



# FCC START-UP GUIDE

*Guidelines for Starting and Operating a Family Child  
Care Program in Mecklenburg County, NC*

Disclaimer: This guide provides an overview of the requirements to start and operate a Family Child Care program in Mecklenburg County. Always refer to official county and state resources for the most up-to-date regulations.

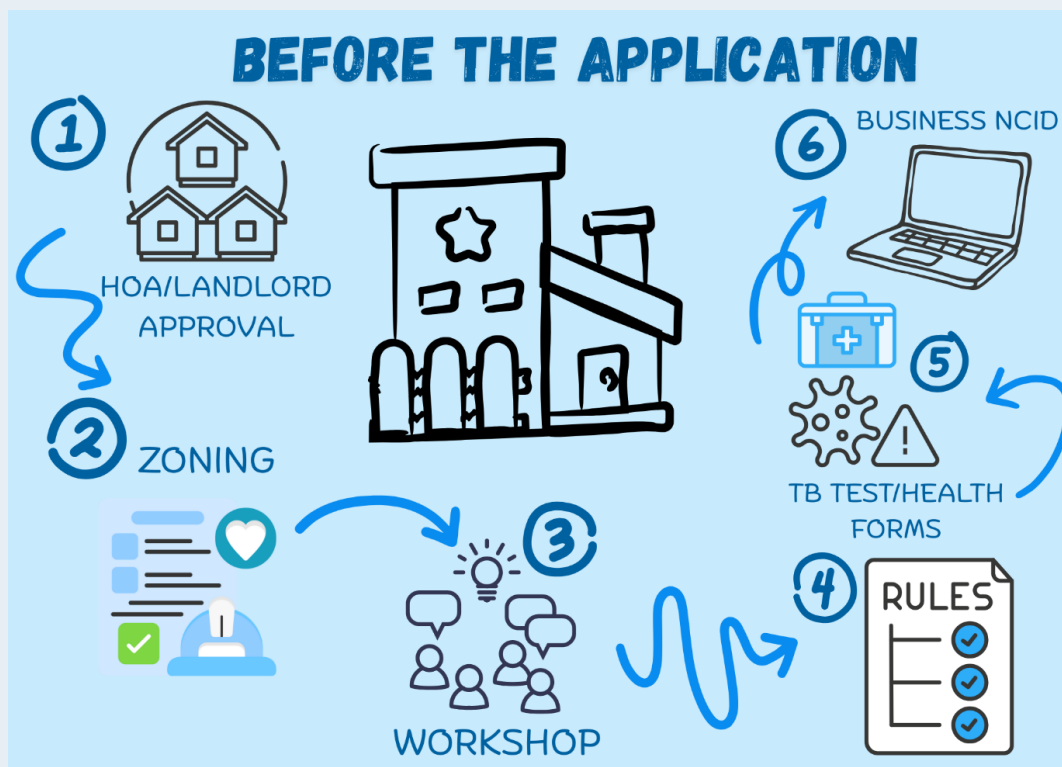
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## Section I: Getting Started

Per North Carolina law [General Statute 110 Article 7 Child Care Facilities](#) and the [Chapter 9 Child Care Rules](#), if you care for **more than two children that are not related to you** on a **regular basis** for **more than four hours per day**, you must be licensed.



Starting a licensed Family Child Care (FCC) program requires careful planning and compliance with local and state regulations. Below are key steps to help you get started. For additional guidance you can also refer to the NCDHHS [Prelicensing Guide](#):

- **Research Requirements:** Understand the difference between Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) and Centers in a Residence (CIR). FCCHs typically serve up to 8 children, while CIRs serve up to 12. **Not all townships allow CIR.**
- **Homeowner's Association/Landlord Approval:** If you rent or have a Homeowner's Association (HOA), obtain written permission to operate an FCCH.

