

Creating a Family Handbook



DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

Learn why this collection of policies is vital to your child care business and how to draft one.

Family handbooks are a vital part of your child care business as they contain policies that will complement your child care agreement or contract. These policies are the “rules” that you, your staff, and the families you serve will follow so outlining them clearly is key as it lets everyone know what they can expect of you as well as what you should expect of them. The following guide will help you to understand why a family handbook is so critical for your business, what it should include, and how you can create your own.

Why is a Family Handbook Important?

Your family handbook serves multiple purposes: it establishes trust by emphasizing safety and quality care, clarifies policies and procedures, promotes effective communication, and empowers families to engage in their child's education. Without it, miscommunication, inconsistency, legal risks, and operational challenges may arise, affecting both families and staff.

How do I get started?

Creating a comprehensive family handbook can be done in four simple steps:

- **Step 1: Write down your services, policies, and procedures**
- **Step 2: Plan what to include**
- **Step 3: Organize your information**
- **Step 4: Seek input from others**

Step 1: Write down your services, policies, and procedures

The bulk of the content you include in a comprehensive family handbook for your child care business will be important information about your services, policies, and procedures, so getting this written down will get the majority of your handbook completed quickly.

Here is some commonly included information that you should consider:

- **Welcome Letter:**
 - Begin with a warm and welcoming introduction, thanking families for choosing your child care business and expressing your commitment to providing quality care.

- **Philosophy and Mission:**
 - Outline your child care business's philosophy and mission statement, explaining your approach to early childhood education and the values you uphold. If your program includes religious programming, share that here.
- **Program Information:**
 - **Age Groups Served:** Clearly state the age groups your child care business accommodates.
 - **Hours of Operation:** Specify your operating hours, including any extended care options, overnight care, or weekend availability.
 - **Daily Schedule:** Provide a general outline of the daily routine(s), including activities, meals, nap times, and free play.
 - **State Requirements:** Note if and under what rules you are regulated and explain any accreditations.
 - **Mandated Reporter:** Remind families that you are a mandated reporter, what that means, and entails.
 - **Staff Qualifications and Training:** Provide an overview of the qualifications, credentials, background checks, and first aid/CPR certification required for everyone involved in caring for children.
 - If you are a family child care provider, list who else might care for the children and under what circumstances.
 - **Curriculum and Learning Goals:** Detail your educational program, including learning objectives, developmental activities, and any enrichment programs.
 - **Nondiscrimination:** Clearly share your nondiscrimination policy.
- **Enrollment and Admission:**
 - **Enrollment Process:** Explain the steps involved in enrolling a child, including necessary paperwork and fees.
 - **Health and Immunization Requirements:** Clearly state your health and immunization policy for children attending your business.
 - **Emergency Contacts:** Obtain and maintain emergency contact information for each child, including alternate contacts. Describe how and when these might be used.
- **Holidays and Vacation:**
 - **Holidays and Vacation Periods:** Share a list of holidays and other times that the business will be closed during the year. Also, provide information on how other closures will be relayed to families. (For example, you may alert them about closure for your summer vacation by March 1 of the given year or how you will notify them of weather-related closures.)
 - **Fees During Closure:** Explain how fees are charged, or not, during holidays and other closures.

- **Birthdays and Holiday celebrations:** Provide information on how families can celebrate their children's birthdays and when and how holidays will be celebrated in your business (for example will you have a holiday party or specifically a Christmas policy).
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:**
 - **Handling of Personal Information:** explain how you will keep personal information about the child and family safely stored and who it may be shared with (such as licensing). Include any procedures for maintaining confidentiality and privacy, including guidelines for staff interactions and communication.
- **Nutrition and Meals:**
 - **Meal Requirement:** Let families know what meals they are responsible for (if any). List any meals/snacks your program provides.
 - **Allergies and Other Guidelines:** Provide information on any restrictions on families' meals and snacks (such as a peanut-free policy).
 - **Accommodations:** Share any dietary accommodations you are willing to make and how families can request them.
 - **Child and Adult Care Food Program Participation:** Consider sharing if you participate in the CACFP and what that means for the children in your care and your business.
- **Health and Safety:**
 - **Illness Policy:** Explain your policy regarding sick children, including when a child should be kept at home and when a child can return to your program. Outline the procedures for handling illnesses when children are in your care.
 - **Provider Illness Policy:** Explain the procedure for when you need to take a sick day – how is it communicated, when will families be notified, and whether you charge families for this day.
 - **Medication Administration:** Describe the process for administering medication and administering care for chronic conditions, if needed, including required forms and protocols.
 - **Allergies:** Request information about any allergies or dietary restrictions your staff needs to be aware of and share how you manage care.
- **Transportation and Field Trips:**
 - **Transportation:** Explain how children are picked up and dropped off, expectations on timeliness and behavior during transportation, and how any emergencies or unexpected events related to transportation (such as

your van breaking down) are handled. Also, include any consent forms needed for transportation services.

