

Becoming a Child Development Associate (CDA)

As a student in an occupational early childhood program, you might be wondering, “Why should I work toward acquiring the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential?” The personal and professional rewards are numerous and include:

- Growing as a professional in knowledge and skill.
- Improving yourself in ways that benefit children.
- Developing a support network of professionals experienced with early childhood development and care.
- Evaluating your knowledge and skills against national standards.
- Acquiring a credential that is nationally recognized by early childhood professionals.

The information in this section offers you an overview of the CDA requirements and assessment process. The training and education required, along with the credential itself, can be a real asset in obtaining gainful employment.

CDA Eligibility Requirements

Personal
At least eighteen years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent.
Ability to speak, read, and write well enough to fulfill all CDA requirements.
Must sign a statement of ethical conduct.
Setting
Must be in a state-approved center.
Candidate must work as a lead caregiver for a group of at least eight children ages three to five.
At least ten children must be enrolled in the program with at least two caregivers present.
No more than twenty percent of those enrolled can be children with special needs.
Experience
At least 480 hours work experience with three- to five-year olds in a group setting within five years prior to CDA application.
Education
120 clock hours with at least ten hours in each of the eight prescribed areas ranging from planning a safe, healthy learning environment to principles of child development and learning.

The Credential Process

The Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C. is the sponsoring agency for the CDA credential. The Council created the CDA credentialing program as a way to assure families of quality child care.

The process for obtaining a CDA credential includes the following six steps:

Step 1 Inquiry Once eligibility requirements are met, candidates can order an application packet from the Council for Professional Recognition.

Step 2 Documentation Next, the candidate must put together the required documentation showing his or her skills. This documentation includes:

- **Professional Resource File.** This file includes an autobiographical statement, written examples showing the candidate's skills in the CDA Competency Standards, and a collection of resource materials (curriculum and activity ideas) that will be of use to the candidate on the job.
- **Parent Opinion Questionnaires.** The parent or guardian of each child in the candidate's care completes a questionnaire giving his or her perceptions about the candidate's skill and knowledge.
- **Formal Observation.** A formal observation is completed by an advisor of the candidate's choice—often a program director or a college instructor. The observation follows the criteria established by the Council for Professional Recognition.
- **Early Childhood Studies Review.** This exam is given during the final assessment visit.
- **Oral Interview.** As a final step in the assessment process, a Council representative presents the candidate with ten structured child care situations. The interview is designed to show how the candidate uses knowledge acquired through experience and training.

Step 3 Application After the candidate and his or her advisor collect the necessary documentation, the application for final assessment and required fee is sent to the Council.

Step 4 On-Site Visit A council representative will visit the candidate and the candidate's work site to look at documentation, give the written exam, and conduct the oral interview.

Step 5 Credential Award or Denial A committee from the Council for Professional Recognition reviews all of the candidate's documentation. If all of the documentation is favorable, the Council awards the CDA credential to the candidate. If for some reason the candidate needs further education and training, he or she will be notified concerning the specifics of that education and training.

Step 6 Renewing the CDA Credential Once an individual receives the CDA credential, the initial credential is valid for three years. After the first renewal, the credential can be renewed every five years.

Correlation to the Child Development Associate (CDA) Competency Goals and Functional Areas

The CDA Competency Goals identify the necessary skills for qualified early childhood professionals. They assess the skills necessary in a variety of early childhood settings that include: center-based programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; family day care; and home visitor programs.

The following charts show how *Child Care Today* addresses the goals, competencies, and functional areas as outlined by the Council for Professional Recognition.

Competency Goal I To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment	
Functional Area 1: Safe Candidate provides a safe environment to prevent and reduce injuries.	Chapters 2, 3, 5, 10, 12, 14–16, 23
Functional Area 2: Healthy Candidate promotes good health and nutrition and provides an environment that contributes to the prevention of illness.	Chapters 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11–14, 17, 18
Functional Area 3: Learning Environment Candidate uses space, relationships, materials, and routines as resources for constructing an interesting, secure, and enjoyable environment that encourages play, exploration, and learning.	Chapters 1, 9, 11, 12, 14–23

Competency Goal II To advance physical and intellectual competence	
Functional Area 4: Physical Candidate provides a variety of equipment, activities, and opportunities to promote the physical development of children.	Chapters 4, 8, 11, 12, 14–19, 23
Functional Area 5: Cognitive Candidate provides activities and opportunities that encourage curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving appropriate to the developmental levels and learning styles of children.	Chapters 4, 11–23
Functional Area 6: Communication Candidate actively communicates with children and provides opportunities and support for children to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.	Chapters 3, 9, 13, –20, 22, 23
Functional Area 7: Creative Candidate provides opportunities that stimulate children to play with sound, rhythm, language, materials, space, and ideas in individual ways and to express their creative abilities.	Chapters 12, 19, 20, 22, 23

Competency Goal III

To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance

Functional Area 8: Self

Candidate provides physical and emotional security for each child and helps each child to know, accept, and take pride in himself or herself and to develop a sense of independence.

Chapters 4, 7–9, 11, 14–19, 22

Functional Area 9: Social

Candidate helps each child feel accepted in the group, helps children learn to communicate and get along with others, and encourages feelings of empathy and mutual respect among children and adults.

Chapters 4, 9, 14–18, 20, 22

Functional Area 10: Guidance

Candidate provides a supportive environment in which children can begin to learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and as a group.

Chapters 9, 11, 15–18, 22

Competency Goal IV

To establish positive and productive relationships with families

Functional Area 11: Families

Candidate maintains an open, friendly, and cooperative relationship with each child's family, encourages their involvement in the program, and supports the child's relationship with his or her family.

Chapters 1, 3–6, 8–10, 12, 13, 18, 22

Competency Goal V

To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs

Functional Area 12: Program Management

Candidate is a manager who uses all available resources to ensure an effective program operation. The Candidate is a competent organizer, planner, recordkeeper, communicator, and a cooperative co-worker.

Chapters 2–8, 10, 12, 13

Competency Goal VI

To maintain a commitment to professionalism

Functional Area 13: Professionalism

Candidate makes decisions based on knowledge of early childhood theories and practices, promotes quality in child care services, and takes advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of children and families.

Chapters 1–4, 7, 10, 13

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