



Child Care Workforce Qualifications, Training, and Professional Development

Working in the child care field can be exciting and rewarding, and it presents an opportunity to impact the lives of children and their families in your community. Research has demonstrated the significance of a child's early years for brain development. It has also shown the importance of having skilled adults in the program who can form strong relationships with the young children in their care.

If you are thinking about starting a career in the child care field, or taking on a different role, you might need to meet some specific qualifications before beginning your work with young children. The information in this resource guide is designed to help you identify the education, training, and experience you need. For example, you may need to qualify for a teaching or administrative role in a child care center or complete particular training to operate a family child care (FCC) program in your home. This guide includes information to help you locate training and professional development opportunities in your community, connect you with membership organizations, and identify other resources in your state that may be useful to your professional development.

Please note that the information in this guide is specific to the qualifications and training needed to work directly with children or as an administrator in the **licensed child care market**—settings such as child care centers and FCC homes that must meet state¹ licensing requirements. Please be aware that there are many other settings and roles in the field that have their own qualification requirements. Also, individual child care programs may have their own policies for hiring staff.

The guide includes information about the following:

- ◆ [Types of licensed child care settings;](#)
- ◆ [State requirements for child care facilities;](#)
- ◆ [Common roles in child care centers and FCC homes;](#)
- ◆ [State requirements for providers in child care programs;](#)
- ◆ [Training and education requirements in early childhood education;](#)
- ◆ [Federal requirements for providers who serve children receiving assistance through the Child Care and Development Fund;](#)
- ◆ [Trainings that meet state licensing requirements;](#)
- ◆ [Finding trainings that meet state requirements;](#)
- ◆ [Community resources available to help decide on a child care career;](#)
- ◆ [Scholarships or other financial assistance available to help pay for trainings;](#)
- ◆ [Obtaining a Child Development Associate \(CDA\) credential;](#)

¹ For the purposes of this document, the District of Columbia is included when referring to “states” and not listed separately.



- ◆ [Early care and education membership organizations and professional associations; and](#)
- ◆ [Additional resources about careers in child care.](#)

The State Capacity Building Center does not endorse any non-Federal organization, publication, or resource.

Types of Licensed Child Care Settings

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There are two common types of child care settings that are part of the licensed child care market—**child care centers** and family child care (**FCC**) **homes**.

Child care centers are facilities where care typically is provided to children in a nonresidential building with different age group classrooms. Care is provided for less than 24 hours per day. State child care licensing regulations include definitions of the types of child care centers that must meet licensing requirements. These definitions often include a minimum number of children served or a minimum number of hours the facility operates to determine whether it must be licensed.

FCC homes are facilities where care typically is provided to children in the provider's residence. A FCC home usually offers care to a small group of children of mixed ages and has one care provider. As with centers, states have definitions of the types of FCC homes that must be licensed. These definitions are usually based on the number of children in care. For example, several states require FCC homes to be licensed if the provider cares for at least one unrelated child or the children from one family, but many states also allow homes with three or more children to operate without a license. Many states license two types of FCC homes—a **small home** that has a small number of children and usually one care provider, and a **large or group home** that usually has a larger number of children and a provider and assistant.

The types of child care settings that are required to be licensed can be very different from state to state. You can find out about your state's requirements by contacting the state child care licensing agency. The **National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations** contains direct website links to state child care licensing regulation documents and licensing agency contact information. Users can access, download, and search state child care licensing regulations that apply to child care centers, family child care homes, and other licensed child care programs. The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations is available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing>.

State Requirements for Child Care Facilities

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Licensing is a process administered by state governments that gives permission to child care facilities to operate. Licensing sets a baseline of requirements below which it is illegal to operate, unless the facility is legally exempt from licensing. States have regulations that include the requirements child care centers and family child care (FCC) homes must comply with and policies to support the enforcement of those regulations. These regulations and enforcement policies vary widely from state to state. Some states may call this regulatory process "certification" or "registration." For the purposes of this guide, the terms "licensing" or "licensed" are used to represent all of the state regulatory processes.



