



Bipartisan Policy Center

Moving Towards Quality

Child Care Center Facility Assessment Checklist

April 2021

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Children, in their earliest years, learn at a rapid pace, and the quality of the environments in which they learn, play, and grow—including child care and early learning programs—are essential to their positive and healthy development. The quality of child care settings, however, have been long neglected, with many child care facilities barely meeting minimum health and safety standards. Despite the great demand for high-quality child care facilities, many providers lack funding or financing to improve their spaces beyond good enough—an already grave issue exacerbated by a lack of guidance on facility quality. Many states look for minimum standards that keep young children safe and healthy and prevent injury, failing to look for facility characteristics that help promote healthy behaviors and development—from child-sized sinks to access to natural light.

The outset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the importance of child care facilities and necessary measures to keep children and providers safe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided guidance for child care providers—including increased handwashing, enhanced sanitization practices, and new pick-up and drop-off protocols—all of which have implications for the facility's physical space.¹

The Bipartisan Policy Center recognizes the value of high-quality child care environments on children's development.² To help states move forward in defining high-quality child care facilities, BPC developed [model improvement standards](#) for existing center-based child care facilities.³ States can use these as a model for better understanding the quality of child care facilities and to guide future investments.

Further, while little is known about the condition of child care facilities across the nation, states have an opportunity to collect data on infrastructure needs of their child care and early learning facilities that serve their youngest learners. To assist with this effort, BPC developed the *Child Care Center Facility Assessment Checklist*, which identifies the following issue areas integral to keeping young children safe and healthy in early learning spaces:

- Environmental Health and Safety
- Prevention of Fire Hazards
- Emergency Preparedness
- General Facility Maintenance—Ventilation, Plumbing, and Electrical Systems
- Building Exterior and Interior
- Playground Quality
- Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

BPC encourages states to use this checklist as a guide for understanding the most pressing issues impacting the quality of child care facilities. Child care providers too can use this as a self-assessment tool to understand their

own strengths and gaps in facility quality. By collecting this data, states can understand what facility investments are needed to support child care providers in creating and maintaining quality early learning environments for the children and families they serve.

Child Care Center Facility Assessment Checklist

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The facility has documentation verifying the absence of lead in water and paint.
- The facility has been tested and has documentation verifying the absence of asbestos.
- The facility has been tested and has documentation verifying the absence or low levels of radon.
- The facility has fully functional carbon monoxide detectors.
- The facility is free of water damage, dampness, mold, and mold odor or is implementing a remediation plan to address the cause of these issues.
- The facility is free from accessible hazardous or toxic cleaning supplies, uses nontoxic cleaning products when appropriate, and implements an integrated pest management system.
- The telephone number for the poison control center is posted and readily accessible in case of emergencies.

PREVENTION OF FIRE HAZARDS

- The facility has functioning smoke detectors and fire extinguishers throughout the building. Batteries are tested monthly.
- The facility has documentation of monthly fire drills.
- All emergency exits and pathways are convenient, accessible, unobstructed, and clearly identified.

- Emergency lighting is available when normal lighting systems fail and is tested monthly.
- Evacuation plans and routes are posted throughout the facility.
- The facility has documentation of having passed a fire inspection within the last 12 months.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- The child care program has a comprehensive written emergency preparedness plan.
- The facility has an emergency preparedness kit with adequate supplies to address immediate needs and to sustain children and staff for an extended period of time.
- The facility has a working landline telephone.
- The program has conducted—or is in the process of conducting—a hazard and threat assessment of the facility and its perimeter, and has taken steps to mitigate potential hazards in coordination with community leaders, emergency management, and public health officials.

GENERAL FACILITY MAINTENANCE— VENTILATION, PLUMBING, AND ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS

- An appropriate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system is in place, is in good working order, and has a preventive maintenance plan.
- Appropriate room temperatures and humidity levels are maintained in all rooms.
- Facility pipes and plumbing fixtures are free from defects and in accordance with building regulatory guidance.
- Sewage systems are inspected in accordance with state and local regulations.
- The facility has a waste management plan for containing and removing garbage.
- Any facility construction, remodeling, or painting is done in areas where children are not present.

