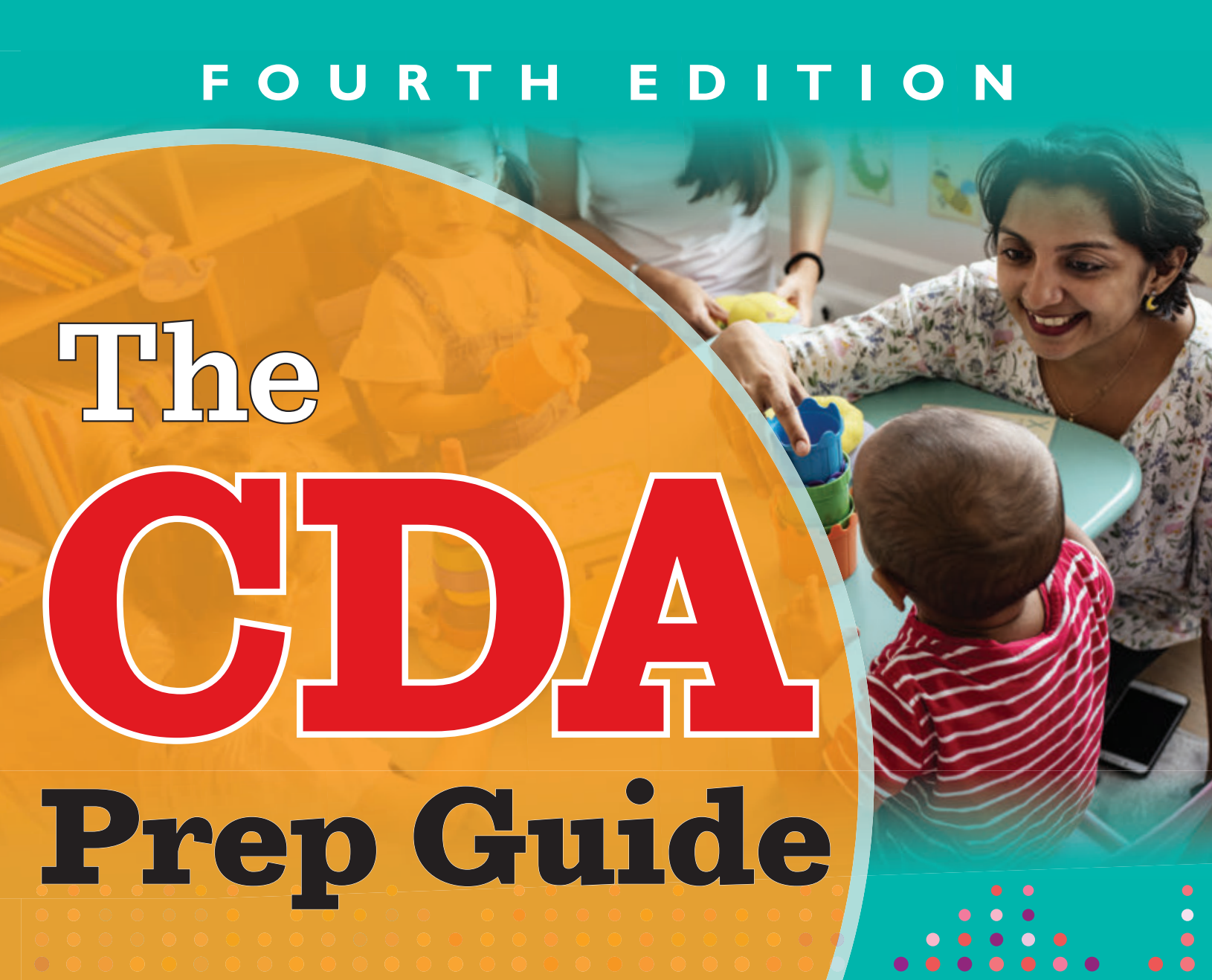


FOURTH EDITION



The  
**CDA**  
Prep Guide

**The Complete Review Manual**

Debra Pierce

The CDA Prep Guide, Fourth Edition



**The**  
**CDA**  
**Prep Guide**

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# Introduction

EARNING A CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE (CDA) CREDENTIAL is a valuable way to begin or continue your journey in lifelong learning. You may be just starting out as an Early Childhood educator or you may have years of experience in the field. Either way, the process you are about to begin will enrich your work with young children.

Becoming an Early Childhood professional takes commitment and a desire to do one's best to meet the quality standards that define membership in a particular profession. What you don't need is a feeling of frustration or confusion. The step-by-step instruction in this book will help make the entire CDA process easier and less stressful.

## **About the Fourth Edition**

In the interest of providing CDA candidates with the most up-to-date help and information possible, this fourth edition of *The CDA Prep Guide* reflects recent changes to the Council for Professional Recognition's CDA National Credentialing Program.

