

RUNNING A HOME DAYCARE

{and doing it well}

A guide to planning, advertising, opening and running
a child care business out of your home.

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INTRODUCTION

What was born out of necessity, soon became a successful business. Home Daycare is one of the easiest, most profitable ways to make money for a stay at home parent. For our family, it was just what we needed at the time.

My husband and I were living in a newly purchased home with two school-aged boys and a young daughter. She was about a year old at the time, and we were committed to having me stay at home with her at least until she hit school age. While my husband's income was great, we still needed to supplement it somehow. I started off with no idea what I was doing, with very little business sense, and with very little in the way of supplies and start-up money, except for what we already had. At first I used only the toys, booster seats and playpens that we already owned. As children started to be signed up, and as I began to interview family after family, my experience shaped how I ran my

business. I was taken advantage of, short-changed, manipulated and walked out on by some of the nicest people I knew. But I learned so much from them. The most important lesson was this:

People will treat your business like a business only if you do too.

Without a thorough policy and the guts to stick to it, nine times out ten, your clients will treat you like a babysitter – paying you when they get around to it, deciding for themselves what your service is worth, and cancelling at the last minute.

You are not a babysitter. You are a Home Daycare Provider, someone who sees what she does as a business, a way to earn a living and who puts the effort necessary into it to see that it succeeds. Your reputation is important to you, because you know it will affect the clients that come your way. Your policies are important because you want to be the type of Provider that is in the business for the long haul, not one that burns out in a matter of months because she is constantly being taken advantage of.

Learn from my mistakes: start your business like a business. Start with clear expectations and stick to them. Don't allow clients to take you for granted or to assume that the rules don't apply to them.

At the same time, let your clients know how much you

appreciate them. Say thank you when they hand you the week's payment. Love on their child like he or she is the only child you care for. Communicate often and well, and let them know the great things that happened each day.

Most of all, enjoy your Home Daycare business. Yes, it is work, and very hard work at that. But it provides the perfect opportunity to spend as much time as possible with your own children while making a full time income. There aren't many other professions that can offer the same.

And I would love to hear from you! Send me your experiences, your questions, and your advice. Who knows, your thoughts might make it into a revised and update version of **Running A Home Daycare [and doing it well]!** Contact me anytime through the Contact page at www.WelcomeToTheZoo.ca.

Megan Elford

November 2014

1

Do You Have What It Takes?

Do you have what it takes to be a Home Daycare Provider?

Contrary to popular belief, providing a safe home environment for multiple children from different families involves more work than many assume it does. Throughout this book, you will find many helpful ideas and guidelines on what is involved, but I expect that you will not close the pages thinking it is an easy job.

Take a look at this quick checklist and decide if this business is really for you.

1. You have a great deal of patience with children and enjoy being with them.
2. You can multi-task well, and aren't overwhelmed by many simultaneous requests.

3. You and your family are okay with sharing your home, your living space, and your yard.
4. You have enough space in your home to use as dedicated daycare space during daycare hours for playing, sleeping and eating.
5. You are prepared to stand behind your policies and procedures, and enforce them when needed.
6. You have well thought-out, simple rules that you can easily explain to your new daycare children.
7. You have a plan for appropriate redirection and discipline when needed.
8. You are able to handle yourself in frustrating and exasperating situations.
9. You are proactive in avoiding isolation by finding community activities, playgrounds, early years centers or other places where you'll be able to take your daycare children for socialization and for grown-up conversation for you.
10. You are flexible and are able to handle changes in routine quickly and with a good attitude.
11. You are able to handle yourself professionally, even when emotions may be involved.
12. You understand that while you are free to run your business the way you want, parents are the ones who know their children best and they have the right to find another daycare if their philosophy differs from yours.

13. You are able to work long hours with the potential for very few breaks (if any).
14. You are willing to research the legislation concerning home daycare in your province and are able to implement it.
15. You are committed to providing reliable, quality, attentive care for families.
16. You are able and willing to keep your home, or at least your daycare areas, in a clean and safe condition each and every day that you are open.
17. Your own children are *for the most part* emotionally able and ready to share their home, their space, and their parent, and you are able to divide your time between the needs of your own children and of other children.

How did you do? Are you ready to take on this venture? It will be so rewarding, but it will also involve some hard work.

If you're ready, let's get down to it!

2

Supplies and Equipment

What will you need to open your home daycare?

When you're first starting out, you'll want to spend as little as possible in case plans change, or the market isn't great in your area. The beauty of running your own in-home daycare is that you can start with relatively little, basically just whatever you normally use for your own children in the way of toys, plates and cups, blankets, and so on.

My suggestion is always that you ask for a deposit or the first week's fee up front, and then use that money to buy whatever you'll need for that child. For example, don't buy a playpen until a child is enrolled that will use that playpen. If they will need another high chair, use that money as well. Once you've enrolled several children, you'll probably have accumulated all of the equipment that you need, since the playpen bought for Johnny can be disinfected and used for

the child that takes his place when he moves on.

Buy good quality used equipment, or inexpensive (but still good quality) equipment at first. If you would really like to upgrade at some point, you can do it when you're making a little more money.

Here's a list of the basic necessities and where I had luck buying them for reasonable prices.

Basics:

Playpens	Used Children's Clothing Stores (eg. Once Upon A Child)	\$40
High Chairs	Ikea – Antilop with tray (easy to clean and stackable!)	\$25
Blankets	Dollar Store (baby-size fleece blankets)	\$2
Pillows	Walmart/Target (small travel pillows)	\$5
Daycare Cots (ages 2+)	Kijiji/Craigslist; Amazon	\$30-\$50
Plates/Cups	Ikea	\$2
Sippy Cups	Walmart (Parent's Choice – great for colour-coding)	\$3
Change Table	Used Children's Clothing Stores (or use your own)	\$40
Toys	Used Children's Clothing Stores (or use your own)	varies

So there you have it – everything you'll really need to open a home daycare. And as I mentioned before, buy equipment only when you need to. You can always use your own child's high chair or playpen for staging, if parents would like to know where and how their child will eat or sleep.