- **Zoning Compliance:** Ensure your home meets zoning regulations (see Zoning section for details). For a CIR, a plan review is required, and information can be found at [Mecklenburg CIR Plan Review](#).
- **Attend Pre-Licensing Workshop:** This workshop is required before applying for licensure. The one-day FCCH workshop is required for FCCH, and the two-day Child Care Center workshop is required for CIR. For current schedules, pricing, and registration, refer to [Prelicensing Workshop Information](#).
- **Establish Contact with Lead Licensing Consultant:** The lead licensing consultant for your zip code will be your point of contact for prelicensing requirements following attendance at the appropriate prelicensing workshop. For current contact information for lead consultants, refer to [NC DHHS Lead Child Care Consultants Contact Information](#).
- **Complete Health and Safety Requirements:** Obtain TB screening, a health questionnaire, and required vaccinations for pets if applicable. For relevant forms, refer to [Provider Forms](#). FCCH and CIR will use the same forms to meet these requirements.
- **Obtain a Business NCID:** This is required to enroll in state systems, including subsidy programs. For detailed instructions and links, refer to [Creating and Linking a Business NCID](#).
- **Application Submission:** Submit an FCCH application with all required documentation including a floor plan. To access the link for the application packet, visit [FCCH Application Packet](#). If you want to provide care for more than five preschool children, you will follow the Child Care Center process for licensure and relevant forms. For more details, refer to [Prelicensing Requirements FCCH and CIR](#).

## Zoning

Each municipality in Mecklenburg County has different zoning regulations for FCCHs. Key considerations include:

- **Residential Zoning:** FCCHs are typically categorized under R-3 zoning, while CIRs require R-4 zoning. Access the [Building Inspection Form for R-4 Occupancy](#) for details on the additional accessibility requirements for R-4 zoning.

- **Permits:** Some townships require special use permits, especially if another FCCH is within a 0.25-mile radius.
- **HOA Compliance:** Before applying for zoning approval, check with your Homeowners Association.

Municipality	Max Enrollment	Link	Article
City of Charlotte	10 FCCH, 12 CIR	<a href="#">Unified Development Ordinance</a>	Article 15.6, Section D and E
Huntersville	8	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Article 9, Section 11
Matthews	8	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Section 155.103
Pineville	6	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Article 6.5.39
Mint Hill	8	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Article 7.1.10
Davidson	8	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Article 3.2.15
Cornelius	8	<a href="#">Zoning Ordinance</a>	Article 6.2.12

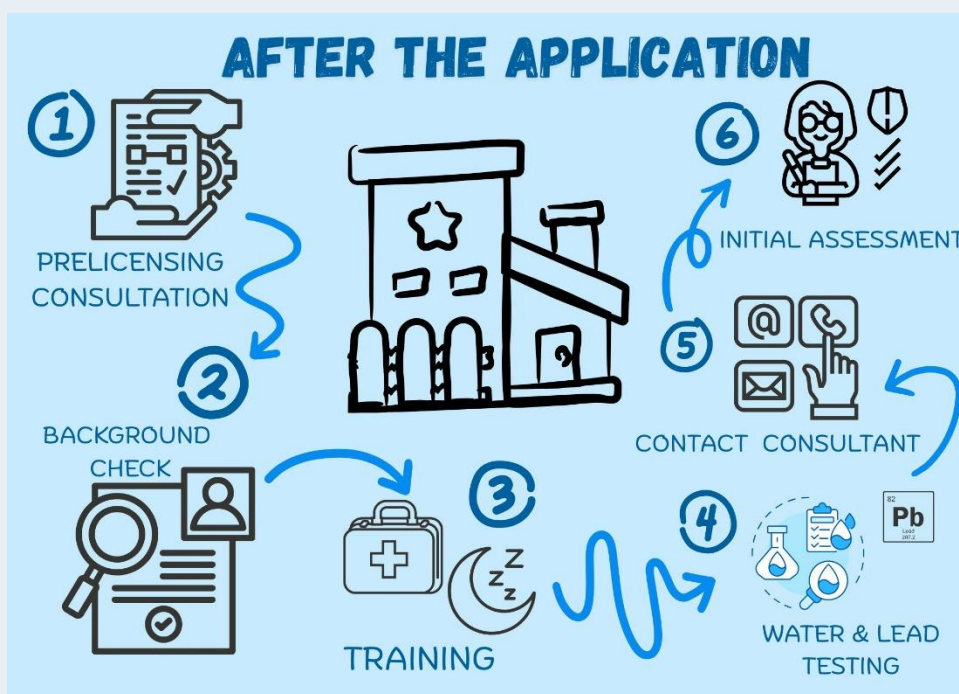
### Prelicensing