CDA Credential: A catalyst to professional growth

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ is a national credential issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. The CDA Council works to ensure that early childhood educators and caregivers know and use best practices to meet the developmental, emotional, and educational needs of young children. The CDA Credential can be a catalyst to professional growth and support a career in early education.

The first step

The first step to achieving a CDA Credential is to visit the CDA Council for Professional Recognition’s web site to read and review required CDA information and CDA process guidelines. CDA contacts are listed in resources below.

Plan for professional development

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ is based on a core set of competency standards developed by the Council for Professional Recognition, which guides early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children.

CDA Candidates will choose one of the following CDA settings:

- Preschool (center-based)
- Infant/Toddler (center-based)
- Family Child Care
- Home Visitor

The CDA Council requires the CDA candidate to complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education any time before CDA application. Candidates needing professional development hours will need to locate early childhood training. Professional development should support the candidate’s professional learning style, align with their designated CDA setting, and most importantly, meet the CDA Council’s guidelines.
In order to qualify and be well-prepared to earn a CDA Credential, a CDA candidate must complete the following:

**Prepare**
- Hold a high school diploma, GED, or currently be enrolled in a high school career/technical program.
- Have 480 hours of experience of working with children in your chosen setting (within three years of applying for CDA).
- Obtain the required CDA book, *The Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program and CDA Competency Standards*, in your chosen setting. It is also recommended to obtain a copy of the CDA Council’s *Essentials for Working with Young Children* and companion *Essentials Workbook*. Available from the CDA Council.
- Complete 120 hours of education (a minimum of ten hours in each of the eight CDA subject areas, any time before CDA application, with a focus on your chosen CDA setting).
- Complete the Professional Portfolio (within six months of applying).
- Locate a CDA Professional Development Specialist (CDA/PDS).
- Become well versed in the CDA Credential process and connect to the Council for Professional Recognition.

**Apply**
- Carefully complete the CDA Application (included in the CDA Competency Standards book).
- Apply online (preferred) or by mail to the CDA Council along with the application fee.
- Await application approval from CDA Council.
- Receive the CDA Council’s Ready to Schedule Notice.

**Demonstrate**
- Verification Visit – Schedule and complete the Verification Visit with a CDA Professional Development Specialist (within 30 days of application approval). The Verification Visit includes reviewing the Professional Portfolio, observing the CDA Candidate as lead teacher (in their designated setting), and reflecting on overall goals.
- CDA Exam – Schedule and complete the CDA Exam (with Pearson-Vue testing center).

**Earn**
- Await notification from CDA Council regarding award of the CDA Credential (the Council reviews results from both the CDA Exam and from the Verification Visit to determine final CDA credentialing).
- Celebrate!

**Renew**
- Prepare for CDA Renewal (within 3 years) and celebrate some more!

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**Need CDA help?**

**Connect with Penn State Better Kid Care!**

Penn State Better Kid Care offers CDA mentoring and encouragement through specifically designated professional development coursework that meets the required 120 hours of training. Better Kid Care’s online professional development lessons align with the eight CDA Subject areas and emphasize the six CDA Core Competencies and thirteen Functional Areas.

Better Kid Care also offers a two hour CDA introductory lesson titled “CDA Credential: An Introduction and Professional Reflection.”

To learn more, visit Better Kid Care’s CDA information page.
http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare/cda

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**CDA resources**

The Council for Professional Recognition
www.cdacouncil.org

CDA National Training Directory
http://www.cdacouncil.org/resource-center/national-training-directory

CDA Council Bookstore
http://store.cdacouncil.org/