Now there are lots of things that are handy to have:

curriculum, baby bottles, educational toys, cubbies for the children's belongings, outdoor play equipment, specialty strollers or wagons, and more. But those things can wait until you have a good income coming in.

Parents should be supplying diapers, extra clothes, special food, cups or bottles, and anything else that you think is practical. I personally have a very specific brand preference when it comes to baby wipes so I provided them, but if you aren't as picky as I am, parents can also provide those. You'll go through LOTS if you use them for cleaning up after meals and snacks, and after crafts, painting, or any other messy activity.

3

Home Daycare and The Law

Why Follow The Law When It Seems Like No One Else Is?

Home Daycare is a business that can be completely free from oversight in many provinces and states. In most cases, like in Ontario, a Provider can choose to be licensed or not. There are huge advantages to be licensed: the ability to accept clients that are subsidized, resources and training you may not otherwise have access to, even toy exchanges and substitute Care Givers for when you're sick. Knowing that a daycare is licensed by the province can also be a reassurance to parents.

But there are also many reasons to remain unlicensed: not having to submit paperwork to receive pay, having the freedom to plan your own day and what you will and won't do during it, and not having regular inspections which can be a disruption to the day.

I chose to keep my own home daycare unlicensed. But just because I wasn't licensed didn't mean I didn't have laws to follow. Those laws included caps on the number of children I had in my care at one time. I also chose to follow the [Day Nurseries Act](#) (the legislation that deals with [Private and Public Daycare](#) in Ontario), as closely as I could. I concentrated on things like curriculum and planning, menu choices, diaper changing procedures, evacuation plans, etc. The details of legislation will differ between provinces and from state to state, but I believe it's so important for us, as home daycare professionals, to do our best to educate ourselves, and to do as much as we can to operate within the law. In Ontario, that comes down to the number of children in your care. We can watch 5 children at a time under the age of 10, in addition to our own children. Other provinces allow more, but in Ontario the magic number is 5.

Here's why I chose to follow the law:

1. It shows that I have taken the time to get to know the law. Knowing and following the legal limits demonstrated that I was invested in my business and protecting myself and my daycare families from a forced closure and huge fines if someone found out I had too many kids in my care.
2. It shows that I operated "above the table", and that I preferred to do things openly and honestly. Believe me, when it comes to the person that is taking care of your child, you want someone who doesn't hide anything and is as honest as possible.
3. I had a good legal reason not to take extra children. When a parent who wasn't normally scheduled for a certain day needed last-minute care, I was able to avoid overtaxing myself (and my patience) by politely declining with legal backing.
4. It protected the children. We did evacuation drills

regularly, but if we had needed to leave quickly during naptime, I would have had 5 sleeping children to carry out on my own. That's a huge task right there, but if I had decided to go over my numbers by a few (or more)? Far more opportunity for tragic results in the event of a fire or other crisis.

5. I'm only one person. I only have two eyes and two hands. I can only watch so many kids on my own without sacrificing the quality of care. Hiring a helper in Ontario would be fine, but it wouldn't enable us to watch more children — the cap of 5 would still be in effect.

I know how hard it is to look at all of the families that need care and to know that someone down the street is taking way too many kids. And I know what it feels like to have to turn down someone, knowing that they'll head straight to that daycare, possibly endangering that child. My only recourse was to make sure that all of the parents I was in touch with knew the law. When parents begin to demand legal daycare, more providers will see the value in following the law.

Do some research, find out what the laws are for your area and do your best to follow them. If nothing else, you'll notice a difference in the type of families that seek out your services. They will be the kind of parents that are looking for quality care, who will prioritize their child's daycare costs, and who will appreciate what you do for their child each day!

4

Setting Up Your Space

Running your own home daycare is a job like no other. No other job requires you to use quite as much of your personal space.

Sure, a web developer or accountant that telecommutes will need a dedicated office with a desk, office equipment and so on.

But with home daycare, you'll need a play area, an eating area, a sleeping area and a bathroom/diaper changing area.

The good news is that all of those areas will be write-offs at tax time. The bad news is that if you don't plan wisely, the daycare could completely consume your house.

For my family, it was really important for us to have spaces in our house that were untouched by the daycare, and for our own kids to have a place to escape to and keep their personal belongings and toys out of reach. It was also important for me to be able to have the daycare kiddos always within my sight, except for the babies while they were sleeping (and of course, I always had the monitor on then).

So here's what we did.

Entrance: Originally we had the daycare families come in through our front door. We had a cubby for each child along with hooks and a boot mat. Each cubby had the child's clip board with their **Daily Report**, and the **Sign-In Sheet** was on the end of the row of cubbies where parents could easily grab it to sign their child in and out.

Soon we realized that it was just too crazy to get 8 kids (5 daycare + 3 of my own), plus me, plus my husband ready to go outside at once all in our tiny entrance way (hubby leaves for work at the same time as we leave for the bus). We quickly converted the back door into a daycare entrance, allowing hubby and our boys to get ready at the front door, while I and the daycare kids and my youngest got ready at the back door.

Playroom: We converted the living room, which is directly adjacent to the kitchen, into a gated playroom. Our back door opens into the living room so it became our new daycare entrance. This allowed storage space for all of the daycare kids' outdoor clothes, bags, etc, and also cut off their access to the rest of the house. The daycare kiddos ate in the kitchen of course, and with this arrangement, I could supervise kids both at the table and in the playroom.

Kitchen: The kitchen was for eating and craft time, but beyond that I didn't feel it was safe enough for the kiddos to be wandering around in there. As soon as they were done eating or crafting, the kiddos would go right back to the playroom.

