

ACCAP Quality Standards

Day Care Centres

The Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP) is a voluntary process through which child care services can demonstrate that they exceed the basic regulatory requirements and meet the higher standards of accreditation. The standards for accreditation, known as the ACCAP Quality Standards (AQS), were developed in consultation with the field and Alberta Children's Services. The Alberta Quality Standards are meant to reflect the diverse range of programs offered for young children in Alberta. The AQS build upon the standards for licensing. To be accredited, therefore, programs must provide evidence of consistent compliance with the AQS *and* have consistently met the licensing requirements that apply to their service.

The ten ACCAP Quality Standards are listed below. They are divided into four categories of outcomes: for children, for families, for staff and for the community. Brief statements regarding the importance of each category and standard are included. Each standard is broken down into numbered criteria which are, in turn, elaborated as indicators. Some indicators may apply to all programs while others may be specific to the type of care being offered. The indicators in this document are specific to child care centres.

Part A: Outcomes for Children

Children enter the world full of potential. The extent to which a child's potential is realized is strongly influenced by early experiences. Children thrive within families and communities that protect their health and safety; nurture and respect them; and provide opportunities for involvement with caring adults, stimulating play and safe exploration of their environment. Warm, supportive and responsive interactions between adults and children help children to feel safe and encourage a sense of self-worth. Children who feel secure and valued are more likely to get along well with others, develop self-control and be able to benefit from opportunities and experiences that foster learning and optimal development.

Standard 1: Children are safe, secure, well cared for and nurtured.

When children are protected from harm and feel emotionally and physically safe, they engage in more exploration of their environment and are more willing to try new things. These activities are essential for the development of physical, social and cognitive skills.

1.1 Policies and practices support children forming secure attachments.

- Building positive relationships is the core of practice.
- Consistency and continuity of care are maintained.
- Families are supported in their secure relationships with their children.

1.2 The child-centred environment promotes best practice.

- Programs exceed minimum health and safety standards.
- Licensing and monitoring reports are shared openly with parents and other stakeholders.
- The program maintains an awareness of emerging best practice.
- Programs initiate concrete action in response to new information about best practice in child- and family-centred environments.

Standard 2: Relationships between service providers and children are supportive and respectful.

Children who experience positive relationships with the adults in the program obtain higher scores on measures of overall social competence, get along better with other children, and have better outcomes on tests of their language and cognitive development.

2.1 Each child is treated with respect.

- Child care staff treat each child with respect and consideration.
- Child care staff listen to children and respond to them in a respectful, appropriate manner.
- Child care staff support children's respectful peer interactions.
- Child care staff acknowledge children's expressed feelings and treat their feelings as valid.
- Routines, activities and interactions are responsive to children's individual backgrounds, needs, preferences and ability levels.

2.2 Interactions and communications with children are positive and supportive.

- Children's independence is encouraged.
- Child care staff's level of communication is adjusted to child's level of communication.
- Child care staff seek children's opinions and demonstrate interest in children's perspectives.
- Child care staff focus on children's capacities and strengths.
- Child care staff give children the support they need to express their feelings in socially acceptable ways and to resolve conflicts.

2.3 Ongoing communication with families informs staff practice in supporting children's emotional and social needs.

- Child care staff make concerted efforts to develop a partnership with families.
- Child care staff actively encourage families to share their experience and knowledge about their children.
- Child care staff modify the environment and their own behaviours to incorporate suggestions from families.

Standard 3: Every child's optimal development is promoted in an inclusive early learning and care environment.

Children have higher levels of social skills, language and cognitive development in programs where the adults are actively engaged with the children, where there are ample toys and other materials to use, and where the activities provided are appropriate for the children's level of development.

3.1 The early learning environment is inclusive, promoting competence, active independent exploration and learning through play.

- Within age-appropriate limits, children are encouraged to make choices about their play, exploring their own interests and the environment for a significant portion of the day.
- Children can choose from a variety of open-ended play experiences that support varying skill levels and interests.
- Children's competence and independence are actively encouraged.
- Materials for play reflect an inclusive approach to planning for a full range of diversity (e.g. ability, culture, ethnicity, family composition, gender).

3.2 Planned experiences are geared to children's interests and build on their experiences in their families and communities.

- The neighbourhood experiences and cultural backgrounds of the children in the program are intentionally incorporated into planning daily experiences.
- Children's interests are observed and documented and serve as the base for planning.
- Routines and transitions are used as learning experiences for children.
- The pace and complexity of routines is adjusted to ensure sufficient time for play.

3.3 Planned experiences promote development and learning across developmental domains.

- Planning to meet developmentally appropriate outcomes through indoor and outdoor play is intentional.
- Social engagement and competence are actively encouraged and promoted.
- The environment promotes early literacy.
- Children's creative expression is encouraged through a variety of open-ended, self-chosen experiences. There are choices of activities and choices within activities.
- Children have opportunities to rest and space for privacy appropriate to their individual developmental needs.
- The use of computer, TV and video technology is limited, thoughtful and intentional.