The entire new process is integrated, with each part interwoven with the others in some way, requiring a good deal of reflection—about what has been included in the Professional Portfolio and about the candidate's own philosophy of teaching young children.

Candidates will create a Professional Portfolio. The Resource Collection is again arranged to align with each of the Competency Standards.



The CDA Professional Portfolio is now a resource you can actually use in your work with young children and families. Feel free to continue to add resources to the portfolio after earning your credential.

Candidates will locate resources, such as translation services and agencies that work with children who have special needs. These resources are grouped together into one section of the Professional Portfolio designated as the Family Resource Guide.

The CDA candidate is expected to take on more personal responsibility in the credentialing process. Locating a Professional Development Specialist (also called the PD Specialist) and scheduling the CDA Exam and verification visit are now tasks for the candidate to complete. The candidate will also review the Family Questionnaires that she has collected and will interpret the feedback as it applies to her practices. At the verification visit, it will be the candidate who reflects on her professional strengths and areas for future growth in order to set personal goals and then strategies for meeting them. This personal responsibility gives the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate the characteristics of a professional in the field—making decisions, reflecting and evaluating, and taking steps to improve practices.

This fourth edition of *The CDA Prep Guide* will help you navigate the new CDA process and become comfortable with it, so you can accurately complete the requirements and be fully ready for a successful verification visit.

## **Pursuing a CDA Credential**

CDA candidates have had varying amounts of child care training, through college classes, in-service trainings, or attendance at a variety of workshops. Many are working on a degree or have already earned a degree in a related area of study. Those who are new to the field may have just begun learning about child development and educating young children through their CDA training hours.

The reasons early child care and education providers are interested in pursuing a CDA Credential are as varied as their backgrounds. Some who are already working in the field may need to earn their CDA to retain their positions, advance into lead teaching positions, or become directors. Others who are just entering the field may need a CDA to be considered for a position.

New research, which continues to show the importance of the early years in terms of children's development, offers strong motivation to provide quality care and education in early childhood programs. The only way to accomplish this is to ensure that care providers meet nationally recognized standards in their work with young children.

The CDA program provides the means to assess and credential child care providers on the basis of their work with young children, in their particular workplace setting, with the age group of children they teach.

Aside from meeting mandates or enhancing personal marketability, going through the CDA process will reward you with confidence and new insight into working with young children. In the process, you will likely gain a sense of personal satisfaction in knowing you have the knowledge and tools to do your professional best in your career as an early childhood educator. Completing the CDA Credential is also a great first step in your journey toward continued professional development and lifelong learning.

Regardless of your point of origin—center-based caregiver, family child care provider, center director, or potential early childhood professional—this book will help you understand and complete the CDA process.

You may be in a formal CDA preparatory program or you may be working on your own. Whichever the case, you will be sure to appreciate the easy-to-understand answers, suggestions, and support.

You are embarking on a journey through a series of steps required to earn your CDA Credential. To do this, you will need to complete the 120 clock hours of training, gather documentation, submit the application, take an exam, and participate in the verification visit with a PD Specialist. When this process is completed, your abilities as a primary care and education provider for young children will be substantiated by this professional, nationally recognized credential, suitable for framing. Be prepared to work hard, learn much, and be extremely proud of your accomplishments.

## **How to Use This Guide**

The information in this book is intended to supplement the materials you have received from the Council for Professional Recognition in *The Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program* and *CDA Competency Standards* book. It is not intended as a substitute, nor is it simply another version of it. If you have not, as yet, ordered the *Competency Standards* book, you will want to do so before beginning to use *The CDA Prep Guide*. The *Competency Standards* book will be blue, yellow, or green, depending on your particular setting and age-level endorsement. At the back of each *Competency Standards* book are perforated pages including an

Application Form, the Family Questionnaire for duplicating, and the documents needed for the verification visit.

It is assumed that you have completed the required 120 clock hours of formal child care training and are ready to begin the next stages of CDA assessment.

Not every Child Development Associate (CDA) candidate is working in the same setting or with children of the same ages. For this reason, not every CDA candidate will be using every section of this book—only the sections that pertain to her particular situation. Some of the information is of a general nature and is important for all CDA candidates to understand; however, other information is specific to center-based preschool, center-based infant/toddler, or family child care providers.

The purpose of this book is to simplify the required tasks of CDA documentation and assessment into a step-by-step process, whether you are in a formal CDA preparatory class or working through this process on your own. You will appreciate the user-friendly format, helpful suggestions, and accurate information that will enable you to be successful.

Easy-to-understand assistance is provided as you take the following steps:

- Assemble the Resource Collection for the Professional Portfolio
- Compose the six Reflective Statements of Competence
- Distribute and collect the Family Questionnaires
- Select a Professional Development Specialist
- Prepare yourself and your setting for the observation
- Complete the application
- Prepare for the CDA Exam
- Prepare for the verification visit

After earning your CDA Credential, you can continue to use this book to renew your CDA credential, to get a CDA for a different setting, and to decide how to continue your professional development.