State child care licensing regulations help protect the health and safety of children in out-of-home care. Licensing helps prevent different forms of harm to children, including risks from the spread of disease, fire, and other building safety hazards, and injury. Licensing also helps prevent developmental impairment from children's lack of healthy relationships with adults, and regulates adequate supervision and developmentally appropriate activities.



The **National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations** contains direct website links to state child care licensing regulation documents and licensing agency contact information. Users can access, download, and search state child care licensing regulations that apply to child care centers, family child care homes, and other licensed child care programs. The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations is available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing>.

Role Names in State Regulations

States vary in the names they use for the **teacher** role in child care licensing regulations. The following are some of the names states use:

- Assistant group supervisor;
- Assistant to head of group;
- Associate teacher;
- Caregiver;
- Caretaker;
- Child care supervisor;
- Child care worker;
- Group leader;
- Group teacher;
- Lead caregiver;
- Primary caregiver;
- Program leader;
- Senior staff;
- Staff;
- Teacher; and
- Teacher assistant.

Within the licensing regulations for centers and FCC homes are requirements for the people who work there. As explained further in this guide, these requirements include specific qualifications, such as being a certain age, completing training or education prior to working in a facility, completing training after being hired, meeting specific health requirements, and passing background checks, among other things.

Common Roles in Centers and FCC Homes

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There are several different roles you can fulfill if you are working in a child care setting. These are the most common:

| Child Care Center Roles | Family Child Care (FCC) Home Roles |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Aide; ◆ Assistant teacher; ◆ Director; ◆ Master teacher; and ◆ Teacher. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Small FCC home provider; ◆ FCC assistant; and ◆ Large or group FCC home provider. |



The most common staff role for **child care centers** is **teacher**, which can be defined as a staff person who can be solely responsible for a group of children. States may use other names for this role, such as caregiver, child care worker, or group leader.

Role Names in State Regulations

States vary in the names they use for the **master teacher** role in child care licensing regulations. The following are some of the names states use:

- Assistant director;
- Child care associate;
- Fully qualified teacher;
- Group supervisor;
- Head of group
- Head teacher;
- Lead caregiver;
- Lead teacher;
- Master teacher; and
- Teacher.

Some states require at least one teacher in a program or classroom to be qualified at a higher level. This position is often called a lead teacher, head teacher, chief caregiver, fully qualified teacher, child care associate, or supervisor. This role is generically labeled **master teacher** in this guide to reflect that this person is required to have more training, experience, or skills than other teachers.

Many states also have requirements for **assistant teachers** and **aides** who work with children in child care centers under the supervision of an individual who is qualified as a teacher or master teacher.

A **director** of a child care center is the administrator who is ultimately responsible for establishing the program, choosing and supervising all other staff, managing both income and expenditures, and maintaining program quality.

If you wish to operate a child care program in your home, typically called **FCC home**, your role would be a **FCC provider**. Some states have more than one type of FCC home. A **small FCC home** is a child care program located in a residence, generally with one provider and a small number of children. A **large or group FCC home** is also typically located in a residence, but usually has one provider and an **assistant** and a larger number of children. States vary in how they name these types of child care facilities and in how they define which settings must be licensed.

State Requirements for Providers in Child Care Programs [Back](#)

To find out the requirements for child care center staff and family child care (FCC) home providers in your state, you can contact the state child care licensing agency. The **National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations** contains direct website links to state child care licensing regulation documents and licensing agency contact information. Users can access, download, and search state child care licensing regulations that apply to child care centers, family child care homes, and other licensed child care programs. The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations is available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing>.

The following are explanations of the different types of licensing requirements you might have to meet to work in a child care center or FCC home.



Minimum Age Requirements

Most states require child care center staff and FCC providers to be a certain age to work in or operate a program legally. The child care licensing regulations will include this age. For example, most states require child care center directors to be at least 21 years old, teachers to be at least 18 years old, and assistant teachers and aides to be at least 16 years old.



