistance provided to the family member helpful?
- How would the family member rate their experience?
- Is there anything the family member feels they needed but did not receive?



Collecting feedback from parents can support the agency's data collection efforts and inform quality improvement and decision-making.



Phone Systems and Phone Etiquette

Despite the growing use of internet-based technology for communication, telephone calls remain an essential communication tool for call centers. Telephone calls are one of the easiest and quickest ways to build rapport with families.

Phone Systems

While it is best for people to answer calls directly, a “live answer” may not always be possible. A call center’s phone system (phone tree) is often necessary, and should be easy to navigate with few connections. The menu of contact options (staff or program names and extensions) should make it easy to reach call center staff.

If the phone system does not have contact list capability, providing a method for families to leave a message and request a return phone call is essential. Use simple language such as, “If you need help finding an early childhood or school-age care and education program, please press __,” rather than using terms such as “referral,” which families may not be familiar with.

Provide phone tree and voicemail prompt options in the most predominant languages spoken by families in the communities you serve. It is also important to plan for how the call center will serve individuals with hearing or sight-impairments.

Exemplary Communication and Telephone Etiquette

Call center staff are often the first personal contact parents have with professionals and services for early childhood and school-age care and education. Thoughtful planning can ensure that phone interactions are comfortable and effective. Considerations for providing high-quality referrals by telephone include these steps:

1. Be ready. Have a checklist, decision trees, intake form, and database ready and available before picking up the phone.
2. Answer the phone promptly.
3. Keep hold times to less than 2 minutes. Phone systems with music and automatic “comfort” messages that play during hold times are useful for letting families know that they are properly connected and that you will answer (or return) the call as soon as possible.
4. Greet the caller with a smile. A small mirror placed by the telephone provides a great reminder to smile when the phone rings.



See Tool 11 on page 42 for sample phone tree scripts.



Guidance for Call Center Staff

Exemplary Communication and Telephone Etiquette, cont.

5. Start the conversation with a warm up. For example, begin each call by introducing yourself.
6. Be attentive and focus on the parent's questions, needs, and ideas without judging, jumping to conclusions, or tuning out on an issue. Be respectful of the parent and his or her privacy.
7. Use language that the parent is using. Do not use acronyms or other language parents might not know. For example, if the parents ask about "'vouchers", then refer to "vouchers" rather than "CCDF child care subsidy" in your response.
8. Ask relevant questions, actively listen, and be respectful of families' expressed primary concerns and time constraints.
9. Be courteous and reassure families that you are prepared to explore and offer referrals to programs and additional community resources.
10. Show empathy. This means you are sharing the parent's emotions, thoughts, or feelings. Empathy is key when building rapport.
11. Be yourself and relaxed. Show genuine interest in the parent. Your tone should be sincere, friendly, and professional.
12. While you may be following a script, use a conversational tone and add your own personality so you do not sound like you are reading.
13. Use open-ended questions to clarify what the parent is looking for and "I" messages to provide feedback to families. Ask questions with sensitivity.
 - Repeat back to the parent the information that you heard.
 - Use the following kinds of statements:
 - "Tell me more about your child's strengths and needs."
 - "I will be able to find you better assistance by having more information about your work schedule."

Using Scripts

Call center staff use scripts to promote a consistent level of service for families. Scripts also provide flexibility for your call center to customize referral interactions to meet the individualized needs of families, to build on their strengths, and to respond to their interests. Call center staff should not, however, read from a script. Reading from a script will hinder the relationship-building process with the parent.

Before taking calls, call center staff should practice the process until they reach a point where managing the flow of a referral call becomes natural. Doing so will facilitate a comfortable interaction and effective referral for the parent.

The sample scripts in this guide (organized by specific topics in the Tools section that follows) are designed to provide measured guidance to assist the parent. They can be adapted to meet your call center's needs and circumstances.

Voicemail

There will be times when families call outside of a call center's operating hours. Call center staff can use a family-friendly recorded voicemail message to let families know when staff are available. The voicemail should have a pleasant, welcoming tone that lets families know they are important and valued.

Recorded messages should let callers know the name of the agency, hours of operations, street and/or mailing address, and the types of services and resources available. The phone message should ask families to leave their name, phone number, and best time to call back. It also should explain when the parent can expect to receive a call back—for example, within one business day.

Returning Calls

It is important to have procedures in place for returning calls. Responding to phone messages within one business day is best. Sooner is better than later. Families may not call back after leaving a message. A missed call is a missed chance to help a family and provide a critical service.



See Tool 12 on page 43 for sample voicemail scripts.



Considerations for Other Methods of Contact

Families might prefer or use one of a variety of methods to contact the call center. Traditional methods include phone, face-to-face, a website, social media, email, and postal mail. More recently, many families use online communications, such as chat, instant messaging, and text. Each of these methods has its own set of considerations. Many are summarized below.

Face-to-Face

If call center staff provide face-to-face referrals and/or consumer education to families, the locations of these centers should be convenient to families. For example, locate centers on or near public transportation routes (if transportation is available) or near other services that families might use, such as social services and public libraries. Considerations include:

- Where would families be most likely to use a face-to-face option?
- Where can this service be provided?
- What hours of operation would be convenient for families?
- Do you have staff who speak the languages most often spoken by families? And can these individuals be available at these locations?

Website

The 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act requires Lead Agencies to ensure that information is available to families, early childhood and school-age care and education programs, and the public through a consumer education website. CCDBG also requires that consumer education websites that are made available through Lead Agencies are equipped with a zip-code-based, program-specific search function. This gives families the flexibility to access information when it works best for them.

The program search feature should be very visible and easy for families to access and navigate. Ideally, families should be able to access information without creating an account or completing a form to access information. Every website should be easy to navigate and offer as much information as possible and appropriate. However, some families may need highly individualized information that does require a form in order to customize the information. In those cases, websites should offer easy ways to create an online account and provide the necessary information.

Here are some considerations when providing a high-quality, customized online referral:

- When designing your process, be sure to follow applicable state and federal privacy rules and regulations related to collecting personally identifiable information.
- Have a customized request form.
- Follow up with families within one business day if, after receiving online referrals (a list of programs to consider), families submit a request for more information.

- Ask and use the parent’s preferred communication method.

Be sure to use plain language in the web pages, program search functions, referrals, and any follow-up customized consumer information packets. See page 22 for more information about using plain language.

Training and Technical Assistance Resources Available on Child Care Technical Assistance Website.

Find tips and tools for creating a consumer education website and family-friendly experience on the federal early childhood training and technical assistance system website.

