

What I Wish I Had Packed for the Journey of Becoming a Family Child Care Provider

By Sonja Crum Knight

I began my career in early childhood education as a family child care provider more than 13 years ago. I moved from an unrelated field in the corporate sector. Embarking on a new career as a family child care provider was very much like a journey. As I traveled, I grew as a professional by seeking a master's degree in [National Louis University's early childhood administration program](#). I also met wonderful mentors who encouraged and supported my desire to grow and learn. Most importantly, I had the pleasure of opening my home and heart to many families whose challenges and triumphs still inspire me today. I remain honored and humbled by their trust.

However, when I decided to change careers and offer care and learning to children in my home, **I did so equipped with little more than my good intentions and a desire to provide meaningful service to my community.** As I reflect on the journey, I now realize a career change of any kind requires preparation, some packing of resources, and knowledge to ensure success. Good intentions are not enough.

In my current role as a program assessor, I have come to view family child care quality through three lenses: Process quality, structural quality, and the quality of business practices. Process quality relates to the quality of interactions in the care environment. Some indicators of structural quality are teacher education, curriculum, and materials. The quality of business practices relates to the benefits derived from the family child care business and the protections that are in place to ensure stability and sustainability. In my experience, these multiple lenses of quality are interconnected. Warm and nurturing interactions along with rich language exchanges are vital indicators of process quality, yet it is difficult to foster process quality without the foundation provided by the elements of structural quality, and without sound business practices, program viability is compromised. Many a fretful day and worried night might have been spared had I possessed this knowledge at the start of my career as a family child care provider.

It would seem that the most fruitful journeys begin when we have packed sufficiently. **I now know that to create and maintain a high quality family child care business one must prepare in advance of the journey as well as while travelling.** Securing a license is only the first step of the journey.

Vital next steps for the new family child care provider include:

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1. **Become a member of the organizations that support our profession** like the [National Association for Family Child Care](#) (NAFCC) and the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC). These organizations have a legacy of advocating for high quality care and education for all children.
2. **Immerse yourself in the vast historical and theoretical knowledge base our profession is built upon.** Learn about the theories and practices that define high quality early childhood education. You can do this by pursuing early childhood education course work at your local community college and by attending professional development workshops offered by your local child care resource and referral agency. Continuously build upon the skills and knowledge these resources provide by doing your own independent research and reading. Stay connected to current research by visiting the peer-reviewed online journal, [Early Childhood Research and Practice](#). Our profession is built upon a legacy of research, theory, and practice; seek and use this knowledge to guide your thoughts about the type of care and education you want to provide.
3. **Access the tools used to assess family child care quality and business practices.** Utilize these tools as a road map for developing or enhancing your family child care business. First, review these tools and note how practices are described at the low, mid, and high levels of quality. Next, set benchmarks for what you would like to achieve by assessing where you currently stand in relation to the indicators. Finally, evaluate what resources you need to move toward the indicators that describe higher levels of quality.
 - The [Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale-Revised](#) (FCCERS-R) assesses process quality and some aspects of structural quality across 38 items. The items in the scale represent best practices in health, development, and education. The scale is designed to assess child care practices within the unique context of family child care.
 - The [Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care](#) (BAS) assesses business and professional practices across 10 items. The items in the scale represent best practices in family child care management.
4. **Acquire the tools to help you put these practices into place.** Do not reinvent the wheel! There are a variety of publications and other resources designed specifically for family child care to help guide your ongoing process, structural, and business quality improvements.
 - [Tom Copeland](#), the nation's leading expert on the business of family child care, has published a wide range of books and conducts trainings on the best practices of running a family child care business. Utilizing these resources will help you align your business with the professional practices described in the BAS.
 - [RedLeaf Publishing](#) offers a variety of resources and publications for family child care. Everything from the amazing [Calendar-Keeper](#), a record keeping system for family child care, to numerous helpful books on curriculum and environments.

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- Build your program management and early childhood education library by sourcing the following books: [The Ultimate Child Care Marketing Guide](#), [Social and Emotional Tools: SET for Life](#), [Director's Toolbox](#)
5. **To set the stage for your success, seek technical assistance from specialists at your local child care resource and referral agency.** Technical specialists can help you distill the knowledge you have acquired by providing on the ground assistance in your family child care environment.

What you need to know most is that you are not alone; family child care is a vital delivery model of care and education that exists within a long tradition community care. The more you know at the start, the better equipped you will be to fully serve the children and families in your program.

Bon Voyage!

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