# Facts about the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential and Process



## **What Is a CDA?**

CDA stands for Child Development Associate. This is a person who has successfully completed the CDA assessment process and has been awarded the CDA Credential. She has demonstrated the ability to meet the specific needs of children, work with parents and other adults, and promote and nurture children's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth in a child development program. The CDA has shown competence in her ability to meet the CDA Competency Standards through her work in a center-based, home visitor, family child care, bilingual, or special education setting (Council for Professional Recognition 2006, 2013).

## ***When and How Did It All Begin?***

The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program began in 1971, through the cooperative efforts of the federal government and the early childhood care and education profession, as a result of concern about the quality of child care in this country. Throughout the 1960s, a dramatic increase occurred in the number of children in care programs as many mothers entered the workforce, but there was no deliberate and organized effort to keep track of the quality of care these children were receiving. This became increasingly important, as major research studies at the time continued to indicate how critical the care that a child received in the early years was to the child's subsequent development. The purpose of the program was to assess and credential early childhood care and education professionals on the basis of performance. The program

was funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families.

For the first ten years, the CDA program was directed by a coalition of early childhood professional associations, including Bank Street College of Education. In 1979, the program added bilingual Competency Standards and assessment requirements to the system, so candidates in bilingual programs could also be assessed.

At first, the program only assessed workers in center-based preschool programs that served children ages three to five. Between 1985 and 1989, the CDA assessment system was expanded to include caregivers in home visitor and family child care programs.

In the spring of 1985, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) began managing the CDA program and set up a separate entity of the organization to administer the program nationally. It was called the Council for Professional Recognition. The Council took on complete responsibility for the program in the fall of 1985. As the result of three years of study and review, the procedures for assessment and national standards for the delivery of CDA training were developed. The Council continues to conduct research on the effectiveness, relevance, and affordability of the credentialing program, periodically making revisions (Council for Professional Recognition 2006, 2013).

Beginning in 2011, the Council expanded its scope as not only an “assessment” organization, but also as an organization promoting professional development, with the CDA Credential as the first step in this process.

In 2013 the Council introduced CDA 2.0. The original Competency Standards and the accompanying thirteen Functional Areas have remained the same, but the procedures and process of assessment have changed significantly.

This new process is much more integrated, with each part relating to the others. It also provides opportunity for the CDA candidate to reflect upon her training, her experience, and feedback from others about her work with young children. Instead of just being a means toward an end, a credential, the CDA process itself has become a valuable professional development experience. In a way, it has become more developmentally appropriate for early childhood professionals—valuing process over product!

This credentialing process has also shifted more responsibility to the candidate, who will need to meet specific deadlines, locate a Professional Development Specialist (called the PD Specialist), and schedule her own verification visit and CDA Exam. By allowing the

candidate to take charge of her own CDA, the Council is encouraging her to be a responsible and goal-directed professional.

Today candidates can earn a CDA in over twenty-five languages, including American Sign Language.

### ***How Many People Have a CDA Credential?***

Since 1975 the total number of caregivers who have achieved a CDA Credential is well over 800,000. As a result of an increased demand for trained and qualified staff by employers in both the public and private sectors, more than 20,000 child care providers apply for the CDA Credential each year. In addition, all fifty states plus the District of Columbia, the US territories of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico include the CDA Credential as part of their child care licensing regulations. The CDA is required for all educators working in military-based early education settings.

### ***Who Earns a CDA?***

More than half of CDAs are between the ages of twenty-six and forty, with a continued increase in the number of CDAs over the age of forty. Of those people who have earned a CDA, 98 percent are female. However, more men are becoming part of the early childhood workforce and are pursuing a CDA. For example, Encuentros Teacher Academy at California State University San Marcos invited male high school students to learn about becoming early childhood educators. During the first year, in 2017, only eleven students participated, but the program has more than tripled due to favorable recommendations from previous participants (Warth 2017).

Those who are CDAs tend to be more diverse with regard to race/ethnicity. Sixty percent of CDAs are earned for preschool, 27 percent for infant/toddler, and 12 percent for family child care. Ninety-two percent of those earning a CDA remained in the field, with nearly 78 percent working in full-time positions. Forty-three percent of CDAs reported earning a salary increase and 26 percent received a promotion. (Information Resources Management Association 2019).

### ***Why Is Getting a CDA Important?***

Working through the CDA process can be worthwhile and rewarding. In so doing, a candidate can benefit through these achievements:

- earn a nationally recognized Credential



- evaluate his or her own work as it compares to national standards and improve on skills
- receive one-on-one advice, support, and feedback from early childhood professionals who have experience working with young children and knowledge of child development
- improve upon existing skills to the benefit of young children, as well as the candidate

(Council for Professional Recognition 2006)

The field of early childhood education is a vibrant one, showing much potential for increased employment opportunity in the future. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that at least 27,000 additional child care workers will be needed in the next ten years. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

Research indicates the critical importance of the first years in a child's life and that investing in these years is important and beneficial, not only to children, but also to families, employers, and our nation. The demand for quality child care is increasing. Earning a CDA can put you into a good position for a promising career as a trained early childhood professional (NAEYC 2017).