- **Consumer Education Websites: A Guide to Creating a Family-Friendly Experience** and **Consumer Education Websites: Creating a Family-Friendly Experience Assessment Tool** provide research-based information that agencies and organizations can use to create or enhance a family-friendly consumer education website and to evaluate their website to identify opportunities to make it more family friendly.
- The **State and Territory Child Care Consumer Education Website: Self-Assessment Checklist** can be used as a self-assessment tool by states and territories as they review their child care consumer education website for (a) alignment with CCDF consumer education website requirements; (b) recommendations within the preamble to the CCDF Final Rule; and (c) additional best practice considerations for user-friendly website design.

Email

Email is a quick and easy method for responding to families—a method that some families may prefer. Families generally expect to be sent a list of programs in their community. The role of your call center, however, extends beyond emailing a list. Call center staff can help families understand what to expect when requesting referrals via email.

The goal is to send specific information about program and service options based on the unique strengths, needs, and interests of the family. Call center staff should respond to email referral requests within one business day.



See Tool 5 on page 33 and Tool 7 on page 35 for sample email content.

Chat and Instant Messaging

Chat and instant messaging features also may be used to support families. Families may use a chat feature to find program options or to ask call center staff to help them voice a concern or connect them to the State, Territory, Tribal or local agency responsible for taking a formal complaint. Chat messaging is an instant connection between call center staff and the parent.

If your call center does not provide 24-hour response by chat, indicate when your agency makes chat options available to the community. If real-time chat is not available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, families reaching chat during unattended times should be directed to use the online referral portal or to leave a detailed email message through an online information request form available on the website.

Just like email, the goal of chat and instant messaging is to link the parent with options that meet their specific needs and capitalize on their strengths and interests. You will need to determine your call center's communications goal. Is the goal to:

- Instantly connect the parent to a person?
- Provide a program referral?
- Refer or connect families to the local organization responsible for filing and investigating health, safety, and abuse complaints?

Exemplary Practices for Live Chats

1. Share the times when a live chat option is available. Share alternative methods of contact for when live chat is not available.
2. Use an automatic message to communicate to families if there will be a wait time. Wait times should be brief.
3. Focus. Attend to one chat request a time. Managing multiple requests can be confusing and may cause misguided information.
4. Greet the parent. Establish a standard greeting. Identify the parent by name, and collect contact information at the start of the chat. Use this information to reconnect with the parent if the connection is lost.
5. Read the request carefully. Understand by asking questions rather than making assumptions.
6. Treat complex chat requests by breaking them down into smaller requests. For example, a parent may be calling to report a health, safety, or abuse complaint. At the same time, the parent may be searching for a program. Address the immediate request first. In this case, refer or connect the parent to the organization that can investigate the complaint, and then address the request for program referrals.
7. When you need more time to research information, let the parent know that you are gathering the information and will get right back to them. This will reassure the parent that you will connect them to the resources they have requested.



See Tool 13 on page 44 for sample chat message script.



Guidance for Call Center Staff

8. Keep responses to the point. Use clear, simple language. Be conversational in your tone when responding to families.
9. Review your response before sending, including spelling and grammar.
10. Thank parents for contacting the call center. Provide additional information, such as a phone number, website, or community resources to meet their need.

Considerations for Developing Consumer Education Resources

Call center staff can enhance their interactions with families by actively listening to learn their interests, needs, and strengths. The information learned during a call can help staff provide important consumer education resources that go beyond the family's initial request.

Consider resources that reinforce or expand on information discussed during the interaction. Whenever possible, offer information that is specific to your state or local community. Families may also be interested in resources available at the national level.

A key to successful consumer education is developing and providing resources that are:

- Responsive to the strengths, needs, and interests of families
- Culturally and linguistically responsive
- Written in plain language

Strengths-based communication strategies and cultural and linguistic responsiveness are discussed earlier in this document on pages 8–9.

Plain Language

Use plain language to make information easier for families to understand. Be concise, be clear, and write as you would speak. Focus on short, simple, and familiar words. Avoid acronyms.

Consider the reading level for consumer educational materials for families. Aim for a sixth grade reading level or lower. The Flesch-Kincaid readability test can be useful in measuring the grade level of your content. You may find this readability test in your word-processing software. Use plain language strategies to help lower the reading level. For example, try shorter sentences and words with fewer syllables.

Research shows that the average reading level of adults in the United States is between seventh and eighth grade (National Center for Education Statistics, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2014).



See Tools 9 and 10 on pages 39 and 40 for ideas on additional consumer education topics and national resources.

By using plain language, writing at an appropriate reading level, and tailoring information to include community-specific resources, you can develop referrals and materials that are easy to understand and that resonate with families.

Operational Considerations

There are several operational considerations for setting up or enhancing a call center. These considerations include the hours of operation, staffing plans, and decisions about phone and computer systems. Others include: data management, professional development, and marketing and promotion plans.

Find more information about these operational considerations available on the Child Care Technical Assistance website.



Training and Technical Assistance Resources Available on Child Care Technical Assistance Website.

Child Care Resource and Referral Call Centers: Operational Considerations for Child Care and Development Fund Administrators and related training guides and recorded webinars.

Tools

Lead Agencies, call center staff supervisors, and call center staff may use the tools—tips, templates, checklists, and reference lists—to help plan and operate a child care call center. These tools can be used as they are, or customized to meet the needs of the agency and the families they work with. Below is a list of the tools, with a short description and page number for each.

Name	Description	Page
1: Enhanced Referral Intake Form	Call center staff can use this template to learn about and record information from parents who are seeking a program for their children.	26
2: Tips for Assisting Families with Children Who Have Special Needs	Call center staff and their supervisors can refer to this tool for tips and examples for wording that are specific to assisting families with children who have special needs.	28
3: Procedures for Concerns About Health, Safety, and Abuse Violations	Call center staff and their supervisors can use this tool to guide policies and procedures for handling calls related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.	29
4: Intake Script for Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns	Call center staff can use this script to identify and forward calls related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.	31
5: Email Template for Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns	Call center staff can use this template to respond to emails related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.	33
6: Tips for Effective Communication Inquiry Techniques for Call Center Staff	Call center staff and their supervisors can refer to this resource to learn more about how to ask probing questions that help build rapport and clarify concerns and expectations.	34
7: Consumer Education Cover Letter Template	Call center staff can include this letter template when following up with parents by regular mail or email.	35
8: Checklist for Consumer Education/Referral Packet	Call center staff and their supervisors can use this list as a guide for what consumer education information to include in consumer education/referral packets.	36

Tools, cont.

