



Five Phases of Accreditation

PHASE ONE

Informing and Exploring

Phase One is for learning about the process and deciding whether to apply. Owners, directors, their boards, and staff will have many questions. Long distance meetings can be arranged over the Internet. Children's Institute staff members can also be available to answer specific questions from individual directors through phone calls and e-mails.

After learning about the process, the next step is purchasing the kit of application materials. Included in the kit is this guide, a paper copy of the quality indicators (the one that will be submitted for the formal application is in electronic form), the list of administrative records that will be needed for the review, a sample parent information letter, samples of surveys (these are not the actual surveys, because surveys are completed electronically, with paper copies available for those without access to a computer), and the checklists for the procedures, safety and hygiene practices, equipment expectations, ratio requirements, and staff training requirements. Also included are copies of the assessment instruments that are used for the basis of classroom observations.

Also in the manual is a separate sheet with the center's ID and password for the self-inventory in Phase Two. This will be unlocked when the fee is paid for Phase Two.

During this phase, it is important to capitalize on communication links to families, staff members, and (if applicable) the board of directors, making certain that everyone understands the reasons for accreditation, the timeline for completion of tasks leading to accreditation, the route for getting questions answered, and the need for everyone to participate and contribute during the accreditation process.

PHASE TWO

Readiness for the Formal Application Process

The first action item for the director is to develop a timeline with self-imposed deadlines. When Phase Two begins, the director will receive a timeline template to complete and return by email to Children's Institute. It will be used to estimate dates for scheduling site observations and the director's interview in Phase Three. If a center wishes to change the timeline during Phase Two, a revised timeline should be submitted.

The timeline should include tasks, the person responsible for completing the task, and the target date for completion of each task. Here is a list of suggested major tasks for the timeline:

- Conducting informational meetings to describe the accreditation process to staff and parents
- Communicating through newsletter articles
- Proceeding through the electronic self-inventory, including target date for submission
- Completing the preliminary electronic staff and leadership qualifications templates
- Conducting “mock” ECERS-R, ITTERS-R, tour of facility, records check with follow-up for corrective actions during informal application (Phase Two)
- Conducting practice assessments by using the checklists
- Conducting any trainings that need to take place to fill training requirements
- Collecting materials for Permanent Products Binder, with target date for submission
- Targeting tentative dates during Phase Three for family and staff surveys
- Targeting tentative date (month/year) for site visits during formal application (Phase Three)

The *Pathways Self-Inventory Tool*, which is in electronic form, provides the focus for this phase.

The Tool is designed to assess your progress toward being ready to apply, and clearly delineates what needs to be accomplished in order to successfully achieve accreditation. A Technical Assistant will review the tool with you upon request, give ideas for sharing it with staff, and help you get set up on the website if help is needed.

On the website, you will enter a code and your password that was sent with the application kit. A Children’s Institute staff person will be designated to track your entries via the web. The choices for each indicator are “met,” “not met,” and (for some, but not all) N/A (not applicable). The “to do” list will be generated for indicators that are “not met.” You may add the tasks that need to be accomplished in order to score the indicator as “met.”

Numbers at the left of the home page indicate the progress of the self-inventory. When 100% of the critical indicators and 80% of the essential indicators have been met, the submit tab can be selected, and your center will be ready for the next phase.

In addition to helping get you started on the Pathways Self-Inventory, the Technical Assistant can suggest ways to obtain the information for the self-assessment. Suggestions will include formats for focus groups to help you take a new, objective look at your environment.

Children’s Institute staff will e-mail instructions to complete the staff and leadership qualifications, along with the automated template that calculates scores. Leadership can use this as a guide to determine areas of strengths and needs, so that when the center is ready for formal application, staff and leadership qualifications meet requirements.

A thorough, thoughtfully completed readiness process, with a timeline, will help to streamline the formal application process. It is important to be candid about scoring the indicators because evidence gathered in the formal application stage will validate or question your answers.

