PROCEDURE FOR OBTAINING
AN INITIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE 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.

Please read through all licensing requirements below BEFORE you begin the pre-licensing process.

We strongly encourage all resources be accessed electronically. If you obtained a printed version of this inquiry packet and would like to access these resources online, please visit the department’s website at https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/index.php/cclicensing/startcc. If you cannot obtain forms or publications online that are not already included in this packet, please contact the Child Care Information Center at 1-800-362-7353.

PREPARATION FOR PRE-LICENSING

☐ Determine if you are eligible to operate a Child Care center before beginning any pre-licensing work.
   • See the Potential Barriers to Obtaining a Child Care Center License (English / Spanish) document and DCF 250.11 for basic eligibility requirements for operating a child care business.
   • Minimum eligibility requirements include a discussion of any existing records for the following:
     o Tax delinquency
     o Unemployment insurance contribution delinquency
     o Criminal background checks – check the list of Barred Offenses for Regulated Child Care

☐ Determine the community needs for your program of interest.
   • Gather feedback from community members and local agencies.
   • Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) for detailed information.
   • Read the Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) brochure.

☐ Study the Licensing rule book for Family Child Care for details and resources.
   • Read the DCF 250 Licensing Rules for Family Child Care Centers with Commentary
   • If you cannot access this online resource, you may contact our Northern Regional Office at (715) 361-7700 for a printed copy of the licensing rules.
   • Review the Initial Licensing Checklist - Family Child Care Centers to understand requirements and prepare for a pre-licensing technical consultant.

PHYSICAL PREMISES

☐ Ensure that the building meets the licensing regulations.
   • Check with your local municipality to determine whether your family child care center will be exempt according to local zoning laws or if you will need a permit to operate.
   • If the center is not also a residence for at least one person, the building will need to meet applicable Wisconsin Commercial Building Codes with an inspection report. See DCF 250.06 (1) for details about building requirements.
   • If your building is not served by a public water system, request a well inspection and water test for bacteria, and if serving children under 6 months of age, nitrates. See DCF 250.06 (6) for details about water system requirements.
     For more information regarding water tests, visit the Department of Natural Resources website.

☐ Read about the Choose Safe Places program, which offers a free consultation to support child care providers in identifying safe locations for new child care facilities.
   • Helping Child Care Provider Applicant Choose Environmentally Safe Places – English / Spanish
   • Voluntary Property Checklist for Child Care Providers – English / Spanish

☐ Install a vehicle safety alarm that prompts the driver to check for children prior to exiting the vehicle.
   • Required for vehicles that are owned, leased, or contracted and has a seating capacity of 6 or more passengers (including the driver).
   • Additional information on vehicle safety alarms is available on the department’s Information for Providers webpage (Vehicles), including a computer-based training video.
Obtain required liability insurance for the premises.
- Liability insurances might also include vehicles or pets; see DCF 250.04 (2) (g) and 250.08 (5) (c) for more details.

Obtain appropriate equipment and furnishings for your child care space.
- A list of suggested equipment, including the latest news & recalls, is available from the Child Care Information Center’s Resource Materials webpage.

BUSINESS MODEL

Prepare a business plan including start-up and operating budgets.
- Include costs for the necessary permits and operation of your center’s building/location.
- Check with your municipality or local zoning authorities about building plan reviews for any modifications to the building.
- Review DCF 250.06 for physical premises and building requirements and determine whether you need to make any changes to the building prior to obtaining a license.

Develop policies and procedures for your program.
- Review the Policy Checklist – Family Child Care Centers for required and strongly recommended topics to include.
- The policies and procedures should be detailed for both staff and parents to reference.
- The department’s Policy Sample – Family Child Care Centers is available for use or reference.
- A written contract between the center and parents is recommended.

Develop orientation plans
- For all employees, volunteers, and substitutes, include all items listed in DCF 250.05 (4) (a).
- For all emergency back-up providers, include all items listed in DCF 250.05 (4) (b).
- For all persons transporting children, include all items listed in DCF 250.08 (4) (b).

Consider participating in Wisconsin Shares, Wisconsin’s child care subsidy program, and YoungStar, Wisconsin’s child care quality rating and improvement system.