Name	Description	Page
9: Consumer Education Topics Reference	Call center staff and their supervisors can use this list to identify and compile State, Territory, or Tribal and locally focused consumer education information to share with parents.	39
10: National Consumer Education Resource Reference List	Call center staff and their supervisors can use this reference list to identify and compile national-level consumer education information to share with parents.	40
11: Phone System Telephone Tree Scripts	Call center staff and their supervisors can use these scripts when recording messages for their phone system telephone tree.	42
Tool 12: Voicemail Scripts	Call center staff and their supervisors can use this script when recording a general voicemail message for the call center.	43
13: Chat/Instant Message Greeting for Health, Safety, and Abuse Concerns	Call center staff can use this script to respond to health, safety, and abuse concerns by live chat or instant messaging.	44

Tool 1: Enhanced Referral Intake Form

For Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education Programs

Use this sample form to develop an enhanced referral intake form for your call center.

INSERT CALL CENTER NAME is here to help you choose an early childhood or school-age care and education setting that is right for your family. We provide a list of programs that have openings in your area. We use a secure site. Personal information entered into the referral form is held confidential. Nonpersonal information is used for statistical purposes and for reporting to funders. This is a free service for personal, noncommercial use only. All commercial use is prohibited. To speak with a Child Care Referral Specialist, please call our office **INSERT OFFICE DAYS AND TIMES AND PHONE NUMBER.**

<p>How do you prefer to receive your referral?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mail <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Fax</p>

Today's Date: _____ Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____
 Address (Location): _____ Zip: _____ County: _____
 Location Where Care Is Needed: _____
 Mailing Address (if different from above): _____ Home Phone: _____ Email Address: _____
 Cell Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Have you used our services before? Yes No
 What is your preferred start date for child care? _____

When do you need early childhood and/or school-age care and education? (E.g., 8am – 6pm)								
Child's Name	Date of Birth	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Types of Programs: Child Care Center Family Child Care Home Group Family Child Care School-Age Program Preschool Head Start
Care Needed: Full Time Part Time Both **Schedule:** Full Year School Year Summer Only

Tool 1: Enhanced Referral Intake Form, cont.

Additional Options:

- Drop In 24 Hour Before School After School Half Day Temp/Emergency Evening Overnight Weekend Snow Days
- Rotating Schedule Breast Feeding-Friendly Food Program Program Must Accept Subsidy for Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education

Language: English Spanish American Sign Language Other: _____

Do You Need Special Accommodations for Any of the Following (please check all that apply)?

- Developmental Disability Educational Disability Moderately Ill/Health Service Sign Language Medical Care Needs Wheelchair Access
- Autism Spectrum Disorder ADHD Deafness/Hearing Impairment Special Diet Down Syndrome Intellectual Disability
- Speech/Language Impairment Cerebral Palsy Visiting Specialist Visual Impairment Traumatic Brain Injury Transportation
- Behavioral/Emotional Other _____

INSERT CALL CENTER NAME makes random follow-up calls to find out if you were able to find a program and if our service was helpful to you. May we have your permission to call? Yes No

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FOR THE REFERRAL SPECIALIST:

Tool 2: Tips for Assisting Families with Children Who Have Special Needs

Early childhood and school-age care and education programs cannot legally discriminate or refuse to admit a child or adult with a disability. However, families may have children with special needs who require specific services. All programs may not feel equipped to handle these services. Families may prefer programs that have staff who are experienced in providing services to children with their identified special needs.

Early childhood and school-age care and education programs may identify themselves as having experience or training in care for children with special needs. You may provide specialized information that includes a provider who has experience with special needs and available equipment. Lists that you provide first must be requested by the parent you are serving.

Here are some helpful guidelines:

1. Inform families of all enhanced referrals available, e.g., linguistic/multilingual supports (early childhood and school-age care and education professionals who speak more than one language), subsidies for military families who are seeking programs staffed by individuals who are trained and experienced in caring for children with special needs, and other services your program may offer for enhanced or special referrals.
2. Offer enhanced referral information to all families so that you do not single out families with children with disabilities.
3. Respect families' desire not to reveal information about a child's special needs.

The following is an example of wording that may be used:

“**INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION** offers referrals in several areas, including bilingual early childhood and school-age care and education and programs with experience working with children with special needs.

“Are there any specific considerations for your child that will help us refer programs that will best fit your families' program needs?”

For more information and resources on the legal aspects of services for children and families with special needs, visit the Child Care Law Center (CCLC) website, at www.childcarelaw.org. CCLC has tools to support making affordable choices so that high-quality early childhood and school-age care and education are available to every child, family, and community. CCLC also focuses on supporting families that face barriers in securing and maintaining quality early childhood and school-age care and education.

Tool 3: Procedures for Concerns About Health, Safety, and Abuse Violations

Each State, Territory, and Tribe designates its own official complaint contact to receive health, safety, and abuse reports. Call centers must work with Lead Agencies to identify the official contact and to know the preferred reporting process.

Find State, Territory, and local child care complaint contact numbers at <https://childcare.gov>. Find contact numbers for complaints about Tribal programs at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development.

Consider these exemplary practices when developing or enhancing your call center's process for handling call related to health, safety, and abuse concerns:

1. Easy Access for Families:
 - There should be many easy and accessible ways to reach the call center: phone, internet, mail, and email.
2. The Greeting:
 - Answer the call in a courteous and polite manner.
 - Make sure the child is not in immediate danger. If there is danger, instruct the parent to hang up and dial 9-1-1 immediately.
 - Record the parent's name (if provided), phone number, and the zip code the parent is calling from. If the parent is unwilling to provide his or her name, enter "Unknown" after "First name" and after "Last name."
3. Clarification of Needs:
 - Explain that, while you are not the agency authorized to take the complaint, you will connect the parent to the appropriate agency that can receive the complaint.
 - Determine the type of early childhood or school-age care and education program that the child currently attends. For example, is the child enrolled in a regulated, registered or licensed child care center, family child care home, or other setting? Or are they enrolled in an unlicensed or unregulated school, center, home or other setting? This information is essential when connecting to the appropriate agency authorized to take the complaint. (In some areas, providers may legally operate without a license, they are legally operating, unlicensed or unregulated providers.)
 - If the health, safety, or abuse violation is from unregulated care (family member, nanny, babysitter, neighbor, etc.), ask the parent if the person providing the care receives CCDF vouchers, subsidies, or fee assistance. If so, proceed with the referral to the appropriate organization. If not, ask the parent if:
 - The complaint involves suspected child abuse or neglect. If yes, direct the parent to the child abuse/neglect hotline for the community.
 - The complaint involves suspected illegal operation of an early childhood and school-age care and education program (caring for children without a license). If yes, proceed with the appropriate organization in the community.
 - If neither of these apply, inform the parent that the Lead Agency does not accept general complaints about unregulated providers. Offer information about regulated care.

