

# Promoting Informed Child Care Choices: A Training Guide for Child Care Subsidy Staff

## Introduction

This training guide offers information that CCDF Lead Agencies, subsidy staff, their supervisors, and others responsible for training subsidy staff can use for professional development.

The modules offer ways to enhance skills and knowledge related to consumer education and parent, family, and community engagement. These skills and knowledge are important because every interaction parents have with the subsidy system is an opportunity for subsidy staff to:

- support families' well-being and parents' abilities to work
- help ensure that children from low income households have the best possible early childhood and school-age care and education experiences, and
- promote family engagement in children's learning and development.

We recognize that the roles, implementing arrangements, and structure of the agencies that are responsible for determining and overseeing subsidy payments may vary.

For agencies that have high caseloads or use an online subsidy process, we encourage you to think creatively about opportunities for consumer education and engagement, and community engagement. For example, consider how you might add a phone call or video call into your process. Use this training to help staff make the most of these interactions.



Families expect and deserve high quality, affordable early childhood or school age care and education programs. High quality programs are responsive to children’s needs and interests and supportive of parents’ role as their children’s first and most important teachers.

As consumers of early childhood and school-age care and education, families serve as:

- decision-makers about programs and services for their family;
- resourceful users of information, programs, and services;
- sources of information for others; and
- advocates to advance program quality.

Subsidy staff can support families in these roles. Whether they meet in person, by phone, or online, staff can:

- partner with families to learn more about and make informed decisions about programs,
- help connect families with comprehensive services to support family well-being, and
- partner with families to build on their strengths and overcome challenges.

These training modules may also help staff feel and be more responsive when a family cannot immediately be served with subsidy.

Further, these training modules will help staff implement requirements included in the CCDBG Act and the CCDF Final Rule.

## **CCDBG Act and CCDF Final Rule Requirements**

Two purposes of the CCDBG Act are: (1) To promote parental choice to empower working parents to make their own decisions regarding the child care services that best suit their family’s needs; and (2) to encourage States, Territories, and Tribes to provide consumer education information to help parents make informed choices about child care services and to promote family engagement and child development. This focus on parental choice and consumer education has laid the foundation for a more transparent system—helping parents to better understand their options and encouraging programs to improve the quality of their services.

The CCDF Final Rule requires consumer education services be directly included as part of the intake and eligibility process for families applying for child care subsidy. Parents of eligible children often lack the information necessary to make informed decisions about their child care arrangements. And for many families, challenges related to inconsistent internet access, literacy levels, English proficiency, or adult disabilities create barriers to finding information. One way Lead Agencies can address these barriers is by providing information directly to families receiving CCDF subsidies to ensure they fully understand their options and are able to assess the quality of programs.<sup>1</sup>

Lead Agencies implement child care subsidy in a variety of ways. Often, Lead Agencies use other governmental or nongovernmental agencies or organizations to implement or perform CCDF services including: performing eligibility determinations, assisting parents in locating child care, issuing provider payments, and other CCDF activities identified by the State. These services and activities may be performed by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies, local governments, child care resource and referral agencies, community organizations, or other entities.

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<sup>1</sup> DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Administration for Children and Families 45 CFR Part 98 RIN 0970–AC67 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program. V. Section-by-Section Discussion of Comments and Regulatory Provisions, page 38, § 98.33 Consumer and Provider Education <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>. CCDF Fundamentals. pages 18 & 19. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/rg\\_ccdf\\_fundamentals.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/rg_ccdf_fundamentals.pdf)

## How to Use This Guide

There are ten modules in the guide. The modules are intended to be useful for subsidy staff in a variety of roles. For example, these modules may be used in professional development for subsidy staff who:

- interact with families applying for child care subsidies;
- help families locate and connect with early childhood, school-age, or comprehensive services; or
- work in the community to support early childhood care and education services and help to build the capacities of services and service providers.