Bathroom: We have 3 bathrooms in our house, but for obvious reasons, I didn't want the daycare kiddos to have access to all of them. The upstairs bathroom became our pottying/diaper changing bathroom. Yes, that meant we all had to traipse up and down the stairs 5 times each day, but those kids became expert stair climbers very quickly! I had a change table and enough potties for everyone, so we did all of that simultaneously which minimized our time up there.

Napping Areas: I had two nap areas. The older kids (18 mos-4 yrs) slept on daycare cots in the playroom. Of course, the cots were pulled out for nap and put away immediately after. The babies slept in playpens in my daughter's bedroom. Before she started school, she napped in my bedroom or on a cot in the playroom. Because the babies were in playpens, they didn't have access to her toys and things. Besides when the babies were sleeping in there, the room was completely off limits.

The off-limits rooms included bedrooms, the basement, and the main entrance to the house (except during our evacuation drills). This made it so much easier for child-proofing, and also for making sure none of my own kids' "special" toys were played with. My kids knew that they needed to keep their own toys out of the daycare areas to keep them safe.

This set up drastically reduced the amount of stress, and even of disciplining I had to do. The daycare kiddos knew the boundaries, and they were always within sight/earshot so

that I could intervene before a situation started to escalate.

Take a look at your own daycare space, and see if there are some things you can change to make it easier to share your home, not just for you but for the rest of your family too!

5

How To Determine Your Rates

Where you set your rates will often determine the type of client you attract. Super cheap rates will attract those who are concerned only with price and who may be penny-pinchers when it comes to their child's care.

Don't get me wrong, I love to save a buck when I can too. But when it comes to my child's care, I am willing to spend the extra because it directly translates into the quality of care. If parents aren't concerned with the quality of care their child will receive, they are far more likely to pull their child when they find "a better deal". They'll also be more likely to question your sick day policy and late fees. You don't need families like that.

You need families who understand that good quality child

care has a price attached and is worth the cost. These families will be much more conscious of your policies because they will value you and how well you care for their child. So unless you offer low quality care, don't offer low prices.

Start by researching the other home daycares around you. Take a look at Kijiji, Craigslist, and flyers at the grocery store for pricing, and ask friends and neighbours. You can also call area daycares and ask for their costs and what it includes. Just be up front and say that you're researching for the purpose of opening a home daycare – you never know when you might come across that daycare owner again, so honesty is the best policy.

As well, often both commercial daycares and home daycares will have websites that list their rates, so do a little snooping around and see what you come up with.

Costs are highly variable from town to town and even between neighbourhoods. Get a good solid idea of what the range is for your area and what it includes.

Once you've got a range of rates, decide where you fit in. Do you offer a highly structured day with a curriculum, planned activities, trips around the neighbourhood and so on? If so, focus on the costs for daycares that offer the same. On the other hand, do you offer more casual care with drop-in spots and spontaneous activities? If so, look at

the costs for daycares that follow the same model.

When you've got a more narrowed range of costs – say, \$30-\$35 per day – consider where you might fall within that range. Do you have an education or experience in child care or teaching? Do you have a unique approach to child care? Will you offer something that no one else offers? If so, lean towards the middle or top end of the range. Or perhaps you'd like to get up and running quickly and easily. If so, lean towards the lower end.

From the beginning though, **determine whether you will offer different rates for different ages.** The most logical thing to do is to offer the same rate for any spot. Since the number of spots you can offer will likely be limited, each spot should be worth the same amount to you, whether that child is 2 or 5. The amount of work involved shouldn't really come into play (unless there are very specific special needs). The spot itself is what you need to price, not the child. This applies to sibling discounts too. There is no advantage to you to have siblings in your daycare – if one is sick, likely the other will be too. When the family takes holidays, both children will be gone. Two children, whether they are related or not, will still require the care of two children. If anything, siblings will cost you more than they will save you, so there is no reason to offer a discount on their spots. Unless you plan on offering discounted care, don't offer discounted prices.

Decide also what your rates will be for sick days and holidays.

There are many ways to approach sick days. You could offer a specific number of sick days (for when the child is sick) for free or at a discount, or you could charge full rate for them. If you charge your full rate, you will find that parents will bring their child, even when they are sick. Offering an incentive to keep their child home when sick will benefit you by keeping those germs out of your home.

For days when you are sick and need to close, it builds a great deal of trust to not charge anything. Often a parent will need to find care elsewhere at an additional cost, or they will need to stay home themselves, which often costs them that day's worth of pay. Don't attempt to speculate on what their employee benefits are, simply use whatever policy you've decided on for all of your families.

Holiday policies can be more difficult. You can offer a specific number of days at a lower rate or for free for when families take holidays. In this case as well, if you don't offer a lower rate for holidays, you'll find at least one or two families who will bring their children throughout the year. It's always a good idea to give families an excuse to enjoy a few days off with their children.

For your own holidays, again consider giving that time to your families for free. They will need to either take their holidays at the same time as yours, or they will need to pay

someone else to care for their child during that time. Give your families as much notice on your holidays as possible. You should be able to do this at the beginning of the year with each Parent Handbook update (or whenever you would normally choose to update your Handbook). I always took two weeks in the summer and one week over Christmas for my holidays. Parents had lots of notice, and could easily decide what they were going to do for the days I was closed.

Statutory holidays – In my area, most employees are paid in full or are paid double time for Stat holidays, while having the day off. Based on that, I always took Stat holidays off, but charged full price for them. Again, I provided a full list of the Stat holidays I would be closed, but that they would be charged in full in my Parent Handbook. Parents were well aware of this policy before signing on with me. What you decide to do will be largely determined by how employers normally do things in your area.

Decide whether you will charge before care or after care.

It is a great idea to charge for the week's care before the week starts. Require payment on Monday morning for that week. This way, if something happens and a family leaves without notice, you will already have been paid for that week. It can be difficult or even impossible to track down a family for the money they owe you if they leave suddenly and without notice. This one I learned through a few very expensive experiences! Starting off the right way would have saved me literally hundreds of dollars.

