PROCEDURE FOR OBTAINING
AN INITIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE A FAMILY CHILD CARE CENTER

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the licensing of a family child care center. Under s. 48.65, Wis. Stats., child care centers providing care and supervision for 4 or more children under 7 years of age for less than 24 hours a day are required to be licensed through the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Chapter DCF 250 governs child care centers that provide care and supervision to between 4 and 8 children under 7 years of age.

1. Determine the need for the program you are considering. Involve other agencies and members of your community. Use the information you gather to decide what kind of program you will offer. Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for detailed information for your area. The enclosed Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) pamphlet will guide you to your local Resource and Referral Agency.

2. Read and study the enclosed rule book DCF 250 Licensing Rules for Family Child Care Centers. The DCF 250 Licensing Rules for Family Child Care Centers with Commentary which contains the licensing rules along with supporting material that provides additional information about the rules is also available on the Department of Children and Families website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cclicensing/rules.

3. Complete the enclosed form Family Child Care Business Start-Up Worksheet and send it to the Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) at:

Supporting Families Together Association
700 Rayovac Drive Suite 6
Madison, WI 53711

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has contracted with SFTA to offer a limited amount of pre-licensing technical assistance at no cost to the requestor. Upon receipt of the Family Child Care Business Start-Up Worksheet, SFTA will assign a child care technical consultant to help you prepare for an initial license. There are certain rules that must be met before a license can be issued; a checklist that identifies those items is included in this inquiry packet. The child care technical consultant will complete the checklist during a visit with you and will detail those items that you will need to complete before you submit the application for a license.

The department’s contract with SFTA covers one on-site visit to a family child care center, which will typically occur just prior to the submission of an application for a license. Additional visits and other services not covered under the contract with DCF are available on a fee-for-service basis from SFTA. If you are interested in purchasing additional visits or services, talk with your child care technical consultant.

Note: Your child care technical consultant is not a DCF licensing specialist and does not have the authority to issue you a license. The child care technical consultant will provide information and assistance to help prepare you to submit for an initial license study and will provide an application for a license upon completion of the technical assistance site visit.

4. Wisconsin statutes exempt certain family child care centers from local zoning ordinances. Specifically, s.66.1017, Wis. Stats., reads as follows:

66.1017 Family child care homes.

(1) In this section:
(a) "Family child care home" means a dwelling licensed as a child care center by the department of children and families under s. 48.65 where care is provided for not more than 8 children.
(b) "Municipality" means a county, city, village or town.

(2) No municipality may prevent a family child care home from being located in a zoned district in which a single-family residence is a permitted use. No municipality may establish standards or requirements for family child care homes that are different from the licensing standards established under s. 48.65. This subsection does not prevent a municipality from applying to a family child care home the zoning regulations applicable to other dwellings in the zoning district in which it is located.

Check with your local municipality to determine whether your family child care center will be exempt according to this law or whether you will need to obtain a local zoning permit to operate.
5. If the proposed family child care center will not be used as a residence by at least one person or will be in a building that is not a one or two-family dwelling, you will need to document that the building complies with all applicable Wisconsin Commercial Building Codes by submitting a report completed by a commercial building inspector with your application for a license. The building inspection shall be conducted by a city commercial building inspector or an architect or engineer registered in accordance with Wisconsin Administrative Rules A-E for Architects or A-E4 for Engineers. Your local zoning authority or building inspector will have more information on obtaining an inspection to determine whether the building you are proposing to use as a family child care center will need any modifications. The Department of Safety and Professional Services administrative code, SPS 361.02(3)(g), exempts family child care centers from meeting the Commercial Building Codes if the program is licensed to care for 8 or fewer children and located in a 1-or 2-family dwelling. Wisconsin Statute s.101.61(1) defines a “dwelling unit” as a “structure or part of a structure which is used or intended to be used as a home, residence or sleeping place by one person or by 2 or more persons maintaining a common household to the exclusion of all others.”

6. Under the licensing rules, each child care provider will need to complete either a 3-credit course in early childhood education or a non-credit, department-approved course in early childhood education. Each provider will also need a non-credit, department-approved course in operating a child care business or a course for credit in business or program administration.

