

Business-Child Care Partnership Tool Kit

MODULE 4 – Moving Forward: Rules and Regulations for Opening or Expanding a Child Care Site



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GROWTH**
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The Child Care Licensing Landscape in Wisconsin

As with any other business entity, rules and regulations to support the health and safety of those impacted by the business are in place for child care programs. In Wisconsin, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has purview over child care licensing and certification. Through initial and ongoing monitoring, DCF ensures Wisconsin child care programs are in compliance with the state’s administrative rules, and that children attending these programs are in safe and healthy environments, being provided care, supervision, and developmentally appropriate activities which meet each child’s physical and emotional needs. The Bureau of Early Care Regulations (BECR) within DCF is accountable for the licensure of all of Wisconsin’s child care facilities, including family child care, group child care, and day camps, and certification in Milwaukee County.

This module will focus on rules and regulations regarding licensed child care programs in Wisconsin; information regarding certification can be found on the [DCF website](#) or by contacting your local [certification agency](#).

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- Module 2 – Building Successful Business-Child Care Partnerships
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- Module 5 – Sustaining Child Care in My Community
- Module 6 – Why Should Businesses Partner with Child Care?

Tool kit modules will be released on a rolling basis. For a full list, visit www.ProjectGrowth.WI.gov.





Getting Started

Detailed information regarding the following steps can be [found on the “Starting a Licensed Child Care” page](#) on the DCF website.

1. **Determine eligibility:** Review the list of [disqualifying offenses](#) which may bar a person from holding a license to operate a child care center or from residing in or working for a child care program.
2. **Determine which type of child care license to obtain:**
 - a. **Licensed family child care** provides care and supervision for less than 24 hours a day for at least four and not more than eight children who are not related to the provider.
 - b. **Licensed group child care centers** provide care and supervision for less than 24 hours a day for nine or more children who are not related to the provider.
 - c. **Licensed day camps** provide care and supervision to four or more children 3 years of age and older in a seasonal program oriented to the out-of-doors for less than 24 hours a day.
3. **Access and review [inquiry packet materials](#)** associated with the type of license being obtained, including the rule book for the license type and initial licensing checklist.
4. **Attend a [Child Care Information Session](#)** offered by your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (optional but recommended).

Next Steps: Pre-Licensing

Preparing for licensing requires a number of detailed steps to ensure a child care program's operations will achieve alignment with Chapters 250, 251, and 252 of the Wisconsin Administrative Codes. These documents provided by DCF for [family](#) and [group](#) child care and [day camps for children](#) outline the necessary steps, including links to important documents and other resources for assistance in completing the licensing process. Planning for licensure includes the following steps:

- **Prepare the physical premises**, including meeting required codes and licensing standards, obtaining insurance coverage, and appropriate furnishings and equipment for the space.
- **Develop a business model**, including start-up and operating budgets, legal structure for the business, and policies and procedures (additional information on business models can be found in [Module 3: Best Business Practices for Child Care](#)).
- **Determine staffing & administration**, including staff structure, required background checks, and additional requirements.
- **Participate in pre-licensing technical assistance**, a no-cost support provided to potential providers to prepare for submission of the licensing application.



Receiving a License

Once the pre-licensing process has been completed, an application for licensing and [applicable fees](#) can be submitted. A Licensing Specialist from the [DCF regional office](#) will complete an initial onsite licensing visit to determine compliance with all relevant rules and regulations for the child care program. DCF recommends planning for at least 60 working days after the submission of application materials as a projected opening date to allow for a completed licensing review.

Once the Licensing Specialist has verified all applicable rules have been met and licensed capacity has been determined, the licensing fee is calculated for group child care centers and day camps. A six-month probationary license can be issued once BECR receives the applicant's licensing fee.

Once a program completes the six-month probation, it will be issued a regular, non-expiring license and will be required to submit fees and forms every two years. The program will maintain a relationship with the DCF regional licensing office, with Licensing Specialists available to answer questions and provide guidance. Specialists will determine the minimum number of monitoring visits required annually for each program and will conduct unannounced monitoring visits to ensure compliance with all administrative rules.

While preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining a child care license requires significant dedication of time and attention to detail, guidance and resources to support the process are abundant. Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies provide services across the state, including supports for potential and current child care providers such as training, information sessions, technical assistance, and more. DCF lists [a number of resources](#) on its website, including:

- Building Construction & Renovations
- Family & Community Relationships
- Health, Safety, & Nutrition
- Planning, Reflection, & Evaluation

Read

- [Monitoring Guide for Wisconsin's Licensed Child Care Programs](#)
- [Most Frequently Cited Rule Violations - Licensed Child Care](#)

Do

- Contact your local [Child Care Resource & Referral Agency](#) for more information about how to get started with the licensing process.



Licensed Group Child Care Centers			
Age of Children	Staff-to-Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size	Indoor Space Requirements:
Birth– 2 years	1:4	8	35 square feet of usable floor space is required for each child, exclusive of passageways, kitchens, bathrooms, offices, storage areas, parts of rooms occupied by stationary equipment, etc.
2 years– 2.5 years	1:6	12	
2.5 years– 3 years	1:8	16	
3 years	1:10	20	Outdoor Space Requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 square feet of outdoor play space is required for each child 2 years + using the space at a given time. • 35 square feet of outdoor play space for each child under 2 years using the space at a given time. <p>The total outdoor space must accommodate at least 1/3 of all children the center is licensed for or shall be a minimum of 750 square feet, whichever is greater.</p>
4 years	1:13	24	
5 years	1:17	34	
6 years	1:18	36	

For staff-to-child or counselor-to-child ratios in [family child care centers](#) and [day camps for children](#), see Table DCF 250.055 and Table DCF 252.425, respectively. Indoor and outdoor space requirements are also located in DCF 250 and DCF 252 licensing rules.



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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 call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. 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.