

Opening a Child Care Center

It can be easy to feel lost or overwhelmed. You have a dream but you are not sure how to realize it. Here is just a partial list of things you need to consider and some resources and information to help you get started.

How do I make sure my program meets all legal requirements?

- The very first step is to check the State Licensing Requirements & Regulations website. Local licensing regulations will outline many requirements for your business from what equipment you will need to how many staff members you should hire. <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/childcare/>
- Contact the Child Care Training Information Center at 1888-352-2842 or www.myflorida.com/childcare/training/
- Make sure you are in compliance with local codes, ordinances and zoning requirements. These may include an occupancy permit along with fire, health and safety inspections.
- Be sure you have appropriate liability insurance.
- Other steps may include establishing a fictitious name, getting a federal identification number and determining what type of business entity you are- sole proprietor, partnership or corporate institution.

What will it cost?

Here is just a partial list of expenses you are likely to incur:

- Equipment
- Furnishings
- Supplies
- Licenses and Permits
- Health Insurance
- Employee absences, sick leave, vacation, professional days
- Payroll and Taxes
- Accountant and/or legal fees
- Advertising
- Rent
- Garbage removal
- Utility bills
- Maintenance and Repairs
- Insurance
- Food
- Phone
- Fire alarm system

How do I build enrollment?

- Before you go too far in planning a center, you need to make sure that your business will be successful. Is there a need for your program? You can access this

information by contacting your local Early Learning Coalition or Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R Program).

- It is wise to do your homework here. Do some market research and learn what type of service or program is most needed in your community. State profiles give a summary of key information about child care in your state. Your local CCR&R is a great source for this information.
- Choose your location carefully. Consider neighboring businesses, parking, etc. Your local chamber of commerce may be helpful here.
- Find some useful marketing and promotion ideas.

How do I determine tuition?

- Of course this will vary and will depend on the size of your program, the age ranges you care for and other services you provide. As a rule, infant care is the most expensive. This is not known as a business to get rich in. Many programs report not seeing a profit for the first 6 months to a year. Even then average profit margins are only 10-15%.
- In establishing your rates, it is best to learn what the going rates are for similar programs in your town.

What policies and procedures should I establish?

- You will want to have a written contract of services with the families. Find some pointers on drafting a contract.
- Establish a mission statement or philosophy as it helps guide future decision making on curriculum, hiring of staff, and other policies.
- Most of your health and safety policies will be governed by the state licensing regulations.
- You will need to set up a system for bookkeeping and record keeping.

Who else will need to be involved?

- It is often recommended that you hire an attorney and an accountant. Most people that start a child care center have prior knowledge of childcare and psychology; not tax laws and liability issues.
- Ultimately, the heart of your program will be the staff-the people who are with the children day in and day out. Qualifications and training requirements are usually outlined by state regulations. It is worthwhile to hire the highest quality staff you can afford.