

So You Want to Start an Early Childhood Education Program Facts You Should Know...



1. *Why should we consider starting an Early Childhood Education Program?*

The sole purpose of Seventh-day Adventist Early Childhood Education Programs is to **MINISTER** to young children and their families. The mission of Adventist Early Childhood Education and Care is to provide young children with Christ-centered, developmentally appropriate experiences in safe, nurturing environments that are aligned with the beliefs and values of the church. If your priority is to make money, than you should **RECONSIDER**. The ministry of operating a quality Early Childhood Education Program is labor intensive and may or may not yield financial benefits. However, the long-lasting rewards that our programs have on the lives of young children and their families are priceless. The business of Early Childhood Education Programs is ministry!

2. *Can churches or schools operate an early childhood program on church or school premises?*

Absolutely. However, most states or jurisdictions have very specific requirements for early childhood programs, including facilities and grounds. It would be important for the church or school board to determine what the requirements are and to be prepared to meet the requirements for licensure.

3. *What ages of children can be accommodated in early childhood programs?*

Early Childhood Education programs can take many different forms, and can accommodate children from birth to school age (typical age range is birth -5 and 5-8 for before and after-care programs). Licensing requirements, including staffing and facilities, differ depending on the age and number of children in the program, and it is important for anyone considering starting a new program to clearly define the parameters of their program and meet all the requirements as stipulated.

4. *How is setting up an early childhood program different from starting a church school?*

Early Childhood Education programs in general are subject to more specific requirements and regulations and are carefully monitored by government agencies. Unlike many private schools, early childhood programs must be licensed in compliance with governmental regulations and union policy. Both programs require suitable facilities and the hiring of qualified personnel.

5. *If our church or school begins an early childhood program, who is considered the employer and owner of the program?*

Establishing a Seventh-day Adventist Early Childhood program is the responsibility of the local church or school constituency with approval from the Conference. As with our schools, early childhood employees are considered Conference employees and should be treated as such. The ECEC program should have its own board, its own policies and procedures, as well as oversight of its own budget. Additionally, the ECEC program should have the day-to-day legal and administrative responsibility to operate the early childhood program in cooperation with the conference and in alignment with the policies established by the Union and Division.

6. *How will I know if it is feasible to begin an Early Childhood Program?*

When determining whether starting an ECEC program is feasible or not, you should consider the following: Of what value is the ministry to the church, the school, and the local community? What is the number and size of other ECEC programs offering Christian education within ½ a mile of the proposed program? Are there free early childhood services in the area such as pre-k offered through the public school or Head Start, etc? Is there a need for quality Christian-based childcare in the area (i.e., is there a significant number of families in the community or in your church in need of childcare, what's the average income)? Could the ECEC program serve as a feeder to the K-12 school? Conducting an in depth feasibility study is advised.

7. ***How do I know if our Early Childhood Program will be financially viable?***
Financial sustainability in ECEC depends on managing the following – enrollment, fees and collections. All three are critical, and all three must be working well in order to stay “in the black”. ECEC programs must stay fully enrolled, every day, all year. ECEC programs must set their fees and revenue sources so that they fully cover expenses and are used to continually enhance and grow the program. Additionally, all tuition and fees must be collected in full and on time. Slippage in any one of these areas can result in financial instability.
8. ***How do I determine what salary and benefits to provide for ECEC employees?***
Wages, benefits, recruitment procedures, and staff retention should be addressed as a part of the strategic plan for ECEC program operation and should be reviewed at least annually by the governance. Wages and benefits should reflect an effort to compensate and retain quality ECEC personnel and policies should be commensurate with those governing Conference employees. Local community wages for similar positions as well as minimum wage laws can offer some guidance with respect to minimum requirements. The church/school in collaboration with the ECEC board should work with the Conference to ensure that these employment issues are clear, equitable, and foster the retention of quality personnel.
9. ***Must all employees in an early childhood program owned and operated by a Seventh-day Adventist church or school be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?***
The goal is that all employees of SDA education programs, birth to 12, be Seventh-day Adventists.
10. ***Should the church be involved in caring for preschool children? Didn't Mrs. White say that children should be home until they were at least eight years old?***
As a church, we recognize that the ideal is for young children to remain at home under the care of their parents for as long as possible. However, in a growing number of Adventist and non-Adventist families, cultural and societal realities and personal choices have brought increasing numbers of young children to childcare centers, and in alignment with the mission of the church as well as with Mrs. White's counsel, “In all that concerns the well-being of the child, it should be the effort of parents and teachers to co-operate” (Education, p. 283) as we collaboratively “train up a child in the way that he (she) should go” (Proverbs 22:6). Our Early Childhood Education and Care Programs minister to the needs of young children and their families within our church as well as the communities in which we serve.

For further information, please contact:

Your Union Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Associate:

Atlantic Union: Marlene Alvarez, earlychildhood@atlanticunion.org
SDA Church in Canada: Betty Bayer, bayer.betty@adventist.ca
Columbia Union: Evelyn Sullivan, ESullivan@columbiaunion.net
Lake Union: Barbara Livesay, Barbara.Livesay@lucsd.org
Mid America Union: LouAnn Howard, lohoward@maucsd.org
North Pacific Union: Sue Patzer, sue.patzer@nw.npuc.org
Pacific Union: Julie Yamada, JulieY@puconline.org
Southern Union: Tamara Libonati, tlibonati@southernunion.com
Southwestern Union: Carolyn Early, cearly@swuc.org

North American Division, Early Childhood Education and Care Associate:

Davenia Lea, 301-680-6443, davenia.lea@nad.adventist.org