High School Diploma or Equivalent

Many states require center staff and FCC providers to have a high school diploma or equivalent, such as passing the General Education Development Test (GED), prior to working in or operating a program. This is especially true in states where the minimum age requirement for a particular role is 18 years old.

Training and Education Requirements in Early Childhood Education

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Many states require providers to have **preservice qualifications**—training or education in early care and education topics completed prior to working in, operating, or assuming a new role in a licensed child care program. The amount of training or education required varies widely from state to state. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (ECQA Center) maintains information about minimum training or education required by state licensing agencies to qualify for center director, teacher, master teacher, and FCC provider roles. This information can be found in the document entitled *CCDF Health and Safety Requirements Brief #9*, which is available at https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/healthsafety_training_brief.pdf.

Most state child care licensing regulations include many options to qualify for roles. State licensing agencies have procedures they use to evaluate the qualifications of providers seeking to work in child care centers or operate family child care (FCC) homes.

Work Experience

In addition to preservice qualifications for training and education, many states require that center staff and FCC providers come to their roles with some experience working with children. Some states require experience as the only qualification for a particular role, while others combine experience with education and training in their qualifications. State child care licensing regulations typically specify the amount of experience required. They might specify that prospective providers must verify that their experience was in a particular setting, was with a certain age group of children, and was supervised.

Orientation

Many states require new employees, especially in child care centers, to complete an orientation training that includes information about the facility's policies and procedures. This orientation is often given by the director of the center or the operator of the FCC home. State licensing regulations often specify the content of this training. States also require center staff and FCC home providers to complete training about the licensing process and regulations.



Ongoing Training Hours

Most states require child care center staff and FCC providers to complete a specific number of hours of training each year. The content of this training is generally related to the care and education of young children. It is completed through a variety of methods, such as adult education courses, college courses, conference workshops, distance learning, and in-service training provided by the center director or FCC home operator. Child care licensing regulations include the specific number of hours of required training and any requirements for training content.

Health and Safety Training

In addition to the annual ongoing training hours, most states require child care staff to complete training in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Many states also require training in other health and safety topics, such as the following:

- ◆ Administration of medication;
- ◆ Care of sick children;
- ◆ Child abuse and neglect prevention and reporting;
- ◆ Fire safety;
- ◆ Hand washing;
- ◆ Prevention of HIV/AIDS and blood-borne pathogens;
- ◆ Prevention of the spread of communicable diseases (universal precautions);
- ◆ Reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS); and
- ◆ Water safety or lifeguard training.



Health Requirements

Most states require child care center staff and FCC providers to show proof that they are physically fit to care for children. To show they are in good health, staff and providers may need to provide the licensing agency with statements from physicians, reports of physical examinations, or proof of immunizations and tuberculosis tests.

Background Checks

Many states require that people who work in child care centers and FCC homes have not committed a crime or been accused of abuse or neglect of children in their care. States often require staff and providers to undergo at least one type of criminal background check, either a check of criminal history records (which may be done with fingerprints), child abuse and neglect registries, or sex offender registries.

Federal Requirements for Providers Serving Children Receiving Assistance through CCDF

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The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act 2014 requires that all states establish health and safety training requirements in 11 different topic areas for child care providers serving children receiving assistance through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program.

The topic areas in which you will need to get training are as follows:



1. Prevention and control of infectious diseases (including immunization);
2. Reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and safe sleeping practices;
3. Medication administration;
4. Preventing food and allergic reactions;
5. Building and physical premises safety;
6. Preventing and reporting Shaken baby Syndrome and abusive head trauma;
7. Emergency preparedness and response planning;
8. Handling and storage of hazardous materials;
9. Transportation safety, if applicable; and
10. First aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
11. Recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect.

Complete requirements and text of the law are on the Fundamentals of CCDF Administration site at: <https://ccdf-fundamentals.icfcloud.com/health-and-safety-requirements>.

Your state may include a requirement for training about nutrition, access to physical activity, or other subject areas the state determines is needed to promote child development or to protect children's health and safety.

NOTE: To verify which training options your state will accept to meet this requirement, please contact your state's child care professional development lead. Contact information is available on the Office of Child Care's website at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/data#tab-pds-state-profiles>.

