

Childcare Staff Interview Questions & Scorecard

[Center Name]

CANDIDATE NAME

POSITION APPLIED FOR

DATE

INTERVIEWER

27

Questions

4

Sections

1-5

Scale

4

Role Tracks

How to use: Ask all questions from Sections 1-3, then choose 2-3 role-specific questions from Section 4 based on the position. Score each answer on the 1-5 rubric. A total score of 75% or higher typically indicates a strong candidate.

Scoring Guide

Rate each answer on a scale of 1 to 5 using the following criteria:

Score	Rating	Description
1	Unsatisfactory	Could not answer or gave a concerning response (e.g., would use punishment, doesn't understand mandated reporting).
2	Below Expectations	Vague or generic answers, limited examples, minimal understanding of best practices.
3	Meets Expectations	Adequate answers with some specific examples, understands basic best practices.
4	Exceeds Expectations	Strong answers with detailed examples, demonstrates solid judgment and child-centered approach.
5	Exceptional	Outstanding examples demonstrating leadership, deep understanding, proactive problem-solving.

Pre-Interview Checklist

- Resume reviewed, gaps and tenure at previous positions noted
- Education and credentials verified (CDA, associate/bachelor's in ECE, state-specific qualifications)
- Background check initiated (many states require results before hire)
- References contacted (minimum 2 professional references from childcare or education settings)
- Interview room prepared (quiet, professional, questions printed, scoring sheet ready)

1. Background & Motivation 5 questions

1 What inspired you to work in early childhood education?

What to listen for:

Genuine passion for children's development, personal connection to the field, long-term career interest (not just "I like kids").

Score:

Notes:

2 Tell me about your education and training in early childhood.

What to listen for:

Relevant credentials (CDA, degree), ongoing professional development, awareness of child development theories.

Score:

Notes:

3 How many years have you worked in childcare, and what age groups have you worked with?

What to listen for:

Experience with the age group you're hiring for, stability (not jumping jobs every few months).

Score:

Notes:

4 Why are you leaving your current position (or why did you leave your last)?

What to listen for:

Professional growth, positive framing, honesty. Red flags: blaming others, negative about previous employer.

Score:

Notes:

5 What do you know about our center and our program?

What to listen for:

Evidence they researched your center, genuine interest, alignment with your philosophy.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

2. Behavioral Questions - STAR Method 8 questions

Ask the candidate to describe a specific Situation, their Task, the Action they took, and the Result.

6 Tell me about a time a child in your care was having a difficult day with persistent challenging behavior. What did you do?

What to listen for:

Patience, specific positive guidance strategies (redirection, choices, validation of feelings), collaboration with co-teachers, documentation, parent communication.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

7 Describe a situation where you had a disagreement with a co-worker about how to handle a child. How did you resolve it?

What to listen for:

Respectful communication, willingness to compromise, focus on child's best interest, not going behind colleague's back.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

8 Tell me about a time you had to communicate difficult information to a parent (behavior concerns, developmental delay, incident).

What to listen for:

Empathy, professionalism, specific examples, focus on partnership with family, documentation.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

9 Describe a time you suspected a child might be experiencing abuse or neglect. What did you do?

What to listen for:

Understanding of mandated reporting obligations, knowledge that they report directly to CPS (not just to director), understanding that reasonable suspicion is the threshold.

Critical:

If the candidate says they would investigate first or wait to be sure, that is a red flag. Mandated reporters must report upon reasonable suspicion.

Score:

Notes: _____

10 Tell me about a time you had to adapt your lesson plan or daily routine because something unexpected happened.

What to listen for:

Flexibility, ability to meet children where they are, creativity, maintaining calm.

Score:

Notes: _____

11 Describe your experience working with a child who had special needs or required accommodations.

What to listen for:

Inclusivity mindset, collaboration with families and specialists, willingness to learn, specific strategies used.

Score:

Notes: _____

12 Tell me about a time you made a mistake at work. How did you handle it?

What to listen for:

Accountability, honesty, learning from mistakes, corrective action taken.

Score:

Notes: _____

13 Describe how you build relationships with the families in your classroom.

What to listen for:

Regular communication, cultural sensitivity, partnership approach, welcoming demeanor, specific examples.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

3. Situational Questions 6 questions

These scenarios test judgment and knowledge of best practices. There are model answers for each.

14 A toddler bites another child. Both are crying. What do you do?

Model answer:

Comfort the bitten child first (check for broken skin, apply ice/first aid), then address the biter with calm, simple language ("Biting hurts. I can't let you hurt friends."), redirect the biter, document the incident, notify both sets of parents (without identifying the other child), watch for patterns.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

15 A parent arrives at pickup and you suspect they are under the influence of alcohol. What do you do?

Model answer:

Do NOT release the child. Calmly offer to call another authorized pickup person. If the parent insists and becomes aggressive, call 911. Document everything. Never accuse directly - focus on the child's safety.