3.4 The adult is actively engaged in children's play and learning.

- Play is child-directed.
- Child care staff extend children's play, facilitating and guiding their exploration and discovery.
- Child care staff build on children's interests in play in planning daily experiences.
- Child care staff participate in, and facilitate children's play, taking on a variety of roles.

3.5 Peer learning is encouraged.

- Children have an opportunity for child-directed play with others in small groups for extended periods of time.
- Child care staff have realistic expectations for child-directed peer play and interactions.
- Child care staff support children in developing strong peer relationships.

3.6 Children are guided as they begin to develop social and problem-solving skills and take responsibility for their own actions.

- Child care staff interact with children positively in response to conflict and inappropriate behaviour.
- Rules, limits and consequences are geared to the children's level of development and explained to children in language they can understand.
- Child care staff use naturally occurring incidents as opportunities to teach appropriate behaviours, rather than correcting behaviour.

3.7 There is regular and systematic documentation of children's growth and development.

- Child care staff reflect continuously on patterns of children's development in relation to typical developmental outcomes.
- Child care staff identify issues of developmental concern and initiate action.
- The developmental goal-setting process is respectful of unique capabilities, developmental capacity and the family's primary role in child rearing.
- Documentation is used as part of the ongoing planning process.
- Child care staff celebrate developmental progress with children and families.

Part B: Outcomes for Families

The family has the primary responsibility for and is key to young children's well-being and development. To promote children's healthy development, programs must establish supportive, collaborate relationships with families based on respect, honest communication and joint decision making. Families have a right to fully participate in their children's program.

Standard 4: Families are supported as the primary caregivers for their children.

4.1 The program builds a relationship of trust with each family.

- The program is family-friendly.
- Child care staff actively seek out interactions with families.
- There is a clear intake process, with specific information about the program's systems provided to families before they begin care.
- Families feel safe in discussing issues with staff.

4.2 The program supports families in their child-rearing role and is respectful of their beliefs about child rearing.

- Child care staff acknowledge and respect the family's primary role in child rearing and their right to transmit their values, beliefs and cultural heritage to their children.
- Families are consulted about their needs and preferences for their children's daily experiences.
- Information about child development is provided for families in an ongoing manner.
- Child care staff model appropriate communication and guidance skills.

4.3 The program builds a sense of community (social networks) among the families it serves.

- The program has an open-door policy and welcomes families to visit.
- The program provides opportunities for families to develop relationships with one another.

4.4 The program advocates for the family in accessing needed supports.

- Child care staff provide information to families about community services and social agencies.
- Staff act as facilitators for families in accessing needed supports.
- Confidentiality is ensured.

Standard 5: Relationships with families are supportive and respectful.

Programs rank higher on standard tests of overall program quality and the children have higher levels of social skills where there is ongoing, mutually respectful communication between the adults working in the program and the families.

5.1 Families are an integral part of the program.

- The program provides opportunities for families to be involved.
- Families are encouraged to express needs and preferences.
- Families are provided with clear information about the program philosophy, goals, policies and practices.
- Families are consulted about program philosophy, goals and objectives, and proposed program, policy or practice changes that may affect them and program effectiveness.
- There are a variety of ways for families to provide input to the program.

5.2 The program recognizes the expertise of families and works in partnership with families to promote children's early learning, growth and development.

- Child care staff and families share information and suggestions to support and enrich children's experiences in the program.

- Child care staff provide formal and informal information to families about children’s experience in the program and their developmental progress.
- Proposed major changes that affect children’s experiences are discussed by families and staff in advance.

5.3 There are clear, simple processes that support regular exchange of information between families and service providers.

- There is regular ongoing communication between families and staff.
- There are opportunities for formal and informal exchange of information.
- The program responds quickly to concerns raised by families.
- There is an effective method for resolving issues.

Part C: Outcomes for Staff

The adults in the program are the most important ingredient for the provision of high quality early learning and care services. Children benefit most when there is continuity of relationship with the adults, when the adults have a good understanding of child development and can translate this into practice, and when the adults feel supported and valued in their work situation.

Standard 6: Program philosophy, policies and procedures support staff in providing high quality early learning and child care services.

Turnover rates among the adults looking after the children are lower in programs where the policies and procedures provide a clear description of each person’s job and responsibilities; the adults have annual performance appraisals; the adults have opportunities to have input into decision making about the program; and adults are encouraged and supported to obtain additional training.

6.1 There is a clear statement of program philosophy, goals and objectives, reviewed on an annual basis.

- Statements are written in plain-language style.
- Statements are easily accessible and understood by child care staff.
- The review process involves the child care staff as key stakeholders.

6.2 There are clear written policies and procedures for managing day-to-day operations of the program.

- There is regular and effective exchange of information between administration and staff.
- Policies and procedures are based on knowledge of best practice and grounded in program philosophy.
- Child care staff have a clear sense of their roles and the expectations for best practice within the organization.
- The program employs sound business practices and follows generally accepted accounting principles.

6.3 Policies and procedures are clearly reflected in everyday practice.

- Reflection on practice is intentional and ongoing.
- Policies and procedures are developed and reviewed with staff input.
- Policies and procedures are consistent with early childhood best practice standards.
- A code of ethics guides practice.

Standard 7: The work environment supports quality service delivery.

A supportive work environment increases staff retention, enhances job satisfaction, and provides staff with the tools they need to support children's optimal development.

7.1 The program has well-defined management practices to recruit and retain staff in a positive work environment.

- There is a written statement of the required skills, knowledge and qualifications for each staff position in the program that is reviewed regularly.
- There is a clear process used to recruit and orient new staff.
- There is an annual performance review process for program staff.
- There is a strategy to recruit staff who reflect the cultural, racial and/or religious diversity in the community served.
- Staff have the qualifications to do the work they are hired to do.
- The qualifications, authority and responsibility of the administration are clearly defined.

7.2 The organizational climate is positive.

- *The physical and social/emotional environment supports the patterns and practices required for continuity of experience for children and staff.*
- Professional development for staff is encouraged and supported.
- Child care staff have access to specialized knowledge and resources for planning when required.
- The program provides staff members with formal opportunities to participate in decision making at both the operational and governance levels.
- Child care staff are informed about changes to the program or government policies and requirements that might directly affect them.

Part D: Outcomes for the Community

High quality child care contributes to well-functioning families and builds social cohesion in communities. It enhances community partnerships and supports appropriate linkages across children's services.

Standard 8: The service responds to the needs and concerns of children, their families, the staff and the community.

A program that seeks information about the needs of the children and families it serves and the community in which it operates on an ongoing basis and modifies itself accordingly is better able to meet those needs, provide activities that promote the growth and development of the children and support families in their parenting role.

8.1 The program is aware of, and responsive to, the diversity of needs in the community of children and families it serves.

- Program policies and practices recognize and reflect a focus on meeting diverse needs.
- Community members and families are respected and consulted.
- The program is responsive to complaints, issues and concerns from members of the broader community.

8.2 The program is an active participant in the broader community of services for children and families.

- The program establishes and maintains partnerships with other community agencies and professional groups.
- The program contributes to community efforts to ensure seamless service for children and families.
- The program uses community resources to meet the needs of the children and families it serves.

Standard 9: Families and community stakeholders are actively engaged in ensuring that community diversity and interests are reflected in the delivery of early learning and child care services.

Involving families and community stakeholders in the governance of the program increases the program's knowledge of family and community needs and assists it to develop the type of programming that is most needed and most appropriate.

9.1 There is a clearly defined process for involving community stakeholders.

- Families and other community members are invited to participate in an advisory capacity and/or to sit on the Board of Directors.
- Families and community members involved in governance reflect the diversity of the community.
- There is an established pattern for regular community consultation.
- Outcomes of the planning processes are communicated with stakeholders.
- The process for engaging community stakeholders is responsive to diversity.
- There is an orientation process for all stakeholders directly involved in the program.

9.2 The roles and responsibilities of stakeholder groups are clearly defined.

- The governance model clearly outlines internal as well as external roles and responsibilities.
- Responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the program is delegated in accordance with legal responsibilities and/or organizational bylaws.
- The program maintains a constant awareness of all legal requirements for operation and communicates these to the appropriate individuals.
- There is a process to support clear communication between management and community stakeholders.
- Roles and responsibilities are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with achieving program outcomes.

Standard 10: Early learning and child care services participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes that support continuous quality improvement.

Quality is not static - it is dynamic. Our understanding of best practices is constantly evolving on the basis of research findings. Similarly, the needs of families and the community change, for example, as a result of demographic shifts. To provide a high quality service, a program must continually monitor itself, make changes, and evaluate the impact of the changes. Involving stakeholders in this cycle of monitoring, changing and evaluating assists in keeping their needs and wishes in the forefront of the discussions.

10.1. The program actively seeks the views of the staff, the families it serves and relevant community stakeholders through a variety of ongoing processes.

- The process for policy/procedure development and revisions involves relevant stakeholders at the governance and operational levels.
- Quality assurance measures are developed collaboratively with relevant stakeholders.
- There is a report back to stakeholders on an annual basis.

10.2 The program uses an annual review process to set goals for the coming year and to develop and implement action plans to address these goals for continuous quality improvement.

- The program is systematically evaluated on a regular basis.
- Procedures and responsibilities for implementing quality improvement plans are set during the annual review.
- Goals and action plans are concrete and realistic.
- There is a process in place to monitor progress in between review periods.