Training

The following is a list of trainings that may help you meet the health and safety training requirements:

Better Kid Care, an initiative of Pennsylvania State University;
<http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare/early-care/ccdbg>

Virtual Lab School, a program created by experts at Ohio State University;
<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/learn>

Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing Concerns, an online training course from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/index.html>

For more information, please see Early Educator Central; <https://earlyeducatorcentral.acf.hhs.gov/coursework>.

NOTE: To verify which training options your state will accept to meet this requirement, please contact your state's child care professional development lead. Contact information is available on the Office of Child Care's website at: <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/data#tab-pds-state-profiles>.



Finding Trainings That Meet the State Requirements [Back](#)

Local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies can provide information about training opportunities, professional development initiatives, and other resources in your area. Child Care Aware® offers a Child Care Finder tool that provides contact information for all state and local CCR&R agencies at <http://childcareaware.org/resources/map/>.



In addition, many states have systems that provide information about training and other resources to help people who work in the early care and education field grow professionally. Many of these systems have a training calendar or database of trainers or training sessions.

Resources to help support you as a teacher or family child care provider are also provided at Early Educator Central, an online initiative that focuses on the careers of infant/toddler educators, seeking to advance their education and improve their competencies. It offers basic training and courses to assist in the pathway to a credential or degree. For more information, visit <https://earlyeducatorcentral.acf.hhs.gov/teachers-families-child-care-providers>.

Trainings That Meet State Licensing Requirements [Back](#)

State licensing agencies have ways to evaluate the qualifications of staff in child care centers and family child care homes. You can contact the licensing agency in your state to find out whether the training that you have completed or plan to complete will meet state requirements. The **National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations** contains direct website links to state child care licensing regulation documents and licensing agency contact information. Users can access, download, and search state child care licensing regulations that apply to child care centers, family child care homes, and other licensed child care programs. The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations is available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/licensing>.

Community Resources to Help Decide on a Child Care Career [Back](#)

Many states have a **professional development system** that provides information, support, and other resources to help people who work, or may want to work, in the early care and education field. These state systems vary widely in the services and resources they offer. Your state's professional development system may include some of the following resources:

- ◆ Career counseling and other professional development planning tools;
- ◆ A registry to track the training that you have obtained;
- ◆ A training calendar or database of state-approved trainers and training sessions;
- ◆ Core knowledge or competency documents that define what providers need to know, understand, and be able to do to work effectively with young children; and
- ◆ A career lattice or ladder that defines pathways to help you better understand the variety of roles, responsibilities, and requirements within the early care and education field in your state.

Scholarships or Other Financial Assistance Available to Help Pay for Trainings [Back](#)

Scholarship Resources

Local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies support child care providers with training and technical assistance to help improve the quality of child care, and they may have information about scholarships. Child Care Aware® offers a Child Care Finder tool that provides contact information for all state and local CCR&R agencies at <http://childcareaware.org/resources/map/>.



- ◆ *Quick Look: Scholarship Initiatives* (2013), by the National Center on Child Care Professional Development Systems and Workforce Initiatives, is a document that provides an overview of state scholarship initiatives. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/20130613_pdwcenter_quicklook_scholarships.pdf
- ◆ Find CDA Scholarships (n.d.), by the Council for Professional Recognition, <https://www.cdacouncil.org/resources/find-cda-scholarships>
- ◆ Scholarships and Grants to Pay for Education (Updated November 2019), by the Office of Head Start, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/scholarships-grants-pay-education>

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project Scholarships

Child Care Services Association

Phone: 919-967-3272

Website: <https://www.childcareservices.org/teach-nc/>

The T.E.A.C.H. [Teacher Education and Compensation Helps] Early Childhood Project gives scholarships to child care workers to complete coursework in early childhood education and to increase their compensation. The project is an umbrella for a variety of different scholarship programs for teachers, directors, and family child care providers working in regulated child care programs in 25 states across the country. All T.E.A.C.H. scholarships link continuing education with increased compensation and require recipients and their sponsoring child care programs to share the cost.



The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project is currently operating in the following 25 states: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina (founding state), Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. State contacts are available at <https://www.childcareservices.org/taqacpass/t-e-a-c-h-wage-state-contacts-and-logos/>

Federal Financial Aid

Federal Student Aid Information Center

U.S. Department of Education

Phone: 800-4-FED-AID (800-433-3243)

TTY: 800-730-8913

Website: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/>

The U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid programs are the largest source of student financial aid in the United States, providing nearly 70 percent of all student aid. Available resources are described in the following publication:

- ◆ *Do You Need Money for College or Career School? Apply for Federal Student Aid* (Dec 2019) (formerly *Funding Your Education: The Guide to Federal Student Aid*) is a comprehensive resource about student financial aid. Grants, loans, and work-study are the three major forms of aid available through the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office. Updated each award year, the guide explains the programs and how to apply for them. It is available at: <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/do-you-need-money.pdf>.

To apply for federal aid and many other state student aid programs, students must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Information about the FAFSA is available at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/afsa>.



Obtaining a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential

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States commonly allow someone to qualify for a teaching or administrative role in a child care facility if they have obtained a CDA credential. The CDA is a competency-based credential awarded to those who work with children ages birth to 5 years old. A CDA may be earned in three settings: center-based care (with two age groups: children younger than 3 years old and children 3 to 5 years old); family child care; and home visiting. In addition, a candidate may earn a bilingual specialization. The CDA Credentialing Program is administered by the Council for Professional Recognition. For additional information, call the Council at 800-424-4310, email cdafeedback@cdacouncil.org, or visit <http://www.cdacouncil.org/>.

- ◆ *Infant/Toddler Credential Factsheet* (2010), by the National Infant and Toddler Child Care Initiative, is a factsheet that provides information about infant and toddler credentials, including the states and territories with credentials, single-level and multi-level credentials, education and training requirements, delivery systems, articulation, and linkages to the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/infant-toddler_credential_factsheet_0.pdf

Early Care and Education Membership Organizations and Professional Associations

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The following are membership organizations that focus on early childhood issues. These organizations also have publications and resource materials available to the public.

American Montessori Society

116 East 16th Street
New York, NY 10003-2163
Phone: 212-358-1250
Email: ams@amshq.org
Website: <http://www.amshq.org/>

Council for Exceptional Children

Division of Early Childhood
2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000
Arlington, VA 22202-3557
Toll free: 888-232-7733
TTY: 866-915-5000
Website: www.cec.sped.org

National AfterSchool Association

2961A Hunter Mill Road, #626
Oakton, VA 22124
Email: info@naaweb.org
Website: <http://naaweb.org/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1313 L Street, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-232-8777
Toll free: 800-424-2460
Website: www.naeyc.org

National Association for Family Child Care

1743 W. Alexander Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84119
Phone: 801-886-2322
Website: <http://nafcc.org/>

National Child Care Association

1325 G Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
Toll free: 800-543-7161
Website: <http://www.nccanet.org/>

National Head Start Association

1651 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703-739-0875
Toll free: 866-677-8724
Website: <http://www.nhsa.org/>



Additional Resources about Careers in Child Care [Back](#)

The following resources provide a starting point for exploring the range of career opportunities in early childhood education, and links to national organizations.

- ◆ *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (2019), by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, is designed to provide assistance to those making decisions about their future work lives. For additional information, visit <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.
- ◆ The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** produces many publications for early childhood professionals, including resources about program administration, relationships with families, professional development, the early childhood profession, careers, developmentally appropriate practice, and public policy and advocacy. To access the publications, visit <http://www.naeyc.org/publications>.
- ◆ Early Childhood Credential Planning and Implementation Guide (n.d.) by the Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ec-credential-guide.pdf>
- ◆ State/Territory Preschool Credential Overview (February 2018), by the Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/preschool-credential-overview.pdf>
- ◆ State/Territory Infant/Toddler Credential Overview (March 2018), by the Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/infant-toddler-credential-overview.pdf>

The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with State and Territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

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