STAFFING & ADMINISTRATION

All teachers and administrators must meet minimum educational requirements for child care.
- Refer to DCF 250.05 (3) for education requirements.
- Visit Child Care Regulation Information for Providers webpage for training resources, including entry-level non-credit courses for child care providers, a list of agencies offering non-credit courses, and entry-level alternatives for child care professionals.
- Visit The Registry’s website for a list of agencies currently offering non-credit courses.

Complete all required background checks for provider(s) and household members.
- Any person (10 years and older) who works with children or resides in the center will need to complete a Background Check Request (BCR) form (English / Hmong / Spanish).
- Adults (18 years and older) are also required to complete a fingerprint-based check in addition to the standard name-based background check.
- Individuals can submit a Background Check Request through the iChildCare Portal prior to submitting their license application. However, keep in mind that an individual only has 180 days to become active at a regulated child care program in order to maintain eligibility; if that time passes without the initial license being granted, a new background check (with the fee) will need to be completed.
- Final eligibility must be received before a license may be granted.
- Visit the Child Care Background Unit (CBU) webpage and the DCF Background Check Checklist – New Providers for all background check requirements and details or contact the CBU at (608) 422-7400 for questions.

Obtain a physical exam for each provider that indicates staff are free from illness detrimental to children, including tuberculosis, and that all are physically able to work with young children. See DCF 250.05 (2) (d).

Obtain any forms needed for either the children’s or staff’s files.
- See Required Items for Family Child Care Centers in Appendix D Resources List of the DCF 250 Commentary Manual.
- Visit the department’s Child Care Licensing Forms and Publications website for copies of the required and optional forms to complete.
PREPARATION

☐ Complete and submit the Family Child Care Business Start-Up Worksheet.
  • Family Child Care Business Start-Up Worksheet – English | Spanish
  • Note: This is not the official application for a license – the application will be available after completing all pre-licensing requirements with an SFTA technical consultant.

☐ Work with an SFTA technical consultant to prepare for initial licensing.
  • SFTA will provide at no cost to you:
    o A dedicated technical consultant assigned to you after submitting the Family Child Care Business Start-Up Worksheet.
    o Limited, pre-licensing technical assistance to prepare for your application for an initial license – including information on compliance with rules and completion of all items in the Inquiry Packet.
    o One on-site or virtual visit to your center prior to submitting the application.
    o The application for initial licensing upon completion of all pre-licensing requirements.
  • Additional visits or services are available from SFTA for a fee.
  • Review the Initial Licensing Checklist with your technical consultant as a preparation guide. If you received a printed copy of this inquiry packet, you will receive the Initial Licensing Checklist from your technical consultant.
  • Note: Your technical consultant is not a DCF licensing specialist and cannot issue the initial license.

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION

☐ Complete the pre-licensing application process with your SFTA child care technical consultant.
  • Your technical consultant will provide you with an Initial License Application – Family Child Care Centers at the conclusion of services.
  • After your technical consultant signs the Initial Licensing Checklist, you will have 6 months to submit a completed application.
  • Some items to submit with the application include:
    o Initial Licensing Checklist – Family Child Care Centers, completed by your child care technical consultant at the site visit. Complete and sign the Applicant section of the Initial Licensing Checklist not more than 14 days prior to submitting it with the application form.
    o Background Check Request forms for the licensee(s), and for persons aged 10 years or older residing in the center, (these can also be submitted through iChildCare within the 180 days prior to being granted a license).
    o Required certificates of insurance, if transporting children in care, or if pets are accessible to children in care.
    o Center policies and a completed Policy Checklist – Family Child Care Centers.
    o Building inspection report which indicates the building complies with all applicable Commercial Building Codes, if applicable.
    o Licensing fee of $15.12 for the first six-month probationary license.
    o Any other materials indicated on the last page of the Initial Licensing Checklist – Family Child Care Centers or the Initial License Application.
  • Note: Any missing application items may prolong the application process.

☐ Complete the pre-licensing onsite visit.
  • Your regional licensing specialist will contact you to schedule the visit after submitting your application.
  • Ensure at least 60 working days after the submission of all application materials as a projected opening date to allow for a completed licensing review.

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.