

How to Earn Your CDA Credential

*A complete roadmap to the Child Development Associate
credential*

**Published by
In and Out Visions LLC**

Chapter 1

What Is the CDA Credential?

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is a nationally recognized certification awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. It is the most widely respected entry-level credential in early childhood education and is required or strongly preferred by Head Start, military child care, and many state-funded pre-K programs.

Earning your CDA tells employers and families that you have demonstrated the knowledge and skills needed to nurture the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of young children.

Three settings to choose from

- Infant/Toddler — birth through 36 months.
- Preschool — ages 3 through 5.
- Family Child Care — birth through age 5 in a home setting.

Chapter 2

Eligibility Requirements

Before you apply, you must meet the Council's basic eligibility requirements.

- Be 18 years or older.
- Hold a high school diploma, GED, or be enrolled in a high school career and technical program in early childhood.
- Complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education training covering all eight CDA subject areas.
- Document 480 hours of professional experience working with young children in your chosen setting within the past three years.
- Compile a professional portfolio with required resource collection items.
- Complete and collect family questionnaires.

Chapter 3

The 120 Hours of Training

The 120 training hours must cover all eight CDA subject areas, with no fewer than 10 hours in each.

- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment.
- Advancing children's physical and intellectual development.
- Supporting social and emotional development.
- Building productive relationships with families.
- Managing an effective program operation.
- Maintaining a commitment to professionalism.
- Observing and recording children's behavior.
- Understanding principles of child development and learning.

Your 45-hour certificate may count toward these hours depending on your state and trainer. Always verify with the Council before assuming credit will transfer.

Chapter 4

Building Your Professional Portfolio

The portfolio is the heart of your CDA application. It demonstrates that you can apply what you've learned in real classrooms with real children.

Required portfolio items

- Six reflective competency statements, one for each CDA Competency Standard.
- A resource collection with 17 specific items, including learning experiences, family resources, and reference materials.
- A professional philosophy statement.
- Family questionnaires distributed to the families in your care.

Plan for 6 to 10 weeks to build a strong portfolio. Many candidates create a binder with labeled tabs and a digital backup.

Chapter 5

Applying and Scheduling Your Verification Visit

Once your portfolio is ready and your training and experience hours are documented, you submit your application and fee through the Council for Professional Recognition's online system, YourCouncil.

After you apply

- Pay the application fee (currently \$425).
- Schedule the CDA exam at a Pearson VUE testing center.
- Schedule the verification visit with a Council-approved Professional Development Specialist.
- Be observed for at least one hour in your setting.
- Complete the reflective dialogue with your specialist.

You'll typically receive your credential within several weeks of completing both the exam and verification visit.

Chapter 6

Renewal and Career Growth

The CDA credential is valid for three years and can be renewed every five years thereafter. Plan ahead so it never lapses.

Renewal requirements

- 45 clock hours of continuing education in early childhood since the credential was awarded.
- Current first aid and CPR certification.
- 80 hours of recent work experience with children in your setting.
- A new family questionnaire and letter of recommendation.

After the CDA, many providers continue toward an associate's or bachelor's degree, a state director credential, or a specialized infant/toddler endorsement. In and Out Visions LLC offers coaching at every step.

Thank you!

We're proud to support your journey in early childhood education. For coaching, registration help, and additional resources, visit **In and Out Visions LLC**.

© In and Out Visions LLC. All rights reserved.