

ACCAP Quality Standards

Family Day Home Agencies

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 family child care agencies.

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.

The agency has practices, policies and procedures that:

- Support providers in building positive relationships as the core of practice.
- Maintain consistency and continuity of care.
- Support families in secure relationships with their children.

1.2 The child-centered environment promotes best practice.

- The agency monitors family child care settings to ensure that minimum health and safety standards are exceeded.
- The agency reports regularly to families and other stakeholders on monitoring activities.

- The agency maintains an awareness of emerging best practice and communicates with providers about best practice on a regular basis.
- The agency implements individual training plans for providers based on an understanding of 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to ensure that:

- Providers treat each child with equal respect and consideration.
- Providers listen to children and respond to them in a respectful, appropriate manner.
- Providers support children’s respectful peer interactions.
- Providers 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to ensure that:

- Children’s independence is encouraged.
- Providers’ level of communication is adjusted to child’s level of communication.
- Providers seek children’s opinions and demonstrate interest in children’s perspectives.
- Providers focus on children’s capacities and strengths.
- Providers 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to:

- Make concerted efforts to develop a partnership with families.
- Actively encourage families to share their experience and knowledge about their children.
- 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 child 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to ensure that:

- Within age-appropriate limits, children are encouraged to make choices about their play, exploring their own interests and the environment in play 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to:

- Use neighbourhood experiences and cultural backgrounds of the children in their care in planning daily experiences.
- Use community resources as part of everyday planning.
- Implement an effective planning process.
- Observe and document children's interests to serve as the base for planning.
- Adjust the pace and complexity of routines and household activities to make them appropriate for the children's level of development.
- Use routines and transitions as learning experiences for children.

3.3 Planned experiences promote development and learning across developmental domains.

Through its home visitors, the agency provides in-home training to the provider to ensure that:

- Planning to meet developmentally appropriate outcomes through indoor and outdoor play is intentional.
- Social engagement and competence are actively encouraged and promoted.
- Early literacy is promoted.
- Children's creative expression is encouraged through open-ended, self-chosen experiences. There are choices of experiences and choices within experiences.

- Children have opportunities to rest and space for privacy appropriate to their individual developmental needs.
- The presence of a mixed age group is promoted as a learning opportunity.
- 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.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to ensure that:

- Play is child-directed.
- The provider facilitates and participates in children’s play, taking on a variety of roles in the play.
- The provider extends children’s play, facilitating and guiding their exploration and discovery through questions, comments and suggestions.
- Daily experiences in play build on children’s interests.

3.5 Peer learning is encouraged.

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors the provider to ensure that:

- Children have an opportunity for child-directed play with others in small groups for extended periods of time.
- Providers have realistic expectations for child-directed peer play and interactions.
- Providers support children in developing strong peer relationships.
- Providers recognize the value of mixed-age peer interactions and play.

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

Through its home visitors, the agency supports and monitors providers to ensure that:

- Providers 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.
- Providers 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.

- The home visitor and the agency assist the provider to reflect continuously on patterns of children’s development in relation to typical developmental outcomes.
- Issues of developmental concern are identified by families, home visitors and providers. Action is initiated with the support of the agency and in consultation with families.
- Developmental goal setting with families, agency staff and providers is respectful of unique capabilities and developmental capacity.
- Documentation is used as part of the ongoing planning process.

- The agency and the provider 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, collaborative 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 agency builds a relationship of trust with each family.

- The agency is family friendly.
- There is a clear and systematic intake process to match families with providers.
- The agency provides clear, systematic information to families about its systems before care begins.
- The home visitor and agency staff connect regularly with families.
- The home visitor visits new children within a month of their enrolment.
- Families feel safe in calling the agency with concerns.

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

- The family's primary role in child rearing and their right to transmit their values, beliefs and cultural heritage to their children is respected. Agency staff offer support for providers in acknowledging the family's roles in child rearing.
- The home visitor supports providers in consulting with families about needs and preferences for children's daily experiences.
- Through the home visitor, the agency provides child development information to families in an ongoing manner.
- The agency provides families with information about appropriate communication and guidance skills. Home visitors model for providers in this area.

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

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

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

- The agency provides information to families about community services and social agencies.

- The agency facilitates connections to needed supports for families.
- 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 agency has practices, policies and procedures to ensure that:

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

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

- The home visitor encourages dialogue between families and providers that supports and enriches children’s experiences.
- The agency has a process to review developmental progress of individual children.
- The agency has a simple mechanism to share daily experiences on children’s developmental progress with families.
- Proposed major changes that affect children’s experiences are discussed by families, providers and agency 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 providers supported by the home visitor and agency staff.
- There are opportunities for formal and informal exchange of information between home visitors, agency staff, families and providers.
- The agency responds quickly to concerns raised by families.
- There is a procedure for resolving issues between providers and families and/or between the agency and families.

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 agency philosophy, goals and objectives, reviewed on an annual basis.

- Statements are written in plain-language style.
- Statements are easily accessible and understood by agency staff and providers.
- Agency staff orient providers to philosophy, goals and objectives, and procedures.
- The review process involves providers and agency staff as key stakeholders.

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

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

6.3 Policies and procedures are clearly reflected in everyday practice.

- Agency staff promote and engage in intentional and ongoing reflection on practice.
- Policies and procedures are developed and reviewed with input from agency staff.
- Providers are also consulted about issues that affect them.
- Policies and procedures are consistent with early childhood best practice standards.
- A code of ethics guides the practice of the home visitor and other agency staff.

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 agency staff position in the program that statement is reviewed regularly.
- There is a clear process used to recruit and orient new agency staff.
- There is a strategy to recruit agency staff who reflect the cultural, racial and/or religious diversity in the community served.
- There is an annual performance review for agency staff.
- There is a clear process to recruit, to orient, and to monitor providers effectively.
- The agency has clear written criteria for determining when a provider is not meeting agency, CFSA or regulatory standards and a fair process for termination of contracts which is shared with providers before they first sign a contract.
- Agency 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 agency has well-developed practices that support providers and are responsive to their requests for assistance so that continuity of experiences for children and providers are enhanced.
- The agency provides professional development for home visitors and providers.
- The agency seeks out specialized knowledge and resources for planning when required and shares them with both agency staff and providers.
- Agency staff and providers have opportunities to participate in decision making at both the operational and governance levels.
- Agency staff and providers 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 of 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 the 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 involved in the program are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with program goals.

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 agency actively seeks the views of the staff, providers, 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 agency 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 agency 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 between review periods.