PHASE THREE

Formal Application Process

Step A.

Phase Two has prepared your center for formal application. You are ready to provide information that will demonstrate the level of quality your center has attained. The first step is to submit the self-inventory electronically and pay the enrollment fee for formal application

The Binder of Permanent Products should then be submitted for scoring. Instructions for completing the family surveys will be sent to the leadership. A staff member will be responsible for the staff surveys. Detailed instructions on staff survey collection are given to the staff member. It is beneficial that this person have access to the Internet to check progress of submissions.

Step B.

After the documents in Step B are received, Children's Institute will schedule site visits. The visits will include a tour of the facility and grounds, plus an examination of a sampling of staff and child records. If the center has children with special needs, these records will be particularly scrutinized for assurance that referral and review procedures have been followed. This assessment can be found in the section headed Checklists, Training Requirements, and Site Assessments of this manual.

A specially trained observer will visit classrooms and observe the environment and program of each using a random sampling of items from the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ITERS-R) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R).

Leadership will be interviewed to gather evidence of the presence of the quality indicators that one cannot capture from observations, surveys, or other means. It is important that the interview be held in a place within the center where the leadership will not be interrupted, except for emergencies. The interview will focus on the topics as outlined in the Checklists, Training Requirements, and Site Assessments section of this manual.

During the assessment process, quality indicators are viewed from a variety of perspectives. The family surveys, staff surveys, leadership interview, tour of facility, and permanent products are crossed checked to determine agreement on particular indicators. If the indicators are in 80% agreement, the particular standard is considered to be met. (The classroom assessments and staff/leadership qualifications are scored separately with minimum requirements.)

Step C.

At this point, there is sometimes a telephone conversation between Children's Institute staff and the center leadership to clarify results on the assessment instruments or designating items for any minor corrective actions that need to take place. In some cases, documentation or observations may have to be repeated.

PHASE FOUR

Review Process

All the materials from Phase Three are organized and examined to confirm that the application is complete. Final scores are tabulated, with a determination as to whether or not Pathways accreditation is attained.

If accreditation is attained, the applicant is notified first by phone, followed by a report that outlines scores, comments, and other feedback by mail. The applicant receives documentation of completion with a certificate to display, and electronic logos that can be used on center letterhead, advertisements, and center documents. A self-report form is included in the event changes occur that may affect the status of accreditation, such as addition of classes, natural disaster, etc.

If accreditation has not yet been achieved, the applicant receives a status report with a list of quality indicators that were found to be not met, with reason for that determination. It is the responsibility of the center to make a plan for corrections, and then notify Children's Institute staff of completion. Evidence that the corrections have taken place must be collected. In some cases a second site visit may be necessary.

Licensing Issues Affect Award of Accreditation Status

Although scoring indicates a center is eligible for accreditation, violations reported to the licensing agenda that have compromised the health and/or safety of children may delay accreditation status or cause it to be denied. If a center is licensed it must be in good standing with the licensing agency before accreditation can be attained.

PHASE FIVE

Continuous Improvement

Centers that have attained accreditation should update records in their profile as changes occur (e.g. staff changes, attainment of degrees by staff, reduction or expansion of classrooms).

After the continuous progress annual fee has been paid, Children's Institute will arrange an informal site visit and/or review strategic plans, informal surveys and other documentation.

The accreditation certificate expires in three years. Centers should apply for reaccreditation at least six months before the expiration date, to avoid accreditation lapses.

REACCREDITATION

For reaccreditation, centers should review their initial self-inventory, update their permanent products binder, staff qualifications template, and leadership qualifications template (if changes in leadership or staff assignments have occurred since the initial accreditation) and prepare for a site visit. Please note, that in pursuit of continuous progress, a minimum of 10 points for each classroom on the staff qualifications template is expected. The center, after paying the fee for formal application, can then move on to Phase Three, with the site visit.