

# Tips and Questions for Interviewing New Child Care Employees

*Learn key tips in preparing for interviews, plus sample questions to consider.*

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The interview process is a crucial step in hiring and vetting candidates. After you have reviewed [applications](#) and resumes to pick a group of candidates, you will want to interview them to figure out which individual is right for the job and also to leave candidates with a good impression of your company.

During an interview, you want to find out more about the candidate's personality, experience, work ethic, skills and techniques, and any other qualities that are important for your new team member to have.

This guide will give you some key tips in preparing for the interview, and sample questions that you might ask of prospective staff.

Check out our resource on [Attracting Talent](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)) to help you create a three-part job posting to find great candidates.

Before choosing to interview a candidate, determine if the candidate appears to meet the minimum qualifications of being a child care staff member. Review the Texas Health and Human Services Commission minimum requirements for child care [centers](#), [registered homes](#), and [licensed homes](#).

If you haven't already asked for authorization for a background check from an individual, the interview process would also be a good time to request the Background Check Request Form, so that the authorization from the individual is provided in a timely manner. For more information and to access the form, view [Form 2971, Child Care Licensing Request for Background Check](#) on the Health and Human Services website.

## Tips for Interviewing

- 1. Know your candidate.** You will want to read through the candidate's resume and anything else they submitted when they applied. If it has been a few weeks since you last read their materials, it is good to read through them again before interviewing so that the information is fresh in your mind.
- 2. Prepare questions.** Based on the candidate's background and the qualities you are looking for, you will want to come prepared with questions to ask. You may want to have a standard set of questions that you ask each candidate to compare them

more easily. You may also want to print these questions out and write down key points from the answers given. Keep reading for example questions to ask in an interview.

3. **Approach the interview like a conversation.** Prepare your set of interview questions, but know that it is okay to follow up with questions that go off of your script if you want to learn more about their answer or dig deeper into something that they said. You may ask clarifying questions if necessary. This also helps the candidate feel more comfortable and at ease.
4. **Give your full attention to the candidate.** You should be on time (if not early) for the interview and have enough time to ask all of your questions and answer any that they might have. Find a place that will not be too loud or distracting for either of you. If you are giving the candidate a brief tour of your facility, build in this time to the interview so that you don't cut your questions short.
5. **Begin by explaining the job and your program's needs.** Share with the candidate what you are looking for in a new employee, and a few things about why working for your program is so great. You could share your Texas Rising Star Certification level, the curriculum you use, why your families are so happy to come to you every day, or whatever you think it is that will sell this employee to come and work for you. You may also want to share any benefits that you offer to staff. Remember, they should leave the interview wanting to work for you!
6. **Give the interviewee time to think.** After asking your question, give it a few seconds before you say anything else. One strategy is to count to seven before you ask the candidate if they want you to repeat the question. Often, the candidate is thinking about how to best respond so you don't want to cut them off while they are thinking.
7. **Allow time for questions from the interviewee.** A very common last question that you can ask is, "do you have any questions for me?" This allows the candidate to learn more about you, your program, and the job that they have applied for.
8. **End by thanking them and sharing the next steps.** Once all questions have been asked or time is up, you should thank them for their time and for answering all of your questions. You should explain the next steps in your interview process (such as contacting references and conducting background checks) and let the candidate know when they should expect to hear from you. It is nice to walk the candidate out of the building, and once again thank them for their time.

## Sample Interview Questions

When thinking about what to ask in an interview, ask yourself what you want most out of a new staff member, and what type of personality would work well with your existing staff. In general, you want to ask questions that will help you get to know the candidate better and learn what sets them apart from other candidates you are interviewing.

Behavioral questions are interview questions designed to give the interviewer powerful insight into the candidate's values and mindset, by asking them to describe scenarios that demonstrate their attitudes towards work and how they typically react to various situations and challenges. Answers to behavioral questions are also harder to make up or lie about.

Competency-based questions are those that will help you learn about the candidate's experience and job-related skills. Answers to these questions can help you understand how much the candidate knows about child development, for example, or if they know what to do in certain situations that might come up.

Below is a list of potential questions. You'll notice that we skip some basic questions, like, "how long have you been working with children?" You should be able to learn that by reviewing the candidate's application materials.

Below each example question, you will also see some suggestions of things to listen for when engaging in an interview conversation with a potential new hire.

1. Tell us about what moment led you to want to work in child care OR  
What about your previous experience are you most proud of?  
*Qualities to listen for: authenticity, passion, and/or expressed delight for children and child care, engagement in their work and field.*
2. Tell me what drew you to this opportunity and what you are hoping to get out of this job.  
*Qualities to listen for: Interest in growing and learning, compatibility, flexibility, interest and fit with your organization, and reasons for leaving your current job.*
3. What is the biggest challenge you've faced in working in child care [or with children if they haven't worked in child care before], and what did you do to resolve the situation?  
*Qualities to listen for: Honesty, problem-solving skills, flexibility, empathy, appropriate expectations of children and co-workers, learning from mistakes, and/or growing from hard tasks.*
4. Tell me about a time when you've had a difficult conversation with a co-worker. How did you handle the situation?

*Qualities to listen for: Professionalism, willingness to compromise, ability to communicate, perspective-taking, problem-solving skills, teamwork, compatibility.*

5. Tell me about a time when you had to tell a parent “no.” How did you prepare for the conversation? What did you say?

*Qualities to listen for: Professionalism, ability to communicate, perspective-taking, problem-solving skills, understanding of parents' and families' unique needs.*

6. Tell me about a time when a child was pushing you to your limits. How did you handle it?

*Qualities to listen for: Problem-solving skills, ability to work under stress, appropriate behavior with children.*

7. In this work, we have busy schedules with many competing demands. Tell me about a time you had two things you had to do in the same timeframe. How did you handle it?