The Council for Professional Recognition has partnered with high school career centers across the nation to enable students to graduate workforce-ready by earning their CDA credential while still in high school.

Most states now recognize the importance of raising their standards for early childhood education staff. For example, since assistant teachers typically spend as much time with children as lead teachers, they are required to have a CDA.

The CDA credentialing system aligns with the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for early care and education. Under this system, child care programs have the opportunity to earn progressively more stars as they reach higher standards in certain key areas, the most important of which is the professionalism of early childhood education staff.

For example, in Tennessee, in order to reach the three-star level, at least half of the educators in a program must have three years of early childhood experience and be enrolled in CDA training (Cannon et al. 2016).

In Alabama, in order to get a four-star rating, at least one teacher in every classroom needs a CDA (Alabama Department of Human Resources 2015).

The CDA credential enables centers to boost ratings and provide the opportunity for their teachers to improve their practice, and it serves as a starting point toward continued professional development.

## **Who Can Apply for a CDA?**

Early childhood care and education workers who are in center-based, family child care, or home visitor programs can be evaluated by the Council. These persons need to have some education and experience in early child care and meet several requirements, specifically, these:

- be eighteen years of age or older
- hold a high school diploma or GED
- be a high school junior or senior enrolled in a high school career/technical program in early childhood education
- have 480 hours of experience working with young children in the same age group and setting as the CDA application
- have 120 clock hours of formal child care education

(Council for Professional Recognition 2013)

## **What Kind of Formal Child Care Education Is Needed?**

The 120 clock hours of formal child care education must include at least 10 hours in each of the following subject areas:

- planning a safe, healthy environment (safety, first aid, health, nutrition, space planning, materials and equipment, play)
- steps to enhance children's physical and intellectual development (large- and small-muscle development, language, discovery, art, music, mathematics, social studies, science, technology, and dual-language learning)
- positive ways to support children's social and emotional development (self-esteem, independence, self-regulation, socialization, cultural identity, and conflict resolution)
- strategies to establish productive relationships with families (parent involvement, home visits, conferences, referrals, and communication strategies)

- strategies to manage an effective program operation (planning, record keeping, reporting, and community services)
- maintaining a commitment to professionalism (advocacy, ethical practices, workforce issues, professional development, goal setting, and networking)
- observing and recording children’s behavior (tools and strategies for objective information collection, assessment of children’s behavior, learning to plan curriculum, individualize teaching, developmental delays, intervention strategies, and individual education plans)
- principles of child growth and development (developmental milestones from birth to age five, cultural influences on development, individual variation including children with special needs, and an understanding of early brain development)

The training can be for college credit or for no credit. Formal courses that cover the previously mentioned topics might have titles such as these:

- Child Growth and Development
- Health, Safety, and Nutrition in Early Childhood Programs
- Guidance Techniques for Early Childhood
- Introduction to the Early Childhood Education Profession
- Emerging Literacy in Young Children
- Early Childhood Curriculum

You may need to look at the catalog description for a specific course to see what topics it covers. These hours of training must be obtained from an organization or agency that has expertise in training early childhood teachers:

- four-year colleges and universities
- two-year junior and community colleges
- technical and vocational schools
- early childhood education or child care programs that provide training, such as Family Services, school districts, Head Start, or employer-sponsored in-service training
- programs offered by the state or federal government or by branches of the U.S. military services

- private training organizations
- resource and referral agencies

Please note that training obtained at conferences or from individual consultants is not accepted by the Council. A candidate may acquire the 120 clock hours of training from one single training program or from a combination of programs. Most CDAs receive their training through credit courses or continuing education units (CEUs). The Council provides a directory of training organizations that have met their specific criteria and have been designated Gold standard. These are listed by state on its website ([www.cdacouncil.org](http://www.cdacouncil.org)) (Council for Professional Recognition 2018).

Although there is no longer any time restriction on the training, it is recommended that the training be taken no more than three years before beginning the CDA process. Research in the field of early childhood is advancing every day, and we in this profession need to stay current to provide the best care and education for young children.

## **Choosing Your CDA Training**

NAEYC's vision for our profession is one that "exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society" (NAEYC 2015). In order to fulfill this vision, we need to make sure those in this profession obtain quality and appropriate training.

Unfortunately, this does not always happen, especially now that online training options seem to have exploded. In the push to hire or to become employable, expediency and low cost often take priority. We can easily find CDA training online from just about anybody. There are training programs that are totally self-directed, with a page or two of instructional content followed by a short quiz, and that require as little as a score of 70 percent to move forward to the next module. One can conceivably sail through an entire course of study in a weekend and print off certificates of completion.