BUILDING EXTERIOR

- The building exterior—including the facility’s exterior walls and roof, stairs, and sidewalks—is in good condition and is absent of health and safety hazards.
- The exterior of the facility is free from standing or pooling water, which can become a breeding ground for insects.
- The parking lot is in good condition and includes a safe pathway for young children and families.
- The facility is free of poisonous plants.

BUILDING INTERIOR

- Stairways used by children have non-slip treads and handrails placed at an appropriate height for young children.
- The facility has a reception area with a clear view of anyone entering the building.
- All high furnishings are securely anchored.
- Each classroom has one or more operable windows that allow children to see directly outside.
- Each classroom has varied lighting types.
- Classroom spaces are configured to ensure full supervision of children.
- Classrooms are large enough to provide adequate space for each child.
- Classrooms have well-defined crib areas that allow young children to rest comfortably from the group while still ensuring easy supervision.
- For classrooms with high ceilings, acoustical tiles, and other sound dampening features are used to minimize noise.
- Doors have view panels for safe entry into or exit from rooms.
- Designated space for active indoor play is available.
- Children’s bathrooms and diaper changing areas are located in or near the classrooms and allow for easy supervision of children.
- Classrooms have sinks that are accessible for young children.

- The program's office space is sufficient and inviting for the effective administration of the program, including space to meet privately with staff and parents.
- The kitchen area is separate from the other areas of the facility.
- The kitchen meets program needs with a sink used specifically for food preparation and handwashing.
- Kitchen equipment and appliances are installed, operated, and maintained according to manufacturers' instructions and are in good working order.
- The facility has sufficient space for program operations outside of child care classrooms.
- The facility has an isolation area for children who are ill.

PLAYGROUND QUALITY

- The facility has documentation from a certified playground safety inspector that the play area complies with safety guidelines.
- The program has a documented cleaning schedule for the playground areas.
- Outside play areas are clean and free from health and safety hazards.
- Play structures and equipment are in good repair and are inspected daily for hazards.
- Outside play areas are designed so all sections are visible to staff and can be easily supervised.
- Outside play areas have secure fencing.
- Elevated structures and platforms have guardrails and/or barrier rails.
- Young children can access quality outside play areas directly from their classroom or from a nearby corridor using pathways that are unobstructed, free of hazards, do not collect excessive water, and are in good repair.
- There is convenient access from the playground area to a bathroom, handwashing sink, and drinking water.
- There is convenient access to a telephone and first aid kit in case of emergencies.

- Outside play areas are organized so preschool play areas are physically separated from infant and toddler play areas.
- Outside play areas incorporate several clearly defined zones—active zone, quiet play, group activities, individual play, etc.—with safe play equipment, ample open space for imaginative play, and clear pathways throughout the space.
- Appropriate safety surfaces and mats are used to prevent injury from falls.
- Outside play areas have sufficient shade through natural or manufactured shade elements.
- A variety of natural features—including gardens, trees, child-safe plants, small hills or slopes, rocks, boulders, and bird feeders or houses—are incorporated into the playground area.
- Sandboxes are in good condition and covered when not in use.
- Outside play areas have sufficient drainage with no evidence of standing water or erosion.
- Outside play areas have secure storage for riding toys, unused equipment, and other toys.
- Outside play areas should be located away from open bodies of water.
- Outside play areas are inclusive and accessible to young children with disabilities.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

- At least one bathroom for each age group meets ADA accessibility standards.
- Drinking fountains must be designed so they are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Accessible parking spaces for providers and parents with disabilities must be made available.
- The facility has continuous and unobstructed pathways—including ramps and curbs—for passage throughout the interior and exterior of the building.
- The play areas are ADA compliant and accessible and inclusive to children with disabilities.

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open*, July 23, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>.
- 2 Bipartisan Policy Center, “Child Care Facilities: Quality Matters,” 2020. Available at: https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BPC_2020_ECH_ChildCareFacilities_Final.pdf.
- 3 The model improvement standards were developed in partnership with BPC’s Early Learning Facilities Working Group, whose members bring expertise in child development, child care financing, community development, architecture and design, and construction. This work is also drawing from existing design guides and reports developed by Community Development Financial Institution partners who focus on child care facilities, including Low Income Investment Fund, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and Reinvestment Fund.



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