If a child is sick for a day or two and you charge a lower rate for sick days, simply credit the difference to the family for the next week. The same applies if you are sick or if you need to close for some other reason.

Determine what you will do if payment isn't made on time. Charging before the week starts means that you can refuse to accept a child into care without payment. If mom shows up on Monday morning without cash in hand, tell her that she can run to the bank with Junior and bring him back afterwards. This eliminates the need for late payment fees and is much more effective at ensuring that you receive your payment.

And finally, **decide what you will charge when a child leaves your care.** If you ask for two weeks' notice when a child leaves your care, you can require payment in lieu of the two weeks if a child needs to leave suddenly. Enforcing this is difficult, but if you have families that really value your care, they'll respect your policy on this. For the families that do leave without either giving two weeks' notice or payment in lieu of it, be reassured in the fact that at least you didn't work for free.

6

Advertising

When I started up my own home daycare, I didn't have a ton of money to do it with. So, I got a little creative when it came to advertising. If you really look into it, there are lots of ways to let people know about your services. Don't be afraid to overdo your advertising coverage. My Rule of Thumb is that a person needs to hear about a service 3 times in 3 different ways before they consider using that service. The more ways you can get your name out, the better. That said, here are my Top Ten:

- 1. Kijiji or Craigslist.** Use free online advertising to your advantage. Word your ad carefully, including your experience, the activities you provide (or plan to provide), your general location, your hours, any perks that set you

apart from others, your website address and your contact information (ideally email, phone and text). DO NOT give your street address, for the safety of the children in your care.

2. Word of Mouth. Ask everyone you know to tell others about your home daycare.

3. Social Media. Post status updates or tweets about your daycare in every social media site you're a part of. Not only can you post openings, but pictures of artwork, pictures of activities you're doing with the kids (with no faces), links to kid-friendly recipes or printables. Not only will this keep your home daycare in people's minds, but you'll get some great ideas to use later ;-).

4. Free Online Business Listings. Google business listings for your area and then submit your information to every one that you can. This will increase your searchability when potential clients do an online search for daycare in your area.

5. Free Online Daycare Listings. A site like www.DaycareBear.ca lists daycares and their current openings for free. Sites like this will be some of the first to pop up when parents do an online search, so take advantage of that!

6. Invest in business cards. There are websites that offer free business cards online, but read the fine print to see if they'll put their own advertising on the back of the card. This may be my Print Broker bias speaking, but your daycare will look much more professional and much less fly-by-night if you invest in business cards that don't "look" free. Once you've got your business cards, give one or two to everyone you talk to, leave several on grocery store or community bulletin boards, leave a stack in the library and at local schools if that's allowed (check first), leave one or two on the side tables in doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms, and give a few to established home daycares and ask them to pass them on to families they can't accommodate. Keep several on you and hand one over when chatting with other parents at the bus stop, at church, at play group or at indoor playgrounds. Even if a few of your cards go straight into the recycling bin, your daycare's name will have first been read by at least one or two people. They'll remember it if someone in their circle mentions that they're looking for care.

7. Make up posters and/magnets. In my area, everyone collects their mail at Super Mail Boxes, and these are prime advertising locations. Every household receives mail at some point or another, so by putting your daycare name on one of these mailboxes, every household will become familiar with your name. And it will come to mind when they or someone in their circle is looking for care. If you put

posters up, make sure they're laminated or weather-proofed somehow. I personally prefer using business card-sized magnets though. Several can be put on each Super Mail Box, and people can take one if they'd like your contact info. Magnets could also be put on each metal door in a neighbourhood (but this could get really pricey!).

8. Design a daycare website. Yes, you need a website. When you're looking for any service, what do you do first? Right, you Google it. You need to have a web presence for others to find. You can hire someone to do this for you, but there are several easy ways to make up your own website for free. Try www.Wix.com, www.Weebly.com or www.Webs.com. They all have super easy, drag and drop website designers. You could use the free domain name that comes with your free site (ie. www.yourdaycare.wix.com), you could spend about \$10/year for a custom domain name (ie. www.yourdaycare.com) or you could get a free .tk domain name from www.Dot.tk (ie. www.yourdaycare.tk). There are a ton of options and ways to get your daycare website up and running. And it could be a simple landing page with your contact info, hours and services, or it could be more complex, with your policies and handbook posted, a contact form, your routines and philosophy and more. It's completely up to you.

9. Add your daycare name and contact info to your email signature. Make sure that every email you send has your daycare information in the signature section.

10. Have shirts made up with your daycare name. This is a bit more of an investment, but one of the best ways to advertise. Have a week's worth of shirts made up and wear them while you work with the kids. Wherever you are with the daycare kids — at the park, the bus stop, the library, walking down the sidewalk — your daycare will be advertising itself. This is the best form of mobile advertising ever. Just make sure you have your business cards with you to give to anyone who asks if those kids are all yours!

There you have it: the Top Ten Mostly Free Ways To Advertise! Now get out there and start advertising!

7

Curriculum

Why would you want to invest in a curriculum for your home daycare? Well, let me see ...

1. Circle/learning/craft time will fill about an hour of your day. It's a great way to keep the kiddos engaged and active.
2. It looks great in your advertising. Parents will be looking for a Provider that is invested in her business and invested in their child. Using a curriculum allows you to do both.
3. The kiddos will be learning lots! And it's always really exciting to be the one that taught them all of that. I recently got reacquainted with one of my daycare babies. She said very proudly "I know how to write my name!". I was able to say "And I know who taught you how to do that!".

4. It keeps your mind active. Taking care of littles all day can be mentally exhausting. Think about it — 5 babies x 4 diapers x 5 days = 100 diaper changes each week! That can get really draining. Planning and prepping lessons (although they will be short and simple) stretches your mind in a different way than the menial tasks will.

5. Parents are proud to tell other parents what their kiddo has been learning in daycare, and that's GREAT advertising for you!