Note: The non-credit, department-approved course in early childhood education is called The Introduction to the Child Care Profession. The non-credit, department-approved course in operating a child care business is called Fundamentals of Family Child Care. In addition, if you intend to care for children under 2 years of age, you will need to complete a non-credit, department-approved course called Fundamentals of Infant and Toddler Care within 6 months of becoming licensed.

Many private agencies around the state offer the non-credit, department-approved courses. You can find a list of all the private agencies offering these courses on the department’s website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccregulation/providers. Agencies offering non-credit courses often list available courses on The Registry’s website at https://www.the-registry.org/myregistry/.

7. Obtain required insurance:
- Liability insurance on the child care business is required if you have any cats or dogs that are allowed in areas accessible to children during the center’s hours of operation; proof of liability insurance must specifically include the coverage of pets.
- Liability insurance is required on all private vehicles used to transport children in care.

You will need to submit documentation of any required insurance with your application for a license.

8. Develop written policies and procedures for staff and for distribution to parents regarding:
- Enrollment and discharge of enrolled children.
- Fees charged, including refunds.
- Child and provider absences, including a procedure to contact a parent if a child is absent from the center without prior notification from the child’s parent.
- Health care, including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) risk reduction procedures if you will provide care to children under 1 year of age.
- Nutrition.
- Daily activities of children.
- Child guidance techniques, including appropriate ways to manage crying, fussing, or distraught children.
- Transportation of children for any purpose including field trips. The policy must include a procedure to ensure that no child is left unattended in a vehicle.
- Religious instruction or practices, if any.
- The types and location of pets or other animals located on the premises of the center, and the type of access the children will have to the pets.
- Information about liability insurance you may have on your business, premises, and vehicles.

A written contract between you and the parent is recommended.

A copy of a policy template called Policy Sample – Family Child Care Centers and the required form Policy Checklist – Family Child Care Centers are available on the department’s website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cclicensing/ccformspubs. You may also obtain copies of these materials by contacting the Child Care Information Center at 1-800-362-7353.
9. Develop an orientation plan for all employees, volunteers, and substitutes. All employees, volunteers, and substitute providers shall receive an orientation prior to working with the children in care. Documentation of the orientation must be maintained in the staff record. The orientation shall include:

- The names and ages of all children in care.
- Current arrival and departure information for each child enrolled, including the names of people authorized to pick up the child.
- A review of children’s records, including emergency contact information.
- Specific information relating to children’s special health care needs, including medications, disabilities, or special health conditions.
- Procedures to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) if the center is licensed to care for children under 1 year of age.
- An overview of the daily schedule, including meals, snacks, nap, and any information related to the eating and sleep schedules of infants and toddlers enrolled in the center.
- A review of the center’s procedures for dealing with emergencies, including natural disasters, human-caused events, food emergencies, and allergic reactions.
- The procedure for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of a child.
- The plan for evacuating sleeping children if the center will be licensed to care for children between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.
- A review of center policies and procedures.
- A review of the licensing rules.
- The reporting requirements for the child care background check under DCF 13.07(3).

10. Develop an orientation plan for all emergency back-up providers who may care for children in the event that you must respond to an emergency. The orientation shall include:

- The names and ages of all children in care.
- Arrival and departure information for each child in care, including the names of people authorized to pick up the child.
- The location of children’s files, including emergency contact information, consent for emergency medical treatment, and any special health care needs.
- Information on any children with special health care needs.
- Procedures to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), if the center is licensed to care for children under 1 year of age.

11. If your facility is not served by a public water system, request a well inspection and water test for bacteria by a laboratory certified under ch. ATCP 77. Include a nitrate test if you will be caring for infants under the age of six months.

12. If you will transport children in a vehicle owned, leased, or contracted for by the child care center that has a seating capacity of 6 or more passengers in addition to the driver, install a vehicle safety alarm that prompts the driver to inspect the vehicle for children prior to exiting the vehicle. Additional information on vehicle safety alarms is available on the department’s website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccregulation/providers.

13. Obtain the necessary forms to be completed by parents, including the forms Child Care Enrollment, Health History and Emergency Care Plan, Child Care Immunization Record, Child Health Report – Child Care Centers, and Intake for Child Under 2 Years – Child Care Centers. Copies are available from the department’s website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cclicensing/ccformspubs. If you don’t have access to the Internet, your child care technical consultant can tell you how to get one copy of each form by mail.