Tool 3: Procedures for Concerns About Health, Safety, and Abuse Violations, cont.

- If the abuse allegation pertains to an occurrence outside of an early childhood or school-age care and education program, ask if a child is in immediate danger. If there is danger, instruct the parent to hang up and dial 9-1-1. If there is no immediate danger, determine the location and connect the parent to the child abuse/neglect hotline in the State, Territory, Tribe or county.

If that hotline is not available, direct the parent to ChildHelp at 1-800-4-A-CHILD. ChildHelp is a National Child Abuse Hotline, staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with professional crisis counselors who can provide aid in more than 170 languages. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources.

- Inform the parent how the complaints for allegations related to unregulated care settings are submitted to the agency authorized to take the complaint—by phone, online, through email, etc.

4. Link the parent to the appropriate agency:

- Provide contact information and any other relevant information so that the parent can make the report on his or her own time.
- If possible, stay on the line with the parent and connect him or her to the appropriate agency. When a three-way call is made to connect the parent making the complaint with the agency authorized to take the complaint, it is called a “warm hand-off.” If the authorized agency is closed, return to the parent and ask if he or she would like to be transferred to the voicemail to leave a message. If the line is busy, dial the number at least three times to try to complete the call. If a busy signal persists, inform the parent that the agency is not available, and provide all of the necessary contact information.

5. Discuss Next Steps/What to Expect:

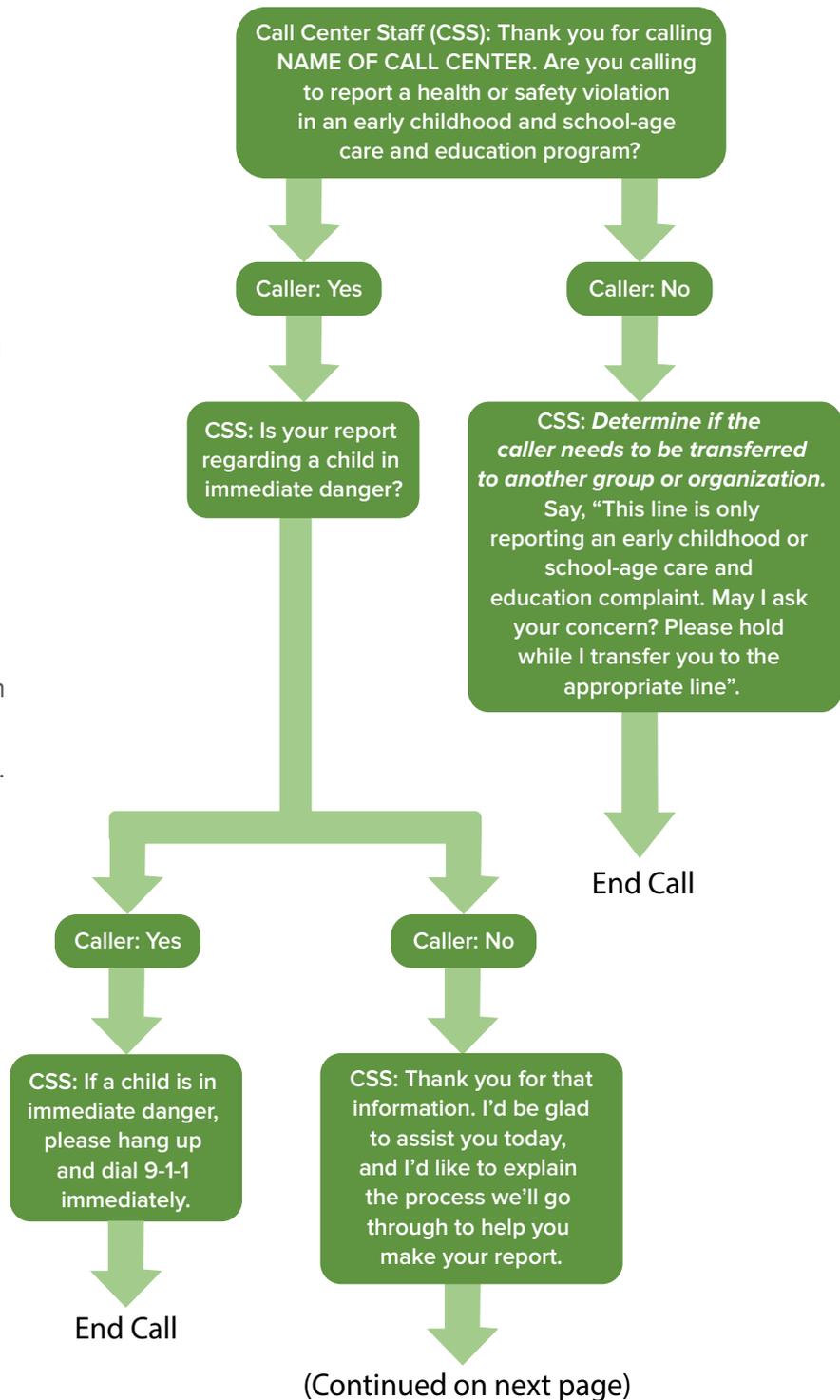
- Discuss next steps with the parent.
- If follow-up is required, let the parent know what that involves.
- Ask for an evaluation of your services. Consider using a brief survey, either electronically or by phone. Sample questions could include:
 - Was the assistance helpful to the parent to make a complaint?
 - How would the parent rate his or her experience with the call center?
 - Is there anything that would have been helpful that the parent didn’t receive?

Tool 4: Intake Script for Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns

Each State, Territory, and Tribe designates its own official complaint contact to receive health, safety, and abuse reports. Call centers must work with Lead Agencies to identify the official contact and to know the preferred reporting process.

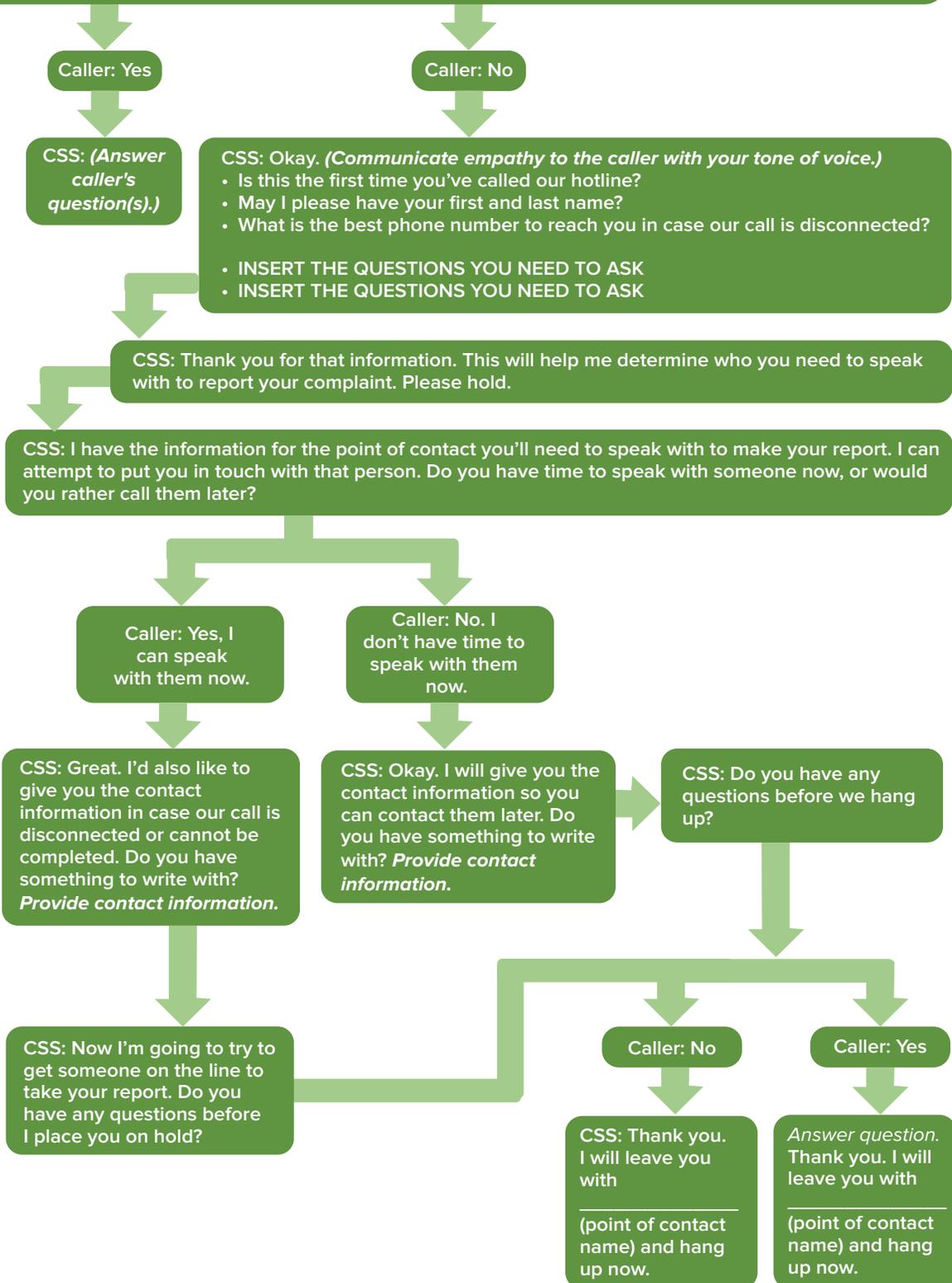
Find State, Territory, and local child care complaint contact numbers at <https://childcare.gov>. Find contact numbers for complaints about Tribal programs at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development.

Use this sample script to develop an intake script your call center can use to respond to calls related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.



Tool 4: Intake Script for Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns, cont.

CSS: Our organization is not able to accept or investigate complaints about early childhood or school-age care and education programs. However, I can connect you with someone that can accept your report. To be able to do that, I need to ask you a few questions. Any identifying information that you give me today, such as your name, will be confidential and only kept as a record of your call. When you speak with your point of contact for the complaint, you can decide whether you'd like to provide your name or make an anonymous report. Do you have any questions so far? (NOTE: Not all States, Territories or Tribes have anonymous reporting.)



Tool 5: Email Template for Health and Safety or Abuse Concerns

Each State, Territory, and Tribe designates its own official complaint contact to receive health, safety, and abuse reports. Call centers must work with Lead Agencies to identify the official contact and to know the preferred reporting process.

Find State, Territory, and local child care complaint contact numbers at <https://childcare.gov>. Find contact numbers for complaints about Tribal programs at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development.

Use this sample email template to develop an email template your call center can use to respond to emails related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.

Email Response to a Parent's Initial Complaint

Dear _____,

Thank you for your email/message on the (INSERT CALL CENTER NAME) website. We are not able to file or investigate a complaint for early childhood and school-age care and education for you, but we can help you find the right place where you can report your complaint.

If a child is in immediate danger, dial 9-1-1 now.

If a child is not in immediate danger, please reply to this email. Answer the following questions so that we can connect you with the proper contact for your type of complaint and location:

INSERT THE LOCAL INFORMATION YOU NEED

TIP: You will need to research what questions you need to know in your State, Territory, or Tribe to transfer the call. Ask as few questions as possible. REMEMBER: keep confidential all information you receive.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

1. What is the zip code where the health and safety violation occurred?
2. Did the violation occur in an early childhood and school-age care and education program?
3. Has the violation been previously reported?

Once we have this information, we will send you the information you need to report your complaint.

Sincerely,

REPLY EMAIL

Dear _____,

Thank you for the information. Please report your complaint for early childhood and school-age care and education to:

INSERT NAME or TITLE

INSERT PHONE

INSERT WEBSITE FORM or EMAIL

If you have any questions about this information, please don't hesitate to contact us again via email or phone:

(INSERT CALL CENTER CONTACT INFORMATION)

Sincerely,

Tool 6: Tips for Effective Communication Inquiry Techniques for Call Center Staff

Managing a referral takes skills. Probing questions can help you throughout the referral process. These kinds of questions are used in many counseling scenarios. They are proven effective because they help clarify initial needs. They also help support and lead the parent to anticipate the next steps in their needs for early childhood and school-age care and education.

The following examples of probing questions and statements can be useful in a referral. You will notice similarities among these examples. The questions are open-ended and do not require a simple “yes” or “no” answer. They allow the parent to communicate their needs. The probes are designed to provide support and acknowledgement to families and ways to respond to difficult issues.