Early childhood educators deserve more than that. More importantly, young children certainly do. When parents entrust their precious children into someone's care, that care should encompass a keen understanding of proper health and safety practices, child development, early childhood curriculum, appropriate guidance techniques, and how to promote relationships with families. This is not possible when a training module consists only of a few screens of

generalized and summarized information . . . promising that all you need to know can be learned in the shortest amount of time possible.

So choose your CDA training carefully. Although online training, if conducted appropriately, can be very effective, there is much to be said for taking at least a portion of your education face-to-face, in a classroom with other students. Getting information and feedback from a qualified instructor in such a setting is ever so valuable, as are the networking and sharing opportunities with your classmates.

If you choose online courses, be sure they are monitored by an instructor who actively participates and is invested in your learning. The courses should be robust and challenge your thinking, and the assignments should involve more than multiple-choice quizzes.

Do your homework before enrolling in an online program. Investigate, ask to take a sample course, and don't get on board just because others do or because it has been labeled by anyone or any organization as "top-notch."

Remember, the most important outcome of your CDA education is not getting a certificate in the mail. It is the new and expanded knowledge that translates into improved practices in your early childhood program.

## **Is Financial Assistance Available to Help Pay for My Training?**

Some state and local organizations offer financial assistance for training as well as for the CDA assessment fees. For example, twenty-three states currently participate in a Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program. This program, which originated in North Carolina, gives scholarships to child care workers to complete coursework in early childhood education and to increase their compensation. To learn more about this program and to see a listing of participating states, you can visit the Child Care Services Association website ([www.childcareservices.org/teach-nc/directory-of-participating-universities](http://www.childcareservices.org/teach-nc/directory-of-participating-universities)). The Council for Professional Recognition has a link on its website for CDA Scholarship Funding, which provides information state by state ([www.cdacouncil.org/resources/find-cda-scholarships](http://www.cdacouncil.org/resources/find-cda-scholarships)). You will also want to inquire through your employer or local early childhood professional association for more information about financial assistance. You may also be able to find free or low-cost training through your local resource and referral agency (Council for Professional Recognition 2006).

## **Do I Have to Provide Some Kind of Proof That I Had This Training?**

Each agency or organization providing the training must provide proof of the candidate's education by means of a letter, certificate, or transcript. The candidate will break down the 120 hours into the required subject areas on the Summary of My CDA Education sheet in the Professional Portfolio.

## **Are There Different Types of CDA Endorsements?**


A candidate may choose from several different CDA endorsements, each in a different setting:

- center-based infant/toddler
- center-based preschool
- family child care
- home visitor
- bilingual
- monolingual
- special education

This choice depends on the candidate's specific experience with young children in whichever of the categories the candidate is working and where she can be observed functioning as a lead teacher. The candidate may not choose a setting in which she hopes or intends to work in the future. For example, if a candidate is working with infants and toddlers in a center-based program, she may not apply for a center-based preschool credential because she plans to move into a classroom of older children in the near future. She must first acquire a center-based infant/toddler credential because this is the setting in which she presently works and where she will be observed for her CDA. She may, at a later date, work toward a CDA for center-based preschool when she has accumulated 480 hours of experience with children in that age group and completes the credentialing process for that setting. All of the steps must be completed again for this new setting, but some of the training taken for the first CDA may be reused if it covers areas that relate to the second credential type. For example, a course that covered health and safety in child care could be counted toward the second credential, but a course specifically about infants could not be used for a preschool credential (Council for Professional Recognition 2018).

Once you have begun the CDA process and until your verification visit is completed, it is very important that you stay in the particular setting you have chosen. This is because all of your documentation, your CDA Exam, Family Questionnaires, and reflective dialogue with the PD Specialist will be based on that setting. Changing settings will not work. It may be necessary to explain this to your director so such changes are postponed until after this time. If you are a “floater” in a center, working with several different age groups and settings as needed, you must ask your director to let you settle into one specific setting and age group for the majority of the time while you are working on your CDA. Within three years of applying as a candidate, you must have 480 hours of experience working with children whose ages and setting are the same as those chosen for your application.

When you receive *The Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program® and CDA Competency Standards* book from the Council, it will be one of three different colors, depending on the specific setting (Family Child Care is blue, Center-Based Preschool is green, and Center-Based Infant/Toddler is yellow). It will have information about the CDA application requirements and process, with the entire midsection devoted to a thorough overview of the six Competency Standards. The back of each *Competency Standards* book includes a section of perforated documents, including an application form, cover sheets needed for the Professional Portfolio, the Comprehensive Scoring Instrument, and other documents that you and the PD Specialist will use during the verification visit.



