

Become an early childhood educator: What does it take?

You enjoy children and you want to learn more about how to nurture children's development. So, what does it really take to become an early childhood professional?

Experienced early childhood experts agree that in order to become a strong early childhood professional, one needs to not only have a desire to work with children and families, but also a drive to learn more about how best to support children and families. It is important to understand what qualities a program looks for in prospective staff, and what expectations a program has for staff.

Qualities and expectations

The field of early education needs professionals who are dedicated to children's development, and who are willing to continually learn, to expand their knowledge base, and to grow as a professional in all areas. Helping children develop to their full potential requires a strong commitment, sensitivity, intentionality and a willingness to develop professionally. These qualities and expectations are important in becoming an early childhood professional.



<p style="text-align: center;">Qualities The qualities of an early childhood professional: One who...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Expectations The program expectations: One who...</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Enjoys children and wants to be involved in children's lives</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is interested, engaged and nurtures children's development throughout the day</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Is curious and willing to learn</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Actively seeks out training and information to build a strong knowledge base</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Is a good role model</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sets the best example all day long</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Is reliable</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is on time for work, is prepared and follows program policy</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Is flexible and thoughtful</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Is able to problem solve in various situations and able to create learning opportunities, both planned and unplanned</p>

For more information about the field of early childhood education, visit Better Kid Care at <http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare>

Relationship building

The capacity to build positive relationships is a strength and skill needed as an early educator. Valuing, supporting, and working cooperatively with children, families, and staff contribute to positive outcomes. Approaching relationships in a collaborative manner builds trust and sets the tone for open discussions.

When building relationships think about:

- Children's overall health, wellness, and development are deeply impacted by their relationships with the early educators in their lives. Children are happier, more confident, and excited to learn when they experience positive relationships with adults. Educators who provide consistent and safe environments and nurturing experiences for children lay the foundation for healthy attachments.
- When early educators know families well, they are better able to respond to both the children's and the family's needs. As early educators invest in building relationships with families, families are more likely to engage with staff, with their child, and with their child's program.
- Building relationships with co-workers promotes a better understanding of one another and a shared commitment to the early childhood program. By working together, staff can improve program quality by recognizing and supporting one another's strengths, supporting one another during challenging situations, and sharing responsibilities.



Professional growth

Being a professional in early childhood education not only includes dressing and behaving appropriately, but also includes continuing to develop skills, knowledge, and expertise linking to quality early childhood programming. Professionalism includes behaving respectfully, sharing appropriate information, upholding confidentiality, and learning what best supports children's development. Continuous professional growth leads to positive outcomes, both professionally and personally.

Resources to move forward

Within Pennsylvania, visit:

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).

<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/>

Pennsylvania Regional
Child Development Offices:

Western Region 1-800-222-2149

Central (Harrisburg) 1- 800-222-2117

Northeast (Scranton) 1-800-222-2108

Southeast Region 1-800-346-2929

Outside of Pennsylvania, visit:

Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

Office of Child Care
(202) 690-6782

extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare

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