Referral Component	Goal of Question	Example of Questions to Achieve Goal
Support to Parent	Developing Rapport	“Is this a convenient time for you to talk?” “Is there another time that would work better for you?”
	Understanding, Interpreting, Responding	“I speak with many families who have the same feelings as you do.” “It would help me if you could tell me more about . . .” “Let me make sure I understand what you are saying. Would it be accurate to say . . . ?”
	Maintaining Positive Expectations	“I hear your frustrations about that situation. Let’s see how I can assist you with that.”
	Relaying Cultural Sensitivity	“Can you give me an example of the type of early childhood and school-age care and education setting you are looking for that would support your beliefs?”
	Listening	“Are you saying . . . ?”
	Explaining	“Let me describe the types of early childhood and school-age care and education settings that are available, and what typically goes on in each.”
Clarification	Focusing on the Parent	“Are there any concerns we haven’t addressed?” “What is the timeframe that you have for finding an early childhood and school-age care and education program?”
	Providing Quality Services	“I have an idea that you may find helpful.” “Do all the services and resources seem helpful?”
	Prioritizing Needs	“You have described a difficult situation. Let’s take it piece by piece. Please start with your most important concern and work through it.”
What Is Next/What to Expect	Deciding on a Plan of Action	“Some of the ways our services may be helpful to you include . . .”
	Following Through	“Would you like me to call you in 2 weeks to see if you need additional assistance?”

Tool 7: Template for Consumer Education Cover Letter

Use this sample template to develop a consumer education letter template your call center can include with consumer education packets/referrals sent by mail or email.

Date

Parent Name

Mailing Address

City, State, Zip

Dear **INSERT PARENT NAME**,

Thank you for contacting **INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME**. Choosing an early childhood or school-age care and education program is one of the most important decisions families make. Enclosed are the referrals that you requested for **INSERT NAME OF CHILD**, based on the information you supplied (**INSERT during our telephone call or that you requested on line**). To help your search, we have included materials in this packet on the characteristics of quality early childhood and school-age care and education programs and (**INSERT information specific to the needs of this family**). If this list does not meet your family's needs, please contact me again at (**INSERT PHONE NUMBER, EXTENSION AND EMAIL ADDRESS**) and we can look for more options.

The information in this packet is for referral uses only and is not meant to endorse or recommend any specific programs. It is important to visit the program and schedule an interview with the program's early childhood or school-age professionals before making your final decision. It is also a good idea to ask the program for references and to contact them. Before you visit a specific program, you should check the licensing history of the program by using (**INSERT the name of the website**). Only you can decide if the quality of care is right for you and your child.

Please remember:

- Your information is kept confidential.
- Referrals are not endorsements. They were selected based on your needs.

To find other services for families, check out the following website: (**INSERT the website your State or Territory uses to meet CCDF requirements. Tribes are not required to have a websites. Provide a link if one exists.**)

We wish you the best with your program search. Call us if you need any additional help. Thank you for choosing **INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME** for your program search.

INSERT NAME OF REFERRAL SPECIALIST

INSERT NAME OF AGENCY TO RECEIVE THE COMPLAINT

Tool 8: Checklist for Consumer Education/Referral Packet

Use this checklist to inform what your call center will include in consumer education/referral packets.

1. **Fee policy statement**

Provide families with a fee schedule prior to receiving referrals. If no fees are charged, inform families prior to receiving services that services are free of charge. A common practice is to include a fee-policy statement in a cover letter in the referral packet.

2. **Confidentiality statement**

Provide a confidentiality statement, not the entire policy. It should be written in family-friendly language that the parent can easily understand. Insert this in a cover letter as part of the referral packet.

Example: "All members of the call center will keep confidential the families and early childhood and school-age care and education programs. This includes refraining from disclosing the names of families, programs, and their information. The call center will not provide the name or identifying factors of any individual who seeks services unless the individual gives written permission".

3. **Disclaimer statement**

At a minimum, inform all families that the program referrals are just that: referrals and not recommendations. The disclaimer statement should be included in the cover letter and written in family-friendly language.

4. **Call center complaint policy statement**

Families should know how and to whom to report their concerns regarding the referral services received. Add this information in the cover letter.

5. **Policy statement for child care program complaints**

Families should be knowledgeable about the steps to take if they have a concern regarding a program. Include contact information for the office staff responsible for receiving and investigating complaints. Add this information to the cover letter.

6. **Provider referrals**

Provider referrals should include the early childhood and school-age care and education program's contact information, location, days of operation, times that care is available, rates, a description of the physical environment, the educational qualifications of the provider, provider training, accreditation status and quality rating (if applicable), provider license status, and provider monitoring and inspection records. As a rule, provide parents with a minimum of three but not more than twenty referrals. Make the referrals appropriate to the needs of parent. Call center staff should encourage families to call back if they need additional referrals.

7. **Description of the types of early childhood and school-age care and education programs available**

Written materials should provide a description of the types of care options available. Ensure that information about care options is specific to the parent's preference. Families should understand the differences among care options.

8. **Information about the basic regulatory/licensing requirements**

Families should have access to a website that includes readily accessible information and contact information and resources for the state child care licensing office, CCDF, TANF, the State/Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, and specific information on how to pursue eligibility. Include information about the minimum requirements for becoming a regulated program, such as background checks; health and safety training; certification in First Aid and CPR; on-site inspections; and training requirements for professionals, staff, and family members.

Tool 8: Checklist for Consumer Education/Referral Packet, cont.

9. **State, Territory or Tribal and local child care licensing information with a statement explaining why families are encouraged to review a program's license history before selecting the program**

Encourage families to understand the importance of reviewing the history of programs they are considering, including license status, monitoring and inspection reports, program quality reviews (if available), and health and safety violations. This history should either be available through your state's consumer education website or through a guided conversation over the telephone, with appropriate follow-up information sent to the parent in their preferred method (e.g., email, postal mail).

10. **Information on quality indicators, including group size, adult-child ratios, health and safety, caregiver education and turnover, family involvement, and accreditation**

Provide families with useful information on quality indicators in a language they understand. Avoid using questions without answers, use direct statements, and direct families to places they can access additional information. Support families to have a plan for using the information when selecting a program.

11. **Information on the average cost of care presented, with information specific to the different age groups, geographic locations, and types of programs**

Families should have information about the average cost of a program or range of costs specific to the age group of the children needing care, the geographic area involved, and the type of program the parent is seeking. Provide this information in an easy-to-understand chart or table. This will simplify the information and make it easy to read.

12. **Financial assistance options: CCDF, military, Tribal child care funds, state child care tax credit, federal child care tax credit, public subsidies for early childhood and school-age care and education**

Give all families information on the availability of public subsidies and tax credits on early childhood and school-age care and education. Tax credits have higher income eligibility guidelines than subsidies. Since circumstances often change, families may become eligible in the future and can then refer to the information you provide to them to determine what options are available. Information about all forms of public subsidies should also include contact information for the office responsible for determining eligibility.

13. **Other financial assistance options**

Inform families of other financial assistance programs, including private programs with sliding fee scales, Head Start, pre-kindergarten and any other private or public programs in the service delivery area. If information about financial assistance will be included with the consumer education materials, provide instructions for interpreting the information. Examples of other options include the availability of additional tax credits, sliding fee scales, multi-child discounts, Head Start programs, pre-kindergarten programs, and other private or public programs that may have openings.

14. **Individualized information to meet the needs of families**

Families should be given materials that meet their unique needs. Examples include written materials specific to the age their children, materials on finding programs for children with special needs, etc.

15. **Additional written resources to meet a family's needs beyond those pertaining to an early childhood or school-age program**

Examples might include information on state health insurance programs, housing, employment, transportation, local pediatrician listings, etc.

Tool 8: Checklist for Consumer Education/Referral Packet, cont.

16. **Written materials on parenting education opportunities**

Give all families information on the availability of parenting education opportunities. These opportunities are often made available through the local CCR&R, or they may be offered through other community programs and partnership initiatives.

17. **When regulated early childhood and school-age care and education is not available, information on creative options, including materials on working with relatives to care for their child, should be provided as appropriate to the caller's needs**

When limited options or no options are available to meet the parent's needs, you should provide written information on creative options for the parent to consider and research further. For example, parents could expand the search area or search criteria, contact local high schools or churches for individuals who may be interested in providing care and education, consider family/friends/or neighbor care, advertise in newspapers or on bulletin boards, job-share, etc. The written information you provide should include considerations for these types of options, sample interview questions, and information on the consumer's responsibilities for these types of arrangements.

Tool 9: Consumer Education Topics Reference

Refer to this list of required consumer education topics. Creating your own community-specific resources to meet the consumer education requirements in the 2014 Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) will greatly enhance your service. Call centers can find resources on the Child Care Aware® of America or <https://childcare.gov> websites to meet these requirements.

Consumer Education Topics	
CCDBG-Required Consumer Education	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of the full diversity of early childhood and school-age care and education services • Availability of subsidy assistance for early childhood and school-age care and education • TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) • Head Start and Early Head Start • LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) • CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program) • SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program) • WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) • Medicaid • State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) • Quality in early childhood and school-age care and education (including Quality Rating System Information where available) • Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) • Research and best practices in child development, parent and family engagement, and physical health and development (especially healthy eating and physical activity) • Social-emotional behaviors, mental health • Positive behavioral health intervention; policies to prevent suspension and expulsion of children birth to age 5 • Developmental screenings • Complaints; monitoring and inspection reports for the last 3 years • Process for licensing early childhood and school-age care and education programs • Background check requirements • State-/federally funded early childhood and school-age care and education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Seat Services • Financial Services • Infant and Toddler Services

Tool 10: National Consumer Education Resource Reference List

Use this list of national organizations to access resources for consumer education. The list is arranged by topic: child development, health and safety, parenting, and early childhood and school-age care and education.

Child Development	
Birth to Five Watch Me Thrive acf.hhs.gov/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive	Provides state resources for developmental screening for children birth to age 5
Parents as Teachers www.parentsasteachers.org	Offers parent education program resources and supports for families regarding early childhood education, from birth through age 5
Learn the Signs. Act Early. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html	Features developmental milestones for children birth to age 5
National Center for Family Literacy www.familit.org	Focuses on the development of quality literacy programs for families and children
Zero to Three www.zerotothree.org	Focuses on the development of infants and toddlers
Health and Safety	
American Academy of Pediatrics www.aap.org	Offers health information for families
Center for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov	Promotes healthy and safe behaviors, communities, and environments
National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education http://nrckids.org	Promotes safe and healthy out-of-home child care centers
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov	Promotes consumer safety in connection to more than 15,000 consumer products
Parenting	
National Education Association's Parent Page http://parents.nea.org	Connects families to education information, other families, and important topics to families
U.S. Department of Education (for families) www.ed.gov/parents	Works toward ensuring equal access to education and promoting educational excellence.
Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education	
Child Care Aware® of America www.childcareaware.org	Assists families in finding the best information on locating quality early childhood and school-age care and education and resources
Council for Professional Recognition www.cdacouncil.org	Credentials administrator for early childhood and school-age care and education professionals

Tool 10: National Consumer Education Resource Reference List, cont.

Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education, cont.	
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) www.naeyc.org	Provides high-quality resources for families, with a website that has a Parent Resource Section with useful consumer education, parenting, and advocacy resources
National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) www.nafcc.org	Promotes professional development and quality standards of care for family child care home professionals
National Head Start Association www.nhsa.org	Offers support and resources to local Head Start programs
National AfterSchool Association www.naaweb.org	Offers program accreditation standards for after-school and out-of-school programs
Office of Child Care http://ChildCare.gov	Works to enhance the quality, affordability, and availability of early childhood and school-age care and education for families.

Tool 11: Phone System Telephone Tree Scripts

Use this sample script to develop a phone system telephone tree script for your call center. Include prompts and information in languages most frequently spoken by families in your service area.

Main Menu

Thank you for calling **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION AND TAG LINE**. Please be advised that your call may be recorded for training and quality assurance purposes. If you do not wish to be recorded, please visit our website at **INSERT WEBSITE** for more information. Please listen as our menu options have recently changed.

If you know your party's extension, please dial it at any time.

Para español, marque el número **INSERT NUMBER**.

For additional language assistance, press **INSERT NUMBER**.

For help finding an early childhood and school-age care and education program, or for general information about early childhood or school-age care and education programs, press **INSERT NUMBER**.

For help reporting a health and safety violation for a program, press **INSERT NUMBER**.

If reporting a health and safety violation for a program is the option:

Intro Message:

You've selected the option for reporting a health and safety violation for a program.

If a child is in immediate danger, please hang up and dial 9-1-1.

If there is no immediate danger, please stay on the line to speak with a specialist.

INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION is not able to accept reports of health and safety violations or child abuse and neglect for a program, but we will help you get in touch with the agency authorized to take your report.

To return to the main menu, press **INSERT NUMBER**.

Comfort Message:

A representative will be with you shortly. Please have ready the city, state, and zip code where the violation occurred so that we can put you in touch with the appropriate contact. A representative of **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION** may also ask if you know the type of the program where the violation occurred. This may be a family child care home program or a child care center program. Thank you for holding for the next available representative.