6. It will be a write-off for you when tax season comes around again. And as with any business, the more write-offs, the better!

So, what do you need to look for in a curriculum? There are several things to consider: time, money, content, accessibility, etc.

When I started doing daycare, I figured I would plan and prep each day's lesson from scratch. And that's a very viable option. I have a B.Ed, so I didn't think it would be that big of a deal. It wasn't difficult, but it was very time consuming. Working 12 hour days, cleaning, kids' homework, and extracurriculars cut my available time pretty short.

Very soon I realized I needed to pay myself for my time, by ordering pre-made curriculum. I went to **Funshine Express** for my curriculum, and had it delivered to my door once a month. I would spend one naptime cutting out visuals and laminating them on a little laminator I bought at Wal Mart. With my basic craft supplies stocked up, I could pick up the teaching manual each day, do our circle time (songs, story, lesson, etc) and our craft time without even reading it beforehand. Now, if I read it beforehand, things would go even better. But on the days I couldn't, it was still great.

There are several competitors to Funshine Express. A quick Google search will give you lots of options. Look for one that fits your criteria when it comes to prep time required, the cost, which supplies are included, etc.

If you decide to do it on your own for the sake of saving money, make sure you keep track of how much it actually costs. The extras, like manipulatives, visual aids, etc. can add up pretty quickly and may cancel out the savings you think you're getting. But there are lots of great free resources, printables, lesson plans and craft ideas online if you have the time to search them out.

8

Interviewing

During my daycare years, I did many interviews with potential client families. Most of them went quite so well that all of the families signed on with me.

Okay, all of them except one family.

The interview was going great, until my youngest locked herself in the basement. And I couldn't find the key. And she was crying quite a bit. And banging on the other side of the door. Yeah, it was just as bad (and embarrassing!) as you're thinking it was.

However, through that interview experience, as well as the others I've conducted, I've learned a few things. I'd like to share them with you so that your daughter doesn't get locked in the basement too. Or so that you're able to find the clients you want, whichever.

First we need to get one BIG thing straight. **Your potential**

clients are not interviewing you. YOU are interviewing them. Yes, they'll have questions for you. Yes, they'll want to check your credentials. But YOU are the one who will be welcoming them into your house every work day and depending on their reliability and adherence to your policies. You need to make sure that they will be a good fit for your business.

Schedule interviews during a time when no other daycare kids are around and when your spouse or someone else can watch your own kiddos (no matter how old they are!). This would be the lesson I learned after the Locked Basement Incident. Some Daycare Providers like to introduce their family members to potential clients; since I did all of the care, I didn't feel this was a necessary step. And you'll want to make sure that you aren't bringing strangers into your house while your current daycare kiddos are there for safety reasons.

Have your [Home Daycare Parent Handbook and Policies](#) ready to look through with them. If possible, sending them a copy by email in advance or having it posted on your website is ideal. I avoided (and possibly weeded out) potential issues when parents showed up already familiar with the way I do things.

Have a schedule for the interview. Once I figured out how important this was, I had a "script" that I liked to follow so that I knew everything was covered. Here was mine:

A) **Welcome:** Welcome the family at the door, with a special welcome for their little one. I wanted to start getting to know their child as soon as possible.

B) **Rundown:** Give the parents a quick rundown of the structure of our interview ("We'll have a quick tour first, and then we'll sit in the playroom and go through the handbook

and policies.”)

C) **Tour:** I would take parents and their child through each of the rooms that were used for daycare – the room the littles napped in, the bathroom (where we changed diapers and did our potty routine), the kitchen and the playroom. At each stop, I would quickly talk about that part of our day. In the nap room, for example: “Each child has their own dedicated playpen or cot to sleep in. I provide it for them as well as their sheet, blanket and pillow. Naptime is from 1-3, and for the first several days after a new child starts with us, I’ll rock them to sleep, rub their back or sit beside them to help them settle.”

D) **Policy Discussion:** It would usually be about 10-15 minutes into our interview at this point, and the little one would be getting pretty restless. This is when I would lead them back to the playroom, and close the gates giving their little one free reign of the playroom. This not only allowed us to talk, but also gave the child a chance to explore and play without any other children around. Go through your handbook and policies point by point. I found it especially helpful to go over the payment policy. Things like sick days, holidays and late payment penalties are very important. It ensures that your potential clients know exactly what to expect, and it shows that you conduct your home daycare like the business it is. It also eliminates any haggling — something I dealt with before going through the policies with each client. This portion could take anywhere from 15 minutes to 45 minutes.

E) **Question Time:** At this point, I would ask if there were any questions that the family had for me, and after that I would ask some [questions](#) about the child’s usual routine, food likes/dislikes, allergies, etc. Many times they would ask if they could come and stay with their child for an hour or two on the first day. I would only allow it if I had their registration papers in hand. Many Providers do not allow this for the

safety of all of their children. That's perfectly reasonable and is completely up to you. At this point they would quite often say thank you and I would usher them out. I never expected or asked anyone to hand in a registration immediately, because I wanted them to have a chance to discuss the policies and make sure they were willing to adhere to them. If asked when I needed to hear back from them, I would tell them anytime is fine, but that the spot would go to whoever gave me a check first (as long as they did well in the interview).

After the interview, assume you will never hear from them again. That way if anyone else calls for the same spot, you are free to offer them the spot as well.

That's it! The most important part is using your time wisely. Yes, you need to sell yourself and your home daycare, but your priority should be using this time to make sure that this family will be a good fit for your daycare. No amount of pay is worth it if you have to continually chase the family for it, or if you never know when they will show up, or if their child would do better with a personal nanny. Now get out there and start interviewing!

9

Developing A Routine

One of the first things potential clients will ask is “What kinds of things do you do with the kids?”. Having a routine in place is the perfect springboard for answering this question.

Now, you may be saying that you’re not the type of person that likes to be constrained by a routine, and that you want to be free to take the day as it comes. But there are several things that DO need to be done at approximately the same time each day. Besides that, children thrive and respond much better when they know what to expect from the day, even if it’s just the ORDER of things, rather than the TIMING.