Score:

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

16 You notice your classroom is out of ratio because a co-worker left for break and a substitute hasn't arrived yet. What do you do?

Model answer:

IMMEDIATELY alert the director or another available staff member. Do NOT leave the children. Combine groups temporarily only if allowed and safe. Never ignore a ratio violation - it's a licensing requirement and safety issue.

Score:

Notes: _____

17 A parent tells you they don't want their child napping because it interferes with bedtime. Your state requires a rest period for all children under a certain age. How do you respond?

Model answer:

Acknowledge the parent's concern empathetically. Explain the licensing requirement for a rest period. Offer compromise: child doesn't have to sleep but must rest quietly (books, quiet toys). Communicate that you'll wake the child after a reasonable period if they do fall asleep.

Score:

Notes: _____

18 You observe a co-worker being rough with a child (pulling their arm, yelling in their face). What do you do?

Model answer:

Intervene immediately to protect the child. Report to the director the same day. If the behavior constitutes abuse, you are a mandated reporter and must report to CPS regardless of what the director says. Document what you observed.

Score:

Notes: _____

19 A child in your class has a severe peanut allergy. A parent sends a birthday treat that contains peanuts. What do you do?

Model answer:

Do NOT serve the treats. Politely explain to the parent (or at pickup) that you have a child with a severe peanut allergy and cannot serve peanut-containing foods. Offer a safe alternative if available. Follow the center's allergy policy.

Score:

Notes: _____

4. Role-Specific Questions choose 2-3

Select the track that matches the position you are hiring for. Choose 2-3 questions.

● Lead Teachers

20 How do you plan and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum?

What to listen for:

Knowledge of developmental milestones, ability to differentiate for individual needs, assessment-driven planning.

Score:

Notes:

21 How do you assess children's development and communicate progress to families?

What to listen for:

Observation-based assessment, portfolio documentation, regular family conferences, developmental screening tools.

Score:

Notes:

● Assistant Teachers

22 How do you see your role in supporting the lead teacher?

What to listen for:

Team player mindset, initiative, willingness to take direction, understanding of shared responsibilities.

Score:

Notes:

23 What do you do during transition times (between activities, cleanup, waiting)?

What to listen for:

Proactive engagement with children, uses songs/fingerplays, helps with setup/cleanup, doesn't disengage.

Score:

Notes:

● Infant Room

24 What is your understanding of safe sleep practices for infants?

What to listen for:

Must know: back to sleep, firm flat surface, no loose bedding/bumpers/toys, pacifier OK, room temperature 68-72°F.

Score:

Notes:

25 How do you support infant-parent attachment while building your own bond with the baby?

What to listen for:

Understands primary caregiving model, respects family routines, communicates daily details to parents.

Score:

Notes:

● Toddler Room

26 How do you approach potty training in a group setting?

What to listen for:

Follows child's readiness cues, consistent routine, positive reinforcement, partnership with family on approach.

Score:

Notes:

27 How do you handle separation anxiety at drop-off?

What to listen for:

Empathy for child and parent, consistent routine, distraction techniques, communicates reassurance to families.

Score:

Notes:

Red Flags to Watch For

- ' Cannot describe specific positive guidance strategies (relies on "timeout" or "consequences" without explanation)
- ' Does not understand mandated reporting obligations
- ' Speaks negatively about children or families
- ' Cannot provide specific examples from experience
- ' Shows no interest in professional development
- ' Prioritizes convenience over children's safety
- ' Has gaps in employment they cannot explain

Scoring Summary

Category	# Questions	Score / Max
1. Background & Motivation	5	___ / 25
2. Behavioral Questions (STAR)	8	___ / 40
3. Situational Questions	6	___ / 30
4. Role-Specific (chosen)	2-3	___ / 10-15
TOTAL		___ / 95-110

RECOMMENDATION

- Strong Hire Hire Maybe Do Not Hire

INTERVIEWER SIGNATURE

DATE

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Reference Check Questions

Use these questions when contacting the candidate's professional references after the interview.

REFERENCE NAME	RELATIONSHIP TO CANDIDATE
ORGANIZATION	PHONE / EMAIL

1 How would you describe [candidate]'s reliability and punctuality?

2 How did [candidate] handle challenging behavior from children?

3 How did [candidate] communicate with parents and families?

4 Would you rehire [candidate]? Why or why not?

5 Is there anything else I should know about [candidate]'s work with children?