Center-based programs can include nursery schools, child care, Head Start, lab schools, child development programs, or parent cooperatives. They can be full-time or part-time operations and have structured or unstructured schedules. These programs can be in universities, public schools, churches, or privately owned and operated. Programs that meet the CDA requirements for a center-based setting can be nonprofit or for-profit.

### ***What Do These Settings Look Like?***

**CENTER-BASED PRESCHOOL SETTING** This is a state-licensed child development center where a candidate is working with a group of at least eight children. All of the children in the group are ages three to five years. Also, the entire center-based program needs to have at least ten children enrolled with at least two caregivers working in the center with the children on a regular basis.

**CENTER-BASED INFANT/TODDLER SETTING** This is a licensed child development center at which a candidate can be observed working as a primary caregiver with a group of at least three children ages birth through thirty-six months. Also, the entire center-based program needs to have at least ten children enrolled with at least two caregivers working in the center with the children on a regular basis.

**FAMILY CHILD CARE SETTING** This is a family child care home in which a candidate is working with at least two children, ages five years old or younger. These children are not to be related to the candidate by either blood or marriage. This child care home must meet minimum state and local regulations, unless it is located where there is no regulation of family child care.

**HOME VISITOR SETTING** This is a program of home visits to families with young children from birth to five years old. Its main focus is providing support and education to parents, helping them meet the needs of their growing children.

**BILINGUAL SETTING** This is a child development program with specific goals for supporting bilingual development in children. In this setting, two languages are consistently used and parent involvement is encouraged to attain the program's bilingual goals. In addition to meeting all of the other standard requirements for earning a CDA, candidates seeking this specialization will need to show evidence (through a course description or syllabus) of having had training in Principles of Dual-Language Learning as part of the required 120 clock hours. This would be indicated under subject area 2: "Advancing children's physical and intellectual development." When distributing the Family Questionnaires, the candidate will ask the families to pay close attention in answering question 14, which is specific to bilingual programs.

There will also be differences in the Professional Portfolio for the bilingual candidate. For example, in the Resource Collection, the candidate will present resources in both languages that are used directly with families and children. These would include Resource Collection items RC I-3, RC II, RC III, and RC IV. For the Reflective Statements of Competence, the candidate will write three in English and three in the second language. The candidate will also need to include information in all six of the Reflective Statements about how principles of dual-language learning are applied in daily practice with children. The Professional Philosophy Statement may be written in either language.

The PD Specialist (the person who will conduct the verification visit) chosen by the candidate must be proficient in both languages and have had direct experience in bilingual early childhood programs and with groups that are non-English speaking. The PD Specialist will conduct the reflective dialogue during the verification visit in both languages. The observation must take place in an early



Contact the Council  
(800-424-4310, [www.cdacouncil.org](http://www.cdacouncil.org)) for  
more information on the  
home visitor setting, bi-  
lingual setting, or special  
education setting.



childhood program where both languages are used consistently every day. The candidate will demonstrate her use of the two languages during the observation. The Competency Standards outlined in the Council's *Competency Standards* books have several specific dual-language indicators flagged, which the PD Specialist will be looking for during the observation. The CDA Exam may be taken in either English or Spanish. If the candidate speaks a language other than Spanish, the exam will be taken in English. During the reflective dialogue, the PD Specialist will speak with the candidate in both languages.

**MONOLINGUAL SETTING** In this child development program, there is daily and consistent use of a language other than English. In most cases, this second language is Spanish. However, if the candidate speaks a language other than Spanish, he or she will need to contact the Council to make special arrangements for locating an eligible PD Specialist who speaks that language and for special accommodations for taking the CDA Exam. There will probably be an additional fee for these accommodations.

Besides meeting all of the other standard requirements for earning a CDA, the monolingual candidate will ask the families to complete the Family Questionnaires in either Spanish or English. In the Professional Portfolio, the Resource Collection items RC I-3, RC II, RC III, and RC IV, all of the Competency Statements, and the Professional Philosophy Statement, must be completed in Spanish.

The PD Specialist chosen by the candidate will be proficient in Spanish and will observe the candidate working with families and children who speak Spanish as the predominant language. The candidate will speak Spanish during the observation. The CDA Exam may be taken in either English or Spanish. During the reflective dialogue, the PD Specialist will converse with the candidate in Spanish.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION SETTING** This child development setting serves children who have moderate to severe special needs. Setting criteria will be the same as for center-based preschool, center-based infant/toddler, or family child care, based on the children's ages and the type of program.

In any of the settings mentioned already, a candidate may either be employed or working as a volunteer (Council for Professional Recognition 2006, 2013).

It is important to note that the Council does not recognize after-school programs or drop-in programs as eligible settings in which

a candidate can demonstrate competence within the Competency Standards, which would include all thirteen of the Functional Areas (Council for Professional Recognition 2019).