So, start building your routine with the basic non-negotiables. When you open, meals and snacks, nap times, etc. And then fill in the rest of the time with things like outdoor play, circle time, trips to the park, crafts, etc.

Your routine may change over time, and that's alright. But you should have a general idea of the pace of each day so that everything is covered (diapers get changed, kids get fed) and so that parents have an idea of what their children are doing each day.

Here's a sample routine from the last year of my own home daycare:

7:00 – Open; Breakfast

7:45 – Breakfast Ends; Free Play (this was when I cleaned up the breakfast dishes, etc)

8:00 – Diaper/Potty Time (I always took all of the kids at the same time since the bathroom was upstairs)

8:15 – Get Dressed for Outdoors

8:30 – Leave For Bus Stop

8:45 – Back Inside; Diaper/Potty Time

9:00 – Circle Time

9:15 – Craft Time

9:30 – Extra Work For Bigs (2+); Free Play For Littles (2 and under)

10:00 – Diaper/Potty Time

10:15 – Snack Time

10:30 – Get Dressed For Outdoors

10:45 – Free Play/Walk/Park/Outdoor Arena

11:30 – Back Inside; Diaper/Potty Time

11:45 – Lunch

12:00 – Free Play/Finish Lunch (this is when I would clean up lunch dishes)

12:30 – Diaper/Potty Time

12:45 – Littles' Nap Time (anyone still in a playpen)

1:00 – Bigs' Nap Time (anyone on a cot)

2:45 – Wake Up For Everyone

3:00 – Snack Time

3:15 – Get Dressed For Outdoors

3:30 – Bus Stop

3:45 – Back to House/Free Play in Yard (parents would start picking up around now)

5:00 – Close (if it was winter, we'd head inside when it started to get dark and have Free Play or read books til close)

As you can probably tell, I am a routine-oriented person. I expect that your schedule would be quite different, or perhaps much less detailed.

Figure out what works for you, AND what you can implement without feeling rushed or stressed. But whatever it looks like, get it down on paper so that parents can see what's going on through the day.

You'll feel productive and the parents will feel secure in the fact that their child isn't being left to their own devices all day. They'll also see that their child's diaper is getting changed regularly and that they're being offered food regularly (it sounds simplistic, but it's a real fear when you're leaving your child with someone you've just met!).

10

Getting Your First Client

The most difficult part of opening a home daycare is getting your name out there and landing your first client.

It may take up to a few months, but once you find your first family, more will quickly follow. As with most things in parenting, no one wants to be the first to try something new. And rightly so — I would be hesitant to place my child in the care of a complete stranger who doesn't have any other children in their care besides their own.

How do you get around this? There are a couple of ways:

Offer to watch a friend's children once a week on a short-term basis for free or for a steep discount. Then when potential clients ask, you can let them know how often you watch your friend's children, the activities you do, the kind of snacks you provide, etc.

Provide a resume of the previous child care experience you've had, whether it's at your church in the nursery, volunteering at your child's school, a nannying position you held in the past, or a kids' team you've coached.

Advertise yourself as a drop-in daycare for the first few months. Look for stay-at-home-parents who want a morning off to run errands, or for working parents that need a last-minute back-up for when their regular daycare provider is closed. Just be sure to let them know that drop-in spots are on a first come, first served basis — you don't want to end up with more kids than you're legally allowed.

Take lots of pictures of your playroom, the activities you do with your own children or the children you watch occasionally (just be sure to keep their faces out of the picture), and the artwork they make. Use those photos in your advertising wherever possible.

Tell everyone you know that you're starting up your home daycare. Post it on Facebook or whatever social media circles you're a part of. Most of the people you know won't need care for their own kids, but they will know someone else who is looking. Give them your phone number or website address, or even better, your business card to pass on.

The important thing to remember is to be patient. Because this is a job that involves something as precious as children, it will take time for your name to get out there and for you to become known as a trusted daycare provider.

11

We've covered all of the basics of running your own home daycare, and we're only just getting started! I hope my thoughts have prepared you and motivated you. Most of all, I hope you've gained the encouragement you need to stick to your policies and to run your daycare like the business it is.

In the following appendix, you'll find all sorts of goodies, including a sample Parent Handbook, sample menu, and more. For more forms and resources, visit www.WelcomeToTheZoo.ca .

I wish you the best on your venture into the wonderful world of Home Daycare! It is one of the most difficult businesses you could ever start, but also the most rewarding. Enjoy the ride!

APPENDIX I

Sample Parent Handbook

Home Daycare Parent Handbook

Welcome To
Our Daycare!

We're excited to have your little one join us at daycare! Each child that joins us quickly becomes an important part of the daycare "family". We look forward to getting to know our new friend!

This handbook contains all of the important things you need to know about attending Doodle Bugs. I encourage you to keep it in a safe place for the duration of this year. You'll want to make sure you have it handy in case you have any questions or concerns.

Enclosed, you'll find:

- Policies
- Payment Details
- Contract Agreement Form
- Our Daily Schedule
- Our Menu
- What To Bring To Daycare
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Sample Communication Log
- Sample Bill of Child Care Services Rendered
- Sample Newsletter

Please don't hesitate to contact me by email or by phone if you have any questions or if clarification is required at any point.

Policies

Communication Log A daily record will be kept for you child listing food eaten, diaper or toileting details, naptimes, favourite activities, needed supplies, and any discipline issues that may arise. The log will be kept in your child's cubby. Please check it each time you come to pick your child up.

Meals and Snacks will be offered as per our daily schedule. A menu will be posted. Food will be offered to children, but they will not be forced to eat. I will notify the parents if a child is not eating.

