

Child Care Licensing Overview and Considerations for Fall 2020



The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is expediting new license applications in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming school year in anticipation of increased demand for school-age child care options. This document is intended to help guide potential new child care providers considering licensing.

As school districts in Washington announce their plans for the upcoming 2020-2021 year, many parents are challenged with the prospect of virtual classes for their grade-school age children. Who will care for children, both in and out of the virtual school hours? This is a question many parents and caregivers are grappling with right now. The existing licensed provider community has been responsive and nimble since the outset of the pandemic; many have remained open and serving children in their community. While providers remain open, we have seen a decrease in the number of families choosing to send their children to care. Unfortunately, the existing licensed capacity will not likely be enough to serve the increased demand for school-age child care.

Perhaps you have thought about serving children in your community previously or in response to the emerging needs this fall. Here are some questions and considerations before becoming licensed to provide child care, whether by opening a center, school-age program or a family home child care program:

- **Need:** Is there a shortage of child care options in your community? Have you connected with local child care providers to learn about local capacity? Additionally, you may be able to find out about supply and demand in your area by contacting Child Care Aware of WA online at <https://childcareawarewa.org>.
- **Space:** Are you able to open your home or buy/rent a larger facility to provide child care? **Plan to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) from your local government**, which is required for center, school-age and emergency child care licenses. Having a C of O already in place will make the licensing process move much quicker.
- **Serving Low-Income Children (Subsidy):** Only licensed and “certified for payment only” programs are eligible for state and federal subsidies. Consider the funding it will take as well as different ways to serve families experiencing low-income through scholarships, fundraising or subsidies. If you plan to serve children who may be eligible to receive subsidy, being licensed or “certified for payment only” is required. See subsidy information on the DCYF Working Child Care Connections website online at www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/getting-help/wccc.
- **License:** Do you need to be licensed? The answer is usually yes, but it depends.



Understanding Types of Exempt Child Care

Per RCW 43.216.010 (1): Any person or entity that provides child care and early learning services outside a child's home must be licensed by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to provide care unless they are exempt.¹ There are 13 exemptions to licensed child care² in law:

- Certain relatives
- Legal guardians
- Neighbors or friends that meet certain criteria
- Parents on an exchange basis
- Nursery schools that meet certain criteria
- Schools
- Seasonal camps that meet certain criteria
- On-site child care that meet certain criteria
- Drop-in recreational or education programs that meet certain criteria
- Programs operated by local, state or federal governments
- Programs within federally recognized tribal reservations
- Programs within federal military reservations
- A program that offers early learning and support services that meet certain criteria

If you think your program might be exempt, please contact dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov to find out for sure.

Note: exempt child care providers cannot access child care subsidy. At this time, that is the only fund source available from DCYF to pay for care.

If opening a licensed program is desired or required, DCYF will help you move forward with either an emergency six-month license or a full, non-expiring license, based on needs.

You are Ready to Move Forward with Becoming a Licensed Provider. What Should You Do?

1. First, if you are planning on using, renting or buying a building for a center or school-age program, make sure you can get a C of O for the building. Check with your local government municipality. The C of O is required to obtain a child care license for center and school-age programs. The C of O is not needed for family home child care programs.

2. For regular licensing, the process starts with an online orientation, available in English, Spanish and Somali: Licensing Process orientation, step one at www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/licensed-provider/licensing-process. You will need a STARS ID number to complete the orientation; apply through the registry system, MERIT online at <https://apps.dcyf.wa.gov/MERIT/Home/SignInRegister>. Then contact dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov for the next steps. *Note: school-age programs have a different orientation process; email dcyf.welcome@dcyf.wa.gov to learn more.*
3. For an emergency six-month license, contact emergencychildcare@dcyf.wa.gov or call 866-777-3293 to find out more. Once the process is underway, you will be connected to DCYF licensing staff who work with you to meet requirements and complete an inspection. *Note: licenses are only good for six months; before the six months expires you will need to obtain a regular license or close your program.*

Already a Licensed Provider?

Here are some additional options to help new or already licensed providers quickly adapt or expand child care services during the COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency:

- **Emergency waivers and variances for licensed child care providers to expand capacity or waive licensing rules specific to the challenges presented by COVID-19:** A provider must apply for these, and they are granted on a case-by-case basis. Contact your licensor to start this process. Find your local child care office online at www.dcyf.wa.gov/find-an-office/el-offices.
- Emergency child care and licenses³ should quickly establish temporary child care and early learning programs, if a waiver or variance is not an option.

Visit our DCYF Early Learning and Child Care COVID-19 webpage at www.dcyf.wa.gov/coronavirus-covid-19/early-learning#general to read our Frequently Asked Questions for Early Learning and Child Care Settings during the COVID-19 outbreak. There are several informational webinars and resources are posted on the right-hand side of the webpage.

1. RCW 43.216.010(1). <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.216.010>

2. RCW 43.216.010 (2). <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.216.010>

3. Chapter 110-310 WAC. www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rules/Emergency.Child.Care.Licenses.pdf

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov).