



**Georgia Dept  
of Early Care  
and Learning**  
BRIGHT FROM THE START



# Child Care Services Winter 2025 Newsletter

Dear Child Care Provider,

Happy 2025! I hope the new year is your best year yet, and that the next twelve months are full of wonderful moments with the children and families you serve.

The new year always brings a time of reflection and an opportunity to plan for the future. Even if you are not one to make formal resolutions, there are some things you can do to have a fulfilling and successful year ahead. Here are a few ideas, specifically for early childhood caregivers:

- **Take care of yourself** - This will mean something different to everyone. Do what you need to do to be the best you, for the children in your care, for your family, and for yourself! It may mean getting more sleep, eating healthier, being more active, etc. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it makes you feel better.
- **Engage in play** - Take time to play with the children on their level. Sit on the floor and read a story or sing and dance with them. They will love the interaction, and you will be fulfilled too!
- **Get organized** - You may not have time to organize the whole child care program or each child care space, but try to make the areas caregivers and children frequently use well thought out and more tidy. Organization will make your days easier.
- **Get rid of "stuff"** - Clutter can cause chaos in a child care space. Eliminate items that are no longer needed, used, or in disrepair.
- **Reconcile paperwork** - Ensure that children's enrollment information and required documents are up-to-date. Ask parents to make necessary updates to work/contact information.

Also remember: Taking just a few minutes to mindfully plan your day will go a long way to help you and the children in your care have a great day! CCS hopes you have an exceptional year ahead!

All the best,

*Pam Stevens*

Pam Stevens  
Deputy Commissioner



**Child Care  
SERVICES**



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## Important Reminder for Programs with License Exemptions

On October 1, 2024, the exemption rules were updated. Programs shall complete the online self-assessment through [DECAL KOALA](#) accounts, or on the DECAL Exemption website to determine exemption or licensing requirements.

Effective February 1, 2025, exemption categories that are not required to apply for an exemption and maintain a DECAL KOALA account, will be closed. The categories that will remain open are programs that hold an exemption category 1-Government Owned and Operated, category 5-Faith-Based Accredited or Religious Schools, and category 7-Day Camp and School Break programs.

For additional information or questions, please email [ExemptionRuleChanges@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:ExemptionRuleChanges@dec.al.ga.gov).

Frequently Asked  
Questions

Visit Exemptions Website

Self Assessment  
Overview



### Mealtime Supervision: Supervising and Teaching

by Jennifer Waters, CCS Technical Assistance Unit Manager

Mealtimes can be challenging. Children are hungry. Lunch is sometimes late. Naptime can't come soon enough, and teachers are tired by the time lunch comes. We get



that. So, we wanted to share some tips on how to make mealtimes one of the *best* times of your day, enjoyable for both teachers and children.

First, let's look at the licensing requirements and build from there. Snack and mealtimes require involvement and participation by teachers, not just oversight. Licensing rules state that, "Staff shall be attentive and participating with all children during mealtimes and shall be seated within an arm's length away from children 36-months of age and younger." This rule is in place to prevent tragedies and child deaths due to choking, and as such it is a core rule for both Child Care Learning Centers and Family Child Care Learning Homes (CCLC 591-1-1-.32 (7); FCCLH 290-2-3-.07 (17)).

Beyond licensing requirements for supervision, mealtimes are also an excellent time for relationship building and teaching. Would you enjoy sitting down to lunch with someone and sitting in silence with no conversation? Children do not enjoy that either. It is uncomfortable and makes mealtimes strained and stressful. Meals are a time for eating and pleasant social interaction. Those social interactions both serve to teach, as children practice their social and language skills, and to help develop positive relationships for children with their caregivers and peers. As conversations naturally occur, children and caregivers learn more about each other, deepening their personal connections. Conversations can be about any topic of interest to the children. They are not limited just to the meal being eaten. There are only so many conversations you can have about food, and the entire mealtime should be full of conversations and interactions with children. So, vary the conversation, just as you would if you were sitting down to a meal with a friend.

Here are some overarching concepts and tips for success to consider and share with your teachers as you get started. These will help programs both meet the licensing requirements consistently and use mealtimes for teaching and relationship-building.



### **Sit and eat with the children.**

When caregivers sit and eat with children, they are able to be attentive and participate with children during meals and snacks. This increases safety, provides time for building relationships through social interactions with children, and allows caregivers to model enjoying nutritious foods.

### **Provide support for caregivers.**

To enable caregivers to sit and eat with children and to stay within arm's reach of children 36 months and younger who are eating/drinking, supports need to be provided, such as comfortable adult seating at the table and additional staffing for larger groups.

### **Make it social.**

Making meals and snacks social increases enjoyment and supervision of children during the meal. It is easier to actively supervise when caregivers are directly engaged and participating with children, having conversations and talking with them about topics that interest them as they eat. These interactions are also natural learning and relationship building opportunities as

children use their social and language skills.

### Tips for Success:

- Focus only on mealtime supervision during meals and snacks and refrain from unrelated classroom duties and tasks, such as putting out mats, cleaning up, etc.
- Hold infants and young toddlers while they are drinking their bottles and feed these children according to their individual schedule needs. Trying to feed all infants at one time is stressful for the children and the caregivers.
- For children eating table food, place all food and drinks on the table prior to calling the children to the table. Serve drinks at the same time as table food to help prevent choking and to aid in healthy digestion.
- Begin handwashing after the meal arrives and allow children to sit and eat as soon as they are done handwashing and a caregiver is within arms' reach to supervise. This helps to prevent long waits that often lead to behavioral issues and discontent for children when they are hungry, and it helps to ensure that their hands remain clean.
- Provide space at each table and an adult chair for a teacher to sit at the table, eat with the children, and have social conversations with the children.
- Consider serving food already plated or utilizing family style dining. These methods allow children to sit and eat, while everyone is seated at the table, reducing the need to leave the table during the meal.
- Second helpings need to be within reach or on the table to prevent leaving the table when children request them.
- A caregiver must stay within arm's reach of children 36 months and younger who are eating. This is easiest when it is a program-wide practice for children of all ages. That way, if caregivers must move around during mealtimes due to absences or staff changes, they are all familiar with what is required and practice it consistently.
- Consider scheduling meals/snacks for children on individualized schedules or in small groups, rather than all at once, to make staying within arm's reach easier to accomplish.
- In Child Care Learning Centers (CCLC), if there is more than one caregiver in the classroom and the group size allows one caregiver to remain within arm's reach of all children during meals/snacks, divide duties so one caregiver is always with children who are eating and drinking and one caregiver is supervising children who are transitioning away from the tables, such as when they are handwashing or playing.
- If multiple tables are needed for larger group sizes, multiple caregivers will need to be seated so that all children at all tables are within arm's reach when eating and drinking.
- In CCLC classrooms with only one caregiver, work with the Director to get mealtime support to ensure supervision requirements can be met.
- Floaters or the cook can place all food and drinks on the table prior to the caregiver and children handwashing and coming over.
- Floaters can help supervise children who are not eating.
- Schedule mealtimes to occur at staggered times, rather than all at the same time, to increase options for floater support.





For more information on mealtime supervision and best practices, please check out our [Rules & Regulations Indicator Manual](#). It provides in-depth explanations for each rule, what indicators of compliance consultants look for during a regulatory visit, and best practices to help programs succeed in sustained compliance of each rule. The Rules & Regulations Indicator Manual can be found on the DECAL website at [Rules and Regulations](#), then by clicking on the Rule Guidance tab. A Mealtime Supervision printable handout is also available on our website at [What is Technical Assistance within Child Care Services?](#)

## Active Play in Cold Weather

As winter arrives and temperatures drop, we often stay indoors to keep warm. Parents and educators share concerns about children playing outside in the cold. Physical activity is crucial year-round in supporting and helping children and adults boost cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles and bones, and improve mental wellbeing. Staying active, especially on gray, cold days, is essential.

Winter's embrace offers a world of possibilities for indoor/outdoor exploration and play. Here are fun and entertaining ideas to engage children, educators, and staff in physical activity as an everyday routine. Watch the temperature and wind chill, and limit outdoors to 20-30 minutes if it's extremely cold.



### Indoor Winter Activities:

- **Color Painting:** Ignite creativity and sensory skills with color painting, where children can express their artistic side while learning about different colors. This activity is a fantastic way to explore their artistic expression and understand color, using the white bond paper as their canvas.
- **Toddler Snowstorm:** This activity from SHAPE America is a fun and engaging way for toddlers to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. It involves rolling and catching cotton balls, followed by creating a "snowstorm" by tossing the cotton balls into the air. This activity helps toddlers improve coordination and interaction with others.
- **Winter-Themed Crafts:** Enhance fine motor skills with winter-themed crafts. Crafting activities such as cutting, gluing and assembling various materials not only aid in developing hand-eye coordination, but also foster creativity, allowing children to create their own winter wonderlands.
- **Story Time:** Read aloud ["Winter is Here," by Kevin Henkes](#). A celebration of the sights, sounds, and smells of the season, this is perfect for young readers. Snow falls, animals burrow, and children prepare for the wonders winter brings.



- **Tummy Time:** An exercise for infants to 12 months, tummy time is an activity that needs supervised time when an infant is awake and alert, lying on her/his belly. Opportunities for tummy time should last as long as possible to help infants learn to enjoy it and build their strength. For infants who are not used to it or do not enjoy it, each period of tummy time can start at 1–2 minutes, and build up to 5-10 minutes over time.
- **Simon Says:** This is a fun classic game that encourages active play and helps in exercising listening skills. Although Simon Says is traditionally a child's game, kids of all ages can play and enjoy the game. The fun increases with the number of players!
- **Let's Get Moving:** Play "Moving Along with Elmo" and enjoy the moves together. Sing Along: Substitute "Elmo" with the kids' names. For example, if the child's name is Alex, you can sing "Alex's got the moves!" Have fun dancing and singing along!

## Outdoor Winter Activities:

- **Winter Nature Walks:** Encourage the children to observe and describe what they see, hear, and feel. Bring along a small bag to collect interesting natural items like pinecones, acorns, or smooth stones. After the walk, you can discuss their findings and even create a nature collage with the items collected.
- **Sensory Bin Winter Scavenger Hunt:** Create a winter-theme scavenger hunt list with items like evergreen trees, stones, falling leaves, etc. Encourage children to use their five senses to experience the cold winter environment.
- **Snowball Toss:** Create “snowballs” using soft balls, lightweight materials like yarn. Set up targets, such as buckets or hula hoops, and let children practice tossing the item into the target, enhancing both coordination and motor skills.
- **Soft Balls Bowling:** Set up bowling pins using empty plastic bottles. Children can take turns rolling soft balls and knocking down the “pins.” This game is perfect for promoting physical activity, coordination, and friendly competition among young children.

## Physical Activity Resources

- Active Play in Cold Weather ([English](#) & [Spanish](#))
- [Dressing Kids for the Winter](#)
- [Understand the Weather: Child Care Weather Watch](#)

When playing outside in cold weather, children should dress in layers to stay warm. Encourage families to provide hats and gloves to wear, especially below 32°F. As educators, enjoy the winter fun and adventures. Always prioritize children's safety during any physical activity. Let's keep moving!

Share your #ColdWinterActivities, #Outdoor/Indoor stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at [tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov](mailto:tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov)!





## Clean Water for Georgia Kids<sup>TM</sup>

The Clean Water for Georgia Kids is a **free** Georgia Department of Education program, helping to identify and get the lead out of drinking and cooking water where children learn and play.

### **Myths vs. Facts: Understanding Lead in Water**

There are several myths about testing lead in drinking and cooking water that can delay essential action. Read on to learn more:





## MYTH

We don't need to test, because our water doesn't smell, look, feel, or taste funny.

It's too much money — if we find lead in water, it's an expensive fix.

I already tested one tap and it was fine.

## FACT

You cannot see, smell, or taste lead in water. The only way to know is to test!

There are no-cost and low-cost solutions to lead in drinking water, including regularly flushing water or only using cold water.

It's important to test every tap used for drinking and cooking because levels of lead vary from tap to tap!

### How you can participate:



Attend a brief training webinar at <https://bit.ly/3jSMxg6>



Enroll at [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia)



Collect and ship your water samples, and receive your free results!

Together with your help, we can protect and make positive changes in the lives of young children across Georgia. Sign up today for a brighter tomorrow!



Visit Our Website:

[www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia)



### Helping Children Navigate Social Situations with Confidence and Kindness

by Maria Davis-Pierre LMHC

Social awareness is an essential skill for kids, helping them navigate the world with empathy, kindness, and understanding. When children begin to understand how

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others are feeling, they are showing empathy. And having empathy makes it more likely they'll help others and show compassion. As caregivers, we have the opportunity to help our kids recognize and appreciate others' experiences and perspectives while encouraging them to honor their own ways of interacting and connecting with the world.

## Provider Payment Estimator Tool Now Available

CAPS and Quality Rated providers can [download the FREE CAPS-QR Payments Estimator Tool](#) from the [Thriving Child Care Business Academy Resources Page](#) to get an estimate of their rates under the new payments structure that went into effect this fall. There's also an [Instruction Guide with FAQs](#) posted on the Resources page to help them use the Estimator Tool.

For more personalized, in-depth help, providers can [register for the FREE Navigating the CAPS-QR Policy Changes Small Study Group Track as well as Individual Coaching](#) led by trainers from Civitas Strategies. The registration link can also be used to sign up for any of the 10 other FREE Small Study Groups offered in the Academy. Providers who complete a small study group series will be eligible for a \$150 stipend and four (4) state-approved training hours. No stipends or training hours are given for Individual Coaching technical assistance, however.

- For more help with CAPS questions and supports, [contact the CAPS Provider Relations Team](#) or call 1-833-442-2277 and follow the prompts for Provider Relations. There's also important CAPS information and updates on the [Provider Relations web page](#).
- For more help with QR questions and supports, contact [QR Provider Support](#) or call 1-855-800-7747.

## Consumer Product Safety Commission Children's Products Recalls



Sign up today to receive up-to-date email notifications whenever children's products are recalled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

[Click Here to Enroll](#)



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