Quiet Time is required for all children. Children will each be given a cot or playpen to rest in. Children will not be forced to sleep, but will be required to lie quietly for the duration of Quiet Time, to allow the other children to get the rest they need. If a child is disturbing the other children by making noise or moving around, they will be given a playpen in a separate room to spend Quiet Time in. Other activities will not be offered during Quiet Time.

Medication will be given only with written permission and

instructions.

Sick Children will not be admitted for care, in the best interests of the other children in my care. Any child exhibiting the following symptoms will be sent home with the parent: vomiting, diarrhea, fever above 101F (38.3C), contagious rash, excessive coughing that produces phlegm or a nose that is running greenish or yellowish mucus. If a child develops any questionable symptoms while in care, I will notify a parent immediately.

Supplies Diapers, formula, breast milk, baby food and an extra set of clothes must be provided when needed for each child. I will provide wipes, snacks and meals, 2% milk, bottles, sippy cups, bibs, blankets, sheets and pillows (although children are welcome to bring blankets and/or stuffed animals from home too). *Weather-appropriate outdoor clothing must also be provided for each child.* Because we meet the bus each morning and afternoon, we will be outside in all types of weather (heavy rain, extreme cold, etc). All clothing may be kept in the child's cubby or on their hook.

Receipts will be provided in January for the preceding year. Please let me know if you require them at a different time.

Two Weeks Notice, or two weeks' payment in lieu of notice, is required if your child will no longer be attending our daycare. I reserve the right to discontinue care for a child without notice for issues such as (but not limited to) behaviour problems or nonpayment of fees.

Please Call by 9 am if your child will not be attending daycare on a given day.

Late Pick-Up Daycare closes promptly at 5:00pm. Please call me if you will be late. You will be charged \$1/minute for each minute past 5:00pm.

Discipline will consist of distraction and diversion techniques (infants to 18 months of age), or time-outs (18 months and up). If

necessary, a child will be given a safe place to play away from the other children. Physical punishment will not be used. Aggression (biting, hitting, etc.) will be followed by an immediate time-out. Any time-outs will be recorded on the Communication Log.

Toilet Learning will be as per the Daily Schedule. At Potty Time/Diaper Check times, all children that can walk will be encouraged to sit on the potty or toilet. If they are successful, they will be praised, but rewards will not be given. All other times, children will be assisted (if needed) and/or allowed to use the toilet whenever they need to. As well, dirty diapers will be changed as needed. When your child is toilet training, please dress them in a Pull-Up or training pants with a waterproof cover.

Evacuation Drills will be practiced periodically. An emergency card is kept for each child in our Evacuation Pack so that parents can be contacted if there is an emergency that requires immediate pick-up (fire, etc.). Children are taught to make their way to the front door at the sound of the smoke detector or when they hear the word “evacuation”. From there we will exit to the van or to our alternate location.

Pick Up If a child is to be picked up by someone other than a parent listed on the registration form, please let me know in advance verbally (NOT by email, but by phone or in person), and let them know I will be asking for photo identification. If I am not told in advance that someone other than a parent will be picking up, I will not release the child to them. If this results in a late pick-up by a parent, all late fees will apply. Please let me know if there are any sensitive custody issues that pertain to your child.

Payment

**Our daycare only offers only full-time spots,
at the rate of \$---/week.**

To register your child, a completed Registration Form and **non-refundable** Registration Fee of \$--- is required.

These rates will increase only if deemed necessary, with a minimum of one month's notice.

Fees are due each Friday by 5:30pm for the preceding week.

Cash is the preferred form of payment.

Late Fees \$5 per 24 hour time period will be charged if payment is not received by 5:30pm on each Friday.

For example, a payment that is received at 7:00pm on Friday will have a \$5 late fee added to it. A payment that is received on Saturday at 7:00pm will have a \$10 late fee added to it.

If payment is not received by Monday morning at drop-off, the child will not be admitted to care until the payment plus late fee is paid in full.

Holidays Daycare will be closed for the following holidays: New Year's Day, Family Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Civic Holiday, Labour Day, Thanksgiving Monday. Full daycare fees for all of these holidays, except Easter Monday, are required. In addition, Daycare will be closed for two weeks in either July or August, and for one week over Christmas each year. Payment is not required for these closures, and exact dates will be handed out in January of each year.

Days Off Families are entitled to 10 (ten) days each year of "days off" at half-rate. These days can be taken for any reason (because a child is sick, family vacation, doctor's appointments,

etc.). Unless you let me know otherwise, I will charge half the daily rate for any absent days until your 10 days are used up. After that, all days, even if absent due to sickness, will be charged at full rate.

Provider's Sick Day If I need to close on a given day because of sickness, family emergency, doctor's appointment, etc, there will be no charge for that day. If I have an appointment that can be scheduled for the end of the day, I may ask my emergency back-up, to take my place for the last 2 or 3 hours of the day. As much advance notice as possible will be given. If I need to leave in the middle of a daycare day because of an extreme emergency or I am too sick to work, parents will be contacted to pick up their children. My emergency back-up, may be called in as a substitute if absolutely necessary.

Our Daily Schedule

7:00 – OPEN; Breakfast
7:45 – Breakfast Ends; Free Play
8:00 – Potty Break, Diaper Check
8:25 – Get Dressed for Bus Stop/Outdoor Play
8:30 – Leave for Bus Stop/Outdoor Play
8:45 – Return From Bus Stop
9:00 – Outdoor Play
9:30 – Inside, Wash Hands
9:45 -- AM Snack
10:00 – Potty Break, Diaper Check, Morning Nap
10:15 – Tot Trays, Free Play
11:00 – Potty Break, Diaper Check, Wake From Morning Nap
11:15 – Circle Time
11:30 – Craft Time
12:00 – Lunch
12:30 – Tidy Playroom; Potty Break, Diaper Check
12:45 – Afternoon Nap for Playpen Sleepers
1:00 – Afternoon Nap for Cot Sleepers
3:00 – Wake From Afternoon Nap; Potty Break, Diaper Check
3:15 – PM Snack
3:25 – Get Dressed for Bus Stop
3:30 – Leave for Bus Stop
4:00 – Return From Bus Stop; Outdoor Play
5:00 – CLOSE

*Tot Trays: Montessori-inspired, self-guided, learning activities promoting practical skills, fine motor skills, pre-math skills, and creating familiarity with letters and sounds.

**Outdoor Play is weather-dependent and may be shortened or postponed due to rain or heat.

***Trips to the playground or walks in the field may change our schedule.

SAMPLE MENU

	Breakfast (7:00-7:45)	Snack (9:45-10:00)	Lunch (11:45-12:00)	Snack (3:15-3:45)
Monday	Oatmeal, Muffins Cold Cereal with Milk Seasonal Fruit Milk	Yogurt Seasonal Fruit Apple Juice	Chicken Noodle Soup Bread & Butter Seasonal Fruit Milk	Animal Crackers Seasonal Fruit Water
Tuesday	Oatmeal, Muffins Cold Cereal with Milk Seasonal Fruit Milk	Blueberry Waffles Seasonal Fruit Apple Juice	Homemade Pizza Raw Veggies Bread & Butter Seasonal Fruit Milk	Goldfish Crackers Seasonal Fruit Water
Wednesday	Oatmeal, Muffins Cold Cereal with Milk Seasonal Fruit Milk	Toast and Jam Seasonal Fruit Apple Juice	Chicken & Rice Raw Veggies Bread & Butter Seasonal Fruit Milk	Graham Crackers Seasonal Fruit Water
Thursday	Oatmeal, Muffins Cold Cereal with Milk Seasonal Fruit Milk	Cream Cheese Wraps Seasonal Fruit Apple Juice	Grilled Cheese Sandwiches Bread & Butter Seasonal Fruit Milk	Oatmeal Cookies Seasonal Fruit Water
Friday	Oatmeal, Muffins Cold Cereal with Milk Seasonal Fruit Milk	Cheese & Crackers Seasonal Fruit Apple Juice	Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce Raw Veggies Bread & Butter Seasonal Fruit Milk	Arrowroot Cookies Seasonal Fruit Water

Seasonal Fruit: apples, bananas, clementines, cantelope, honeydew melon, canary melon, watermelon, grapes, kiwi, oranges, raisins, craisins, pears, mango, pineapple, strawberries, pears **Raw Veggies:** peppers, cucumbers, carrot, celery, broccoli, snap peas,

What To Bring To Daycare

At our daycare, most of the things your child will need during the day are provided.

There are a few items that must be brought, and there are several that parents may choose to bring.

I will provide the optional items if they are not provided by parents.

Must Haves:

- diapers (if cloth, must also provide a wet bag)
- complete change of clothes
- weather-appropriate outdoor clothing
(*sun hat in summer, jacket/sweater in cooler weather, snow suit, hat, mitts in winter*)
- weather-appropriate footwear
- child-specific milk or baby food
- bottles

Optional:

- preferred brand of sunscreen
- preferred swimsuit/water clothes
- preferred blanket and/or stuffie for naptime

Daycare Will Provide:

- sunscreen
- water clothes
- all food & drinks for meals and snacks listed on menu
- all dishes, bibs, sippy cups, and cutlery for meals and snacks
- wipes
- pillow/blanket/sheet for naptime
- cot or playpen for naptime

Frequently Asked Questions

How many children do you care for?

As an unlicensed home daycare in Ontario, I am legally allowed to watch 5 children in addition to my own children.

What are the ages of the children you accept for daycare?

I accept children from newborn up to age 10. Most of the children I care for are between the ages of 9 months and 3 years old.

Do you use cloth diapers?

While most of the children I care for use disposables, I do accept children in cloth as well. I ask that parents bring fresh, clean diapers each morning along with a wet bag. I do not soak diapers, but will dump them and place them in the wet bag for parents to wash each night. I also suggest that 5 disposable diapers be kept here for your child in case we go through all of the cloth diapers.

Do you go outside every day, even in bad weather?

Yes. If it is a school day, we must accompany the school-age children to the bus stop, regardless of the temperature or precipitation. Please bring weather-appropriate clothing each day. Hats, mitts and snowpants can be left at daycare in your child's cubby if you like.

How much TV do children in your care watch?

We do not watch tv or videos at all during daycare hours.

Do you transport children during daycare hours?

Occasionally we travel to the county museum, a splash pad or indoor playground during daycare. This can only be done on days when the number of children here fits with the number of carseats I own. I will let you know at drop-off when we are considering a trip like this.

Do you provide care on evenings or weekends?

No. I work 50 hours each week and enjoy spending my time off with my family, so I do not provide evening or weekend care.

Do you offer sibling discounts?

No. The number of spots I have available is very limited, so each spot is worth a large part of my income. To ensure that I can maintain the level of care and the reliability that families deserve, I do not offer sibling discounts.

What happens if you're sick?

If I am sick or if I need to close for any other reason (family emergency, utility failure, etc) I will call you as soon as I know. Finding back-up care is your responsibility, however, you will not be charged for any days that I choose to close (outside of the paid statutory holidays listed in the Payment section).

Bill of
Child Care Services Rendered

Name of Child: _____

Week of: _____

<i>Day</i>	<i>Rate</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Total</i>
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Balance			
NSF & Late Fees			
Other Fees			
TOTAL DUE			

FD= Full Day, PTH= Part Time Hourly

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan Elford lives with her husband and three children in Southern Ontario, Canada. She has a passion for teaching children, and has worked through the years in many capacities with them, from private commercial childcare, to Children's Ministries, to running her own home daycare.

Megan enjoys spending time with her family, road trips, and blogging.

You can find her online at www.WelcomeToTheZoo.ca, at www.facebook.com/welcometothezooblog, and at www.twitter.com/blogatthezoo.

Megan would love to hear your thoughts on this book. Email her at megan@welcometothezoo.ca.

www.WelcomeToTheZoo.ca