- **Off-Site Activities:** Share how off-site activities, including field trips are handled, including consent forms, transportation methods, car seats, seat belts, and safety protocols.
- **Communication and Involvement:**
 - **Communication:** Outline how you will communicate with families, including regular updates, newsletters, and family-teacher conferences.
 - **Sharing images and information:** Let families know how and when you would share children's images (if at all) and the consent forms required for you to do so.
 - **Social Media policy:** Share with families how you plan to use social media in your child care business.
 - **Involvement Opportunities:** Encourage family involvement in activities or volunteer opportunities.
- **Discipline Policy:**
 - **Behavior Expectations:** Clearly state the behavior expectations for families and children and how behavioral issues will be addressed.
 - **Positive Guidance:** Emphasize your approach to positive behavior guidance practices and redirection rather than punishment.
- **Safety and Security:**
 - **Pick-Up and Drop-Off Procedures:** Explain your procedures for drop-off and pick-up to ensure the safety of the children. Include the times, authorized individuals who may pick up the child, car seat requirements, and any security measures in place, such as sign-in/sign-out systems or identification requirements.
 - **Emergency policy:** Share your policies for handling emergencies that require staying in and those where you need to leave the building.
- **Fees and Payment:**
 - **Tuition and Fees:** Clearly outline the fees for your child care services, including any additional charges for special programs or events.
 - **Payment Schedule:** Specify the payment frequency and accepted payment methods.
 - **Late Payment Policy:** Detail your policy for late payments, including any penalties or late fees.
- **Engagement Policies:**
 - **Grievance Procedure:** Provide a process for families to follow if they have concerns or complaints.

- **Termination Policy:** Clearly state the circumstances under which the child care business may terminate a child's enrollment.
- **Appeals:** State if there is any process for appeals of termination and how any final fees will be billed.
- **Acknowledgment Form:** Include a section for families to sign, indicating they have read and understood the contents of the handbook.

Step 2: Plan what to include

Now that you have the bulk of your content out of the way, think about what else you might want to include. These sections can truly help you to define your child care business and highlight your values, so think through the message that you want to convey in your content. Some examples of things you might wish to include are:

- Your value proposition (what makes your business unique)
- Opportunities for family involvement
- Enrichment programs and special events that you offer
- Cultural sensitivity and inclusion information
- What to expect when children graduate from your care
- A list of useful community resources
- Frequently asked questions
- How to provide feedback

Step 3: Organize your information

Next, take a moment to decide how you want to organize the information you've planned to include. Organize the information in a logical and easy-to-navigate manner, such as starting with an introduction, followed by specific sections including those noted previously in this tool. As you organize these pieces, consider the following questions:

1. Is there information that should be prioritized or that families are likely to look for on a regular basis? If so, consider putting this information at the very beginning or end of the document to make it easy to find quickly.
2. Does the order make sense? Ensure a logical flow of information as this will help readers navigate the handbook and find the information they need more effectively.
3. Is the document easy to read? Simplify wording and text wherever you can. Also, using headings, bullet points, icons, and charts, can help enhance readability and comprehension. A table of contents may be helpful to easily find policy topics.

In this step of the process, the thoughtful organization ensures that your handbook becomes a user-friendly resource. By prioritizing key information, maintaining logical flow, and enhancing readability, you'll create a well-structured guide that families and staff can easily navigate and benefit from.

Step 4: Seek input from others

Now that you've successfully written and organized the components of your handbook, the next step is to refine it further through the valuable input of others. This collaborative phase enhances the overall quality and effectiveness of your guide.

- **Seek Legal and Professional Input, as needed:** Particularly when uncertain about specific policies, it's advisable to involve legal counsel in reviewing both individual policies and the handbook as a whole. This ensures alignment with local laws and regulations governing the child care business, mitigating potential legal risks.
- **Invite Family and Staff Input:** Actively engage with your child care community by seeking feedback from current families and caregivers. This ensures that the handbook addresses their practical needs and concerns, making it a relevant and user-focused resource. In addition, involve your staff in the review process to ensure that the handbook accurately represents current practices. This collaborative effort results in a more accurate, comprehensive, and ultimately, more useful document for everyone involved.
- **Do a final edit** for spelling errors, missing words, or wrong words. We all know spell check can be a help, but when typing quickly one may miss a word change substituted by the computer. Having an error-free handbook increases your professional image.

How can I ensure families know about and use the handbook?

Your handbook is only effective if everyone knows it exists as well as how to use it. There are several steps that you can take to ensure families and staff are aware of the handbook and use it effectively:

1. **Provide the information on day 1:** Provide physical copies of your handbook to families when they enroll and staff when they onboard. Include an introduction to the handbook in family and staff orientation sessions.
2. **Incorporate an acknowledgment statement:** Encourage active engagement with your handbook by including a section where families and staff are required to acknowledge that they have read and understood the contents of the handbook.
3. **Inform families how new/edited policies will be shared** – Outline for families how they will be notified of new/edited policies and the time frame by which these new policies are effective.
4. **Offer digital accessibility:** Making the handbook available on your website or PDF document can enhance convenience and usage since many families prefer digital resources.
5. **Include multilingual support:** If your child care community is diverse and includes families with different languages, consider offering translations to ensure inclusivity and understanding.

- 6. Use your handbook consistently:** Most importantly, continue to use the handbook as a reference point in your interactions with families.

Next Steps

Now that your handbook has been written and distributed to families and staff, ensure you take the steps to keep your handbook up to date. Child care policies and regulations may change over time, so make sure to review and update the handbook as changes arise and review it end-to-end at least once a year.

Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

[Georgia Licensing Rules and Regulations](#)

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For questions about coaching or study groups: Email GAcoaching@civstrat.com

To Find Other ECE Resources: Visit the [DECAL Website](#)

For General Questions about the Academy: Email thriving@decals.ga.gov

For More Information:

[Family Child Care Learning Home Rules and Regulations](#)

[Child Care Learning Center Rules and Regulations](#)