## **The CDA Process**

The CDA process includes five stages: prepare, apply, demonstrate, earn, renew. Several parts of this process are completed even before you submit your application to the Council. These are the five stages:

### ***1. Prepare***

Any time before applying, the candidate must have the required education (have a high school diploma or GED or be in high school enrolled in an early childhood career/tech early childhood program) and have completed the required 120 clock hours of training, including ten hours in each of the CDA subject areas.

The candidate must choose one of the CDA settings, based on the children with whom she is working (center-based preschool, center-based infant/toddler, or family child care) and order the appropriate *Competency Standards* book from the Council for Professional Recognition. You will specify one of these settings when ordering. Ordering can be done by calling 1-800-424-4310 or by going online at [www.cdacouncil.org](http://www.cdacouncil.org).

The CDA candidate is assessed on the basis of six national CDA Competency Standards. The six standards are the criteria used to evaluate a caregiver's performance with children and families. These same six standards are used for all of the settings.

These are the six CDA Competency Standards:

- I.** To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment
- II.** To advance physical and intellectual competence
- III.** To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance
- VI.** To establish positive and productive relationships with families
- V.** To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs
- VI.** To maintain a commitment to professionalism

(Council for Professional Recognition 2006, 2013)

The six Competency Standards are defined in greater detail by thirteen Functional Areas. These Functional Areas describe more specifically the functions that a caregiver must perform to meet the criteria of each Competency Standard. These functions will vary according to a candidate's particular child care setting and the age groupings of the children.

Within six months of your application, you will distribute and collect Family Questionnaires. You will also assemble your Professional Portfolio, including the Resource Collection, six Competency Statements, and your Professional Philosophy Statement.

As a candidate, you will prepare a Professional Portfolio. The portfolio will include various pieces of documentation, a Resource Collection, six Competency Statements (based on the CDA Competency Standards), and a Professional Philosophy Statement. Specific instructions for assembling and preparing this portfolio are included in chapter 4 for a preschool setting, chapter 5 for an infant/toddler setting, and chapter 6 for a family child care setting.

Also prior to applying for a CDA, you will need to locate a PD Specialist. This is a person who has been trained and certified by the Council to conduct CDA verification visits. Read more about the PD Specialist later in this chapter.

One of the final steps in the CDA process will be to compose a Professional Philosophy Statement. It will be typed and placed into the last section of your portfolio. You will not write this Professional Philosophy Statement until you have completed these steps:

- completed all of your CDA training
- had at least 480 hours of experience working with young children
- completely finished the Professional Portfolio

All of these combined experiences will enable you to write a fuller, more thoughtful, informed Professional Philosophy Statement.

To prepare for writing this philosophy statement, however, it is a good idea to think about how you feel about certain aspects of early childhood practices, based on your experience and training. This will help you to organize your thoughts. This may be the first time you have ever thought about your own personal philosophy of teaching young children, or if you have, you may not ever have written it down.

In appendix F is a Professional Philosophy Exercise, which involves a series of statements you will complete to prompt you to think about your beliefs and feelings. When asked, the majority of CDA candidates who have gone through this exercise before trying to write their philosophy statements said it was very valuable to them and made this task much easier. Rather than just a couple words, try to write a short paragraph as your response to each item, thinking deeply about what you're writing.

Right now, as you begin your CDA journey, take a few minutes to complete this exercise. You will be reviewing and using your responses later when you write the Professional Philosophy Statement. When you are finished, come back to this page and continue reading about the next stages of the CDA process.


## **2. Apply**

Application can be done online on the Council's website ([www.cdacouncil.org/yourcda](http://www.cdacouncil.org/yourcda)) or by using the paper application form located at the back of your *Competency Standards* book. Your application fee accompanies the form. When the application has been accepted, the candidate will receive a Ready to Schedule Notice email from the Council. At that time, you will schedule the CDA Exam and call the PD Specialist to schedule your verification visit.

## **3. Demonstrate**

The CDA Exam and the verification visit can be scheduled in any order the candidate wishes. The CDA Exam is taken on a computer at a Pearson VUE Testing Center and consists of multiple-choice questions geared to the candidate's particular CDA setting. The verification visit consists of three parts:

- 1. Review:** The PD Specialist will look over the candidate's documentation, including the Professional Portfolio.
- 2. Observe:** The PD Specialist will observe the candidate working in her setting with young children for a two-hour period.
- 3. Reflect:** The candidate will have a reflective dialogue with the PD Specialist about her professional strengths and areas that can be improved, along with setting some goals for professional development.

 You will need to have your Professional Portfolio completed before the verification visit.

The first two parts of the verification visit—review and observe—are scored using the Comprehensive Scoring Instrument that is at the back of the *Competency Standards* book.

#### **4. Earn**

The PD Specialist submits scores for the observation and the verification visit within forty-eight hours of completion. These scores, along with the score for the CDA Exam, are combined for a cumulative score to determine the decision for credentialing. If this score meets the Council's requirement, the CDA Credential will be awarded and mailed to the candidate. If not, the candidate will be notified and provided with information about appeal procedures and other options.

#### **5. Renew**

The CDA Credential must be renewed every three years. Several pieces of documentation, along with a fee, are submitted along with the Renewal Application.

(Council for Professional Recognition 2018)

### **The Professional Development Specialist**

The PD Specialist must meet the requirements listed in the *Competency Standards* book:

- Have internet access
- Possess a working email address
- Be comfortable working with people of varied racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds
- Know local, state, and national standards and requirements for child care programs that serve children from birth to five years
- Conduct verification visits during early childhood programs' usual operating hours
- Be bilingual, if conducting a bilingual verification visit
- Speak the language of the Monolingual Specialization, if conducting a monolingual verification visit
- Have earned an associate's or bachelor's degree from an accredited university or college in one of these disciplines:
  - Early childhood education/child development

- Elementary education/early childhood education
- Home economics/child development
- Have studied, within the degree held, a minimum of eighteen credit hours or twenty-four quarter hours of coursework in early childhood education/child development, specific to children from birth to five years old
- Possess sufficient experience to meet one of these two requirement options:
  - Option 1. Those who hold a bachelor's degree or higher need at least two years working in a child care setting serving children from birth to five years old, with one year spent working directly with children as a caregiver, teacher, social worker, or similar role, and one year supporting the professional growth of at least one other adult.
  - Option 2. Those who hold an associate's degree need at least four years working in a child care setting with children from birth to five years old, with at least two years working directly with children as a caregiver, teacher, social worker, or similar role, and two years supporting the professional growth of at least one other adult.

The PD Specialist can be chosen from among people you know who have received this certification in your area or from among those listed in the Council's PD Specialist Directory. You can access the PD Specialist Directory on the Council's website at [www.cdacouncil.org/pd-specialists/role-a-responsibilities/354-pd-specialist-directory](http://www.cdacouncil.org/pd-specialists/role-a-responsibilities/354-pd-specialist-directory).

It is suggested you choose several PDF Specialists, because not every one of them will respond or many not be interested. They will each get an email from the Council indicating your interest in having them be your PD Specialist. They have the option of calling you by phone or sending you an email. Either way, it is important to have a phone conversation with each of them. You have the last word in choosing your own PD Specialist. Treat this like a job interview. Ask some questions such as, how long they have been a PD specialist? How many Verification Visits for CDA do they conduct in a given month? What kind of work do they do, and why did they become a PD Specialist? Does this person seem friendly? Dedicated? Knowledgeable? Is this someone you feel comfortable inviting into your program to conduct your observation?

Once you decide, the PD Specialist will provide his/her ID number that you will put into your CDA Application.

If you are choosing a PD Specialist from among people you know, it is important to consider whether any ethical conflicts of interest related to your particular relationship may interfere or even disqualify the person from serving as a PD Specialist for you. Here are some restrictions the Council has set forth about conflicts of interest:

A person may not, under any circumstances, serve as your PD Specialist if the person fits these descriptions:

- an immediate relative, such as your mother, father, sibling, spouse, son, or daughter
- someone who is currently your direct supervisor
- a coworker who teaches in the same group or classroom where you work

The Council also has a listing of other circumstances that warrant careful thought, as they may also be considered conflicts of interest:

- someone who is your indirect supervisor
- a trainer, either direct or indirect
- any person or representative of an organization that has financial or contractual considerations related to you or who may benefit in some way from your credentialing outcome
- your employer
- a coworker employed in the same facility, but not in your group or classroom
- someone who is your peer or friend
- any person who may hold a personal or professional bias toward or against you or any group to which you belong
- a licensing agent

The decision to choose an individual who fits one of these categories is up to you and the particular PD Specialist. As you begin to work together, you will both sign a Statement of Ethics (Council for Professional Recognition 2018).

As you can see, this process involves multiple steps. You should not have to go through this credentialing process alone. Even if you are the first teacher in your program to do this, someone should be

supporting you and offering help. Perhaps you know another CDA candidate or someone who has already gone through the process. Or the instructor who provided your training hours might agree to mentor you. If you work in a child care center, your director can be a source of support. Chapter 2 is devoted to center directors and how they can help ensure the success of their teachers who are working on a CDA Credential. It would be a good idea to encourage your director to read it, so you might benefit from the added support only a director can provide.



# A step-by-step guide to the Child Development Associate credentialing process

Whether you are just starting out as an early childhood educator or have years of experience in the field, earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is a valuable step in your journey in lifelong learning that will enrich your work with young children.

Newly up-to-date, **The CDA Prep Guide**, Fourth Edition, offers step-by-step support through the CDA credentialing and certification renewal process. This resource also includes assistance in choosing your training, compiling the Professional Portfolio, and successfully completing the Verification Visit and CDA Exam in a variety of settings including school-based, centers, and family child care.

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