Tool 12: Voicemail Scripts

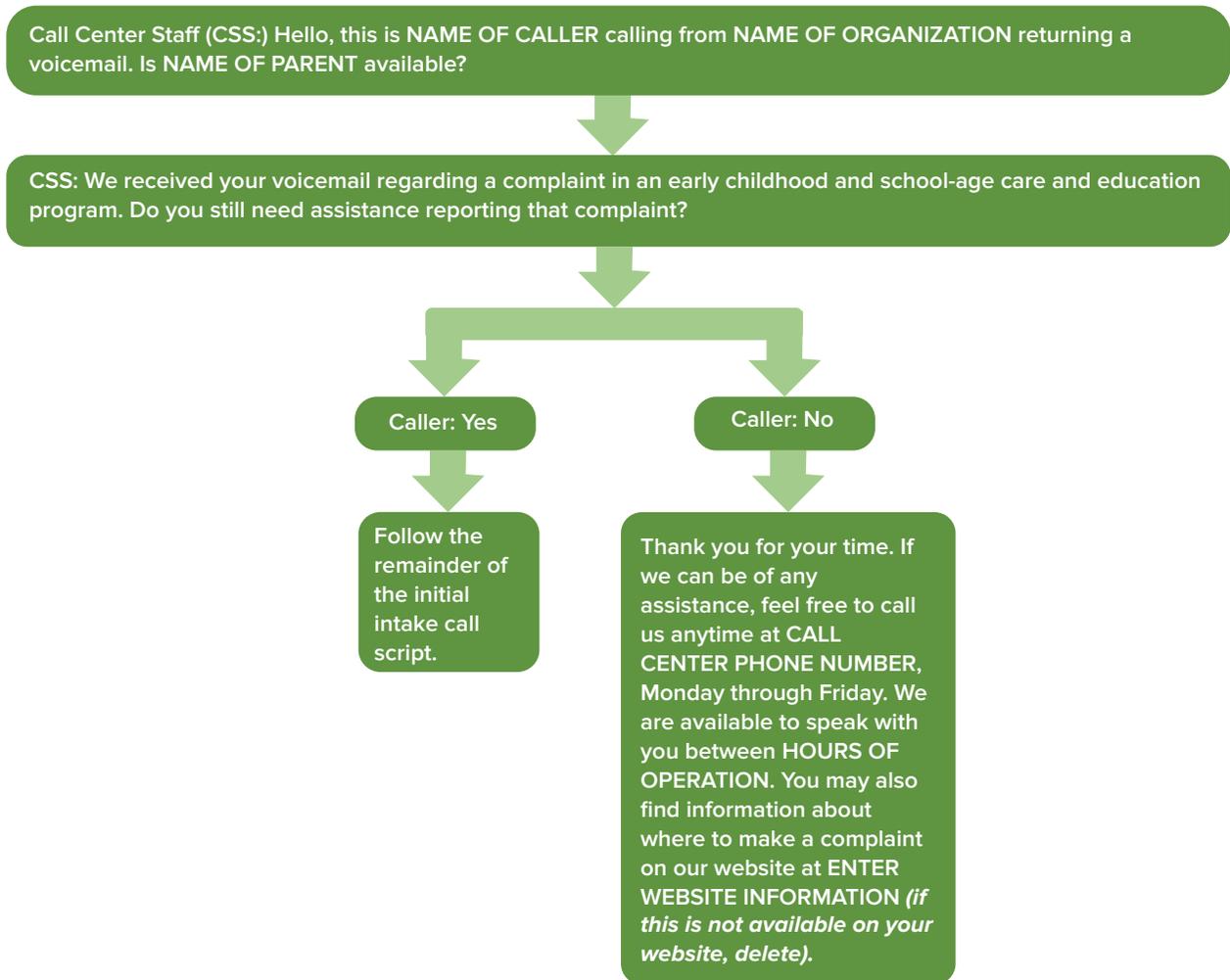
Use this sample script to develop a voicemail script for your call center. Include prompts in languages most frequently spoken by families in your service area.

Voicemail Message

Thank you for calling **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION**. If you are calling for an early childhood and school-age care and education referral, please leave your name, phone number, and the best time to reach you. We will return your call within one business day. If you are calling about a health and safety violation or to report child abuse and neglect in an early childhood and school-age care and education setting, please listen to the following options. If a child is in immediate danger, please hang up and dial 9-1-1.

For all other calls, please know that **INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION** is not able to accept reports of health and safety violations or child abuse and neglect in programs, but we will help you get in touch with the authorized agency to assist you in making your report.

Returning a Voicemail Call



* REMEMBER: Keep confidential all information parents share in line with agency protocols.

Tool 13: Chat/Instant Message Greeting for Health, Safety, and Abuse Concerns

Each State, Territory, and Tribe designates its own official complaint contact to receive health, safety, and abuse reports. Call centers must work with Lead Agencies to identify the official contact and to know the preferred reporting process.

Find State, Territory, and local child care complaint contact numbers at <https://childcare.gov>. Find contact numbers for complaints about Tribal programs at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development.

Use this sample script to develop an chat/instant message your call center can use to respond to chat/instant messages related to health, safety, and abuse concerns.

A Greeting After a Post

I see you have selected the option to report a health and safety violation for early childhood and school-age care and education. Please be advised that we are not able to accept or investigate complaints for early childhood and schoolage care and education programs, but we can provide guidance for those who'd like to make a report. Do you have a program complaint to report?

Immediate Danger?

Is a child in immediate danger?

Immediate Danger—YES

Please dial 9-1-1 immediately. Immediate danger to a child should be reported to emergency services right away.

Immediate Danger—NO

Thank you for confirming. I'd be glad to help you learn how to report your complaint.

Questions

I need to ask you a few questions to determine where and how you'll make your report. Please reply to BOTH questions below:

1. **INSERT THE QUESTIONS***
2. **INSERT THE QUESTIONS***

TIP: You will need to research what questions you need to know in your State/Territory/Tribe to transfer the call. Ask as few of questions as possible.

REMEMBER: Keep all information confidential.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

1. What is the zip code where the health and safety violation occurred?
2. Did the violation occur in a Family Child Care Home or a Child Care Center?

Thank you for that information. I'm reviewing the information for this location now. Please stand by, and I'll have some guidance for you shortly.

Tool 13: Chat/Instant Message Greeting for Health, Safety, and Abuse Concerns, cont.

Report Complaint

You may submit complaints in the following ways. Please find the information below to report your complaint for early childhood and school-age care and education:

INSERT ALL WAYS TO SUBMIT COMPLAINTS (AS APPLICABLE)

FOR EACH WAY,

INSERT PHONE NUMBER

INSERT WEBSITE LINK INFORMATION

INSERT EMAIL INFORMATION

INSERT MAILING ADDRESS

References

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NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement