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Your Childcare Startup Roadmap

Follow the steps in order. Tick each action when complete and write down anything you still need to confirm.

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

This is a planning tool, not an application form. Start with the idea, confirm the likely regulatory route, research your community, and investigate a property before making financial commitments.

STEP 1 — Describe the program you want to open

- ■ Choose the model you are exploring: licensed childcare centre, home childcare through a licensed agency, independent unlicensed home childcare, or another child-focused program.
- ■ Identify the age groups, estimated number of children, proposed days and hours.
- ■ Write 2–3 sentences describing the service families will receive and what a typical day or session will look like.

STEP 2 — Identify the likely regulatory pathway

- ■ Review the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) and Ontario Regulation 137/15 at a high level.
- ■ Consider whether the actual purpose and structure of your program requires a licence or may meet a specific exemption or authorization.
- ■ Do not assume a program is exempt because it is called a preschool, academy, camp or enrichment program.
- ■ If classification is unclear, ask the Ontario Ministry of Education for direction before making major commitments.

STEP 3 — Research your community and demand

- ■ Look at existing childcare services, the ages they serve, hours, fees and availability where possible.
- ■ Identify the families you hope to serve and the need your program would address.
- ■ Estimate realistic enrollment Plan for a gradual start rather than assuming every space will be filled immediately.

PAUSE BEFORE YOU COMMIT
Do not sign an unconditional lease, purchase a property or begin renovations based only on an assumption that childcare use will be permitted.

Startup Roadmap — Property & Finances

Complete these checks before committing to a site or finalizing your project budget.

STEP 4 — Investigate a location before committing

- ■ Identify a possible property address and the exact childcare use you are proposing.
- ■ Contact municipal planning or zoning staff. Ask whether that use is permitted at that specific address.
- ■ Ask whether a zoning amendment, minor variance, parking or drop-off requirements may apply.
- ■ Find out which building, fire, public health, accessibility, outdoor-space and occupancy reviews may be needed.
- ■ Keep written notes of the answers and request written confirmation where possible.

STEP 5 — Check whether the idea is financially realistic

- ■ Estimate start-up costs: deposits, professional fees, design, approvals, renovations, permits, furnishings and learning materials.
- ■ Estimate monthly costs: rent and occupancy costs, payroll, utilities, insurance, food, supplies, software and administration.
- ■ Estimate income using your proposed capacity, fees and realistic enrollment assumptions.
- ■ Include working capital for delays, vacancies and unexpected expenses.
- ■ Do not count on CWELCC or grant funding until eligibility and approval are confirmed.

YOUR PROJECT AT A GLANCE

Community / municipality	
Proposed childcare model	
Target age groups	
Proposed capacity	
Possible property address	
Target opening timeframe	

NEXT
Once you have worked through Steps 1–5, use the proposal outline on the following pages to organize the details of your project.

Childcare Project Proposal Outline

Use this working outline to prepare a clear summary of the childcare business you intend to establish.

PART A — BUSINESS CONCEPT

Proposed business name	
Owner / operator	
Community / municipality	
Proposed childcare model	
Target age groups	
Proposed capacity / spaces	
Days and hours of operation	

PART B — PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Describe the service you plan to offer, the families you intend to serve, and what children will experience during a typical day or session.

Program summary	

PART C — COMMUNITY NEED

- ■ Who are the families you expect to serve?
- ■ What childcare or early learning options already exist in the area?
- ■ What need or gap do you believe your program will address?
- ■ What information supports your understanding of local demand?

Research notes / evidence	

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Proposal Outline — Site, Operations & Budget

Use this page to record what you know and identify what still needs investigation.

PART D — LOCATION AND PROPERTY

Proposed property address	

- ■ Have you contacted municipal planning / zoning? ■ Yes ■ Not yet
- ■ Is the proposed use confirmed as permitted in writing? ■ Yes ■ No ■ Pending
- ■ What building, fire, public health, accessibility, outdoor-space or occupancy questions remain?

Property / zoning notes	

PART E — OPERATING PLAN

- ■ Outline your proposed daily schedule, routines and program approach.
- ■ Identify the staffing positions and qualifications you expect may be required.
- ■ Record questions about supervision, ratios, group sizes and staff coverage. Confirm requirements for your model.
- ■ List the policies you expect to need: enrollment, fees, parent communication, health and safety, illness, medication, emergencies, supervision and records.

Operating plan notes	

PART F — PRELIMINARY FINANCIAL PLAN

- ■ List expected start-up expenses and obtain estimates where possible.
- ■ List ongoing monthly expenses, including staffing and occupancy costs.
- ■ Estimate revenue using realistic capacity, fees and enrollment assumptions.
- ■ Identify available start-up funds, working capital and questions for a qualified financial professional.

Start-up cost estimate	
Monthly cost estimate	
Financial questions	

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Before You Apply — CCLS & Licensing Preparation

Use the Child Care Licensing System as your central guide for the application process and required supporting documents.

1. PREPARE YOUR PROJECT INFORMATION

- Define your proposed program, age groups, capacity and operating hours.
- Identify the proposed property and investigate municipal zoning and site suitability before committing to the location.
- Develop a preliminary program and staffing plan, and begin organizing business and property information.
- Review the CCEYA and Ontario Regulation 137/15 so you understand the legislation and requirements relevant to your proposed model.

2. REGISTER AND WORK THROUGH THE CCLS SYSTEM

Ontario's Child Care Licensing System (CCLS) is the central online system for the licensing application. Once you access the system and begin the applicant steps, follow the instructions and prompts provided there.

Open Ontario's Child Care Licensing System information and applicant guidance

The CCLS system identifies the information and supporting documents required for your application. The documents are provided as upload items within the system. Use the CCLS checklist and upload sections as your working document list; prepare each item and upload it in the place indicated.

3. COMPLETE THE CCEYA LICENSING STANDARDS TEST

Complete the CCEYA Licensing Standards Test through CCLS as part of your licensing preparation. Follow the instructions in the system and confirm that the applicable test requirement for your role has been completed.

CCEYA Licensing Standards Self-Test — official test information

4. PLAN FOR THE LICENSING TIMELINE

Allow approximately 4–12 months for licensing processing.
Build this potential timeframe into your business plan, property arrangements, financing and target opening date. Processing times can vary, so avoid promising families or committing to an opening date until you have confirmed your project's progress with the Ministry.

YOUR CCLS ACTION CHECKLIST

- Create your Ontario.ca Login and access CCLS.
- Follow the applicant instructions in the system.
- Review the required document upload list in CCLS.
- Prepare and upload each requested document in its designated section.
- Complete the applicable CCEYA Licensing Standards Test.
- Monitor your application and respond to Ministry requests through the system.

Important: CCLS is the source for the current application instructions and the specific supporting documents required for your application. Requirements can vary by project. Municipal zoning/building approvals and Ministry licensing are separate processes. Do not begin operating a licensed program until the required licence has been issued.

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Official Resources & Your Next Planning Guides

Use the official Ontario resources below, then continue with the paid planning tools to develop your project in more detail.

OFFICIAL ONTARIO RESOURCES

Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA)
Ontario Regulation 137/15 — General
Planning and Design Guidelines for Licensed Child Care Centres (PDF)
Ontario Child Care Licensing System (CCLS)

The Ministry's Planning and Design Guidelines are a free government resource. Review them before selecting a layout or planning renovations; they cover planning, interior and exterior design and related licensing considerations.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP WITH MH CHILDCARE FOUNDATIONS

The free checklist helps you organize your first steps. These additional guides provide more focused planning support for two of the biggest early decisions: financial feasibility and property suitability.

FINANCIAL PLANNING GUIDE Build a realistic startup budget and financial picture. Work through anticipated setup costs, monthly operating expenses, revenue assumptions, enrolment planning and working capital. Request / purchase by email	**$29 CAD**
CHILDCARE ZONING SNAPSHOT A focused property-planning resource to help you understand zoning and municipal due diligence questions for a proposed childcare location. Municipality required when requesting. Request / purchase by email	**$39 CAD**

To request either guide, select its email link. The message will be addressed to info@mindfulhorizons.ca. For the Zoning Snapshot, include the municipality of the proposed property. No separate online checkout URL has been provided, so these links open a pre-addressed purchase request email.

IMPORTANT

Legislation and government guidance can change. Always check the current versions on Ontario.ca and e-Laws. The paid guides are planning resources and do not replace municipal confirmation, Ministry direction or qualified legal, architectural, zoning or financial advice.

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