The titles of the modules are:

1. Building a Shared Understanding of Consumer Education and Consumer Engagement
2. How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Consumer Engagement
3. Strength-based Attitudes
4. Relationship-based Practices
5. Building a Shared Understanding of Family Engagement
6. How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Family Engagement
7. Creating Welcoming Environments That Are Inclusive and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive
8. Building Community Partnerships
9. Self-care and Managing Stress
10. Summary Learning Reflection

Choose and use modules in ways that best meet your needs. For example, some users prefer to begin the training with **Module Nine: Self-care and Managing Stress**.

The modules can be used by groups or individual learners.

**Group learning:** A skilled facilitator can use the modules to support professional development experiences for a group of learners. For example, a group of learners may be a team of staff within an organization or a peer learning community. Tips for group facilitators:

- Follow the modules in order as part of a professional development plan or choose and use individual content areas that address your specific needs.
- Modify or adapt the modules based on your group’s knowledge and experience. We encourage you to share with us your adaptations and ideas for new activities.
- Provide each participant with a whole booklet or choose to print only selected materials from each module. For example, print the Handouts (Discussion Notes, Activities, and Reflective Practice Exercises) or recommend to participants that they find a way to store their reflections so that they can see their growth over time.

For groups, we encourage you to think creatively about how you might use existing staff meetings, team huddles, and planning times as opportunities for this training. A series of “lunch and learns” (training over lunch hours) might be feasible. Another idea to consider is for staff to explore the modules individually and then come together as a group for shorter amounts of time (15-20 minutes per module) to share reflections.

**Individual learning:** Individual learners may complete the modules on their own. Consider opportunities to reflect with colleagues about your experiences with each of topics.

Groups and individuals should expect to spend 45-60 minutes on each module. It will take approximately seven to nine hours to complete the entire training.

For groups and individuals, we encourage you to explore and reflect on the modules, over time, one or two at a time rather than altogether in one day. We understand that subsidy staff are busy and that finding this amount of time for training can be challenging.

## How the Modules are Organized

Each module begins with background information about the topic followed by an activity designed to enhance application.

Each module includes these specific components:

- **Goals:** the intended outcomes for families and subsidy staff.
- **Learning Objectives:** what subsidy staff need to know.
- **Key Competencies:** practices that subsidy staff need to be able to do.
- **Estimated Time to Complete Activity:** a guideline for how long it will take to complete the module.
- **Materials You'll Need:** supplies to prepare to complete the activity, for example, chart paper and markers and any handouts for the group.
- **Discussion:** useful information for the facilitator and to share with participants.
- **Thoughts from the Field:** quotes and anecdotes from subsidy staff. These can spur conversation and help people think through how the content applies to their work.
- **Activity:** detailed instructions and for some modules, handouts to help groups and individual learners apply concepts explored in the Discussions.
- **Reflective Practice Exercise:** includes the Goals, Guiding Questions, Thoughts from the Field, and a reflective activity. Participants should keep the Reflective Practice Exercise handouts so they can look back on their reflections and use them to complete a summary after completing all modules.

Agency leaders can use the modules as a resource to support and coach staff. Each Discussion includes information about what leaders can do. Leaders may find it helpful to review and reflect on the modules before using them for training.

## Resource Terms

### Subsidy Staff

Subsidy staff refers to professionals who are responsible for assisting families with child care subsidy. Subsidy staff includes individuals who help families build on their knowledge about the benefits and requirements of subsidy participation; determine eligibility; provide consumer education, oversee subsidy payments; and based on families' strengths, needs, and interests, help them connect with additional comprehensive supports for family well-being.

### Professionals and Programs

Professional refers to all other early childhood and school-age care and education professionals working at the systems or program level. Program refers to all early childhood and school-age care and education programs.

### Parent and Family

Parent and family refer to all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, including biological, adoptive and foster parents, pregnant women and expectant families, grandparents, legal and informal guardians, and adult siblings. Families can be biological or nonbiological, chosen or circumstantial. They are connected through cultures, languages, traditions, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support.