14. Obtain a physical exam, unless you have had one in the past year, that indicates you are free from illness detrimental to children, including tuberculosis, and that you are physically able to work with young children.

15. Determine which areas of the premises will be used by children in care, and obtain appropriate equipment and furnishings. Make sure that the center is free of hazards, including recalled products. Information on recalled products can be obtained through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s website at www.datcp.wi.gov or from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772.

During the initial site visit, the licensing specialist will inspect the entire premises, including areas that you will not be using for child care, to ensure that children will be safe and that you have removed any hazards. Allow a minimum of 2 hours for the initial visit, though it may take longer depending upon your readiness for licensure.
16. **Even after you have completed the pre-licensing process with your SFTA child care technical consultant, you are not yet licensed.** The child care technical consultant will provide you with an *Initial License Application – Family Child Care Centers* at the conclusion of services. You will need to complete this application and submit it with the following items to the regional office serving your area (see enclosed listing) in order to become licensed:

- **Initial Licensing Checklist - Family Child Care Centers** which was completed by your child care technical consultant after your on-site visit. You will need to complete every item on the checklist and sign the applicant section of the Initial Licensing Checklist not more than 14 days prior to submitting your application.
- Completed **Background Check Request** forms for yourself and all household members aged 10 years and older. See additional information regarding background checks in item 17 below.
- Written policies and procedures and the completed **Policy Checklist - Family Child Care Centers**.
- Any other items specified on the last page of the **Initial Licensing Checklist - Family Child Care Centers**.
- One check or money order made payable to the Department of Children and Families for $15.12 (see item 18 below).

Once you have submitted all your application materials, the department will make a determination as to whether you are eligible for a license. The determination is based on review of all the application materials, completion of the child care background checks as indicated in item 16, and the results of the investigation to determination whether you are fit and qualified for a license.

It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that you have met all applicable items in the **Initial Licensing Checklist - Family Child Care Centers** before the application is submitted and the initial licensing visit is scheduled with the department. If the licensing specialist makes the initial licensing visit and you are not in compliance with all applicable requirements of **DCF 250 Licensing Rules for Family Child Care Centers** your application for a license may be denied because you do not meet the requirements for a license. Administrative Code DCF 250.11(2)(g) states, “The department may not process an application for a license if the applicant has had a license or certification to operate a child care center revoked or denied within the last 2 years prior to the date of the application. An applicant is deemed ineligible to submit an application for a license and a person may not hire an employee within 2 years from the date an applicant or employee had a child care license or certification revoked or denied.”

If you do not submit all the required application materials to the department within 6 months of the date that the Initial Licensing Checklist was signed by the SFTA technical consultant, you must repeat the pre-licensing process from the start, and update and resubmit all application materials.

17. The department will complete a child care background check on all applicants for licensure, employees, adult household members, and minor household members aged 10 - 17. Minor household members age 10 - 17 are subject to child abuse and neglect checks only, but may, in some instances, be subject to a criminal background check. You and your household members must complete all required components of the background check, including a fingerprint-based check, and receive final eligibility before a license may be granted. Additional information about the background check requirements can be found on the Department’s website at [https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccbgcheck](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ccbgcheck) or by contacting the Child Care Background Unit (CBU) at (608) 422-7400.

18. A licensing fee of $60.50 is charged every two years. Therefore, your fee for the first six-month probationary license to be submitted with your application is $15.12. The check or money order should be made payable to the Department of Children and Families.

19. Licenses are not transferable. If you move, you must contact your licensing specialist and submit a new application and fees to obtain a probationary license for the new location at least 30 days before you move. No credit will be given for fees at your prior location.

20. Under the authority of s.48.73, Wis. Stats., and DCF 250.12(2), the department must be granted unrestricted access to your premises any time during licensed hours for the purpose of monitoring your compliance with the licensing rules. If you fail to allow access to a department representative, the department shall take enforcement action against your license under s.48.715, Wis. Stats., including issuance of orders, forfeitures or revocation of your license. In addition, if the department is unable to monitor for compliance or verify correction of licensing violations, it may affect your eligibility to receive child care subsidy payments pursuant to DCF 201.04.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please contact the Bureau of Early Care Regulation at dcfcclicreg@wisconsin.gov or (608) 421-7550. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

DCF-P-PFS4066 (R. 10/2019)