*Qualities to listen for: strategies for time-management, planning skills, communication when need help, managing a classroom, and working with the needs of many different children.*

8. When thinking back to your previous work experience, what is the most important thing learned while you were in that position and how did you learn it?

*Qualities to listen for: Eagerness to learn, willingness to try new things, adaptability, ability to handle frustration*

These are just a few examples of the types of questions you might consider asking. The questions or prompts are crafted so that the applicant can share a previous time when they've encountered a similar situation and what they've done or learned from that experience.

## Follow-Up Questions

If the answer that the candidate gives you does not seem to answer the question or seems to lack important details, you can certainly ask a follow-up question to learn more. Some examples of follow-up questions include:

- Can you explain more about what your role was in that example?
- Thank you for sharing that story. Can you tell me more about how that turned out?
- That sounds very interesting. Can you elaborate on what you learned from that experience?

## Role Specific Questions

The above interview questions shared can be used with anyone applying for a position in your program. You might also want to consider position-specific questions when interviewing for a Lead position, an Assistant position, or even a Director position. Here are some additional questions you might want to include in your interview process:

### *Assistant Position*

1. In this Assistant position, you will be expected to support the other adult(s) in the room as they outline the expectations for the children in your group. Tell me an example of when you've worked successfully as part of a team. What did you do to ensure the success of the team?
2. Describe a mentor you've had. How did that person help you grow professionally?

### *Lead Position*

1. In this Lead position, you will be expected to be responsible for both the children's growth and development as well as the other adults in the room. Tell me about how you have led other adults, or peers, in your previous work or past experiences.
2. Describe a situation where you have planned, implemented, and assessed learning experiences for [insert age group here]. How did it go and what did you learn through that experience?
3. What strategies would you use to support an assistant with no previous child care experience?
4. What professional skills will you bring to the table for this role?

### *Director Position*

1. As Director, you are responsible for the quality of care that the staff provides the children and families of this program. Tell me about a time when you motivated and guided adults to do their best work. What strategies did you utilize?
2. Describe the qualities of the ideal child care program. What does the leader do to create these ideals?

## Questions to Stay Away From

When conducting interviews you should also be aware that there are types of questions that you can't ask of the applicant because they are illegal. You must avoid questions around the following areas:

- **Age** – Questions like “How old are you?” “When did you graduate?” “How long before you plan to retire?” are all illegal to ask in an interview.
- **Religion** – Questions like “What religion do you practice?” “Where do you go to church?” should not be asked. It's important to note that the one exception is if there is a *bona fide occupational qualification*. This means that having a specific job-related rationale that is clearly a necessity for success in the position. Religious-based child care programs are usually this exception. Justifying a bona fide occupational qualification can be complicated, so you may want to seek legal counsel ahead of pursuing these questions.
- **Family status** – Questions like “What does your husband do for a living?” “Do you have children?” “Are you married?” “Do you plan to have children?” and “Are you pregnant?” are not okay to ask.
- **Race, ethnicity, or national origin** – Questions like “What country are you from?” “Where were you born?” “What neighborhood do you live in?” and “Are you a U.S. Citizen?” are illegal to ask.
- **Disability** – Questions like “What is your weight?” or “Have you had a major illness in the last year?” are not okay to ask either.

You may be thinking that some of these topics, such as age and health screenings, are important to review based on the minimum qualifications of being a child care staff member. (Review the Texas Health and Human Services Commission minimum requirements for child care [centers](#), [registered homes](#), and [licensed homes](#)).

To help you navigate interview questions and put together a list for your candidates, the table below outlines acceptable and unacceptable ways to ask about topics that may come up.

If you want to learn more about prohibited employment policies and practices, visit the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on their [website](#).

## Acceptable & Unacceptable Inquiries for Interviews and Employment Applications

Topic	Acceptable	Unacceptable	If Unacceptable, what is the Reason?
<b>Age</b>	If <u>age is a legal requirement for employment</u> , can ask: "If hired, can you furnish a proof of age?" or a statement that the hire is subject to age verification.	What is your date of birth?	Could be viewed as age discrimination.
<b>Attendance/reliability</b>	Which hours and days can you work?	How many children do you have?	Could be viewed as discriminatory toward females or family status.
<b>Attendance/reliability</b>	Do you have responsibilities other than work that will interfere with specific job requirements such as traveling?	What are your child care arrangements?	Could be viewed as discriminatory toward females or family status.
<b>Attendance/reliability</b>	Do you have a reliable method of getting to work?	Do you own a car?	Could be considered racial or family status discrimination.
<b>Citizenship/national origin</b>	Have you ever worked under a different name?	What is your maiden name?	Could be considered national origin discrimination.
<b>National origin</b>	None. There are no questions where determining someone's national origin is relevant.	What is your father's surname? What are the names of your relatives?	Not only are these irrelevant, but they could be considered national origin discrimination.
<b>Religion</b>	None. *For religious-based bona fide occupational qualification programs: - What, if any, faith tradition do you practice? - How does your faith impact your work?	What house of worship do you attend?	Could be viewed as religious discrimination.

## After the Interview

After the interview is finished, be sure to take a few minutes to review or complete your notes. You might choose to organize your thoughts based on the most important skills, characteristics, and qualities from [your scorecard](#).

Next, you will want to reach out to references to [complete reference checks](#). Also, you will need to complete [Texas Child Care Regulation Background Checks](#).

## Additional Assistance

If you have any questions, you can [access free, one-on-one business coaching](#) by visiting [childcare.texas.gov](http://childcare.texas.gov). Other resources, guides, and tools are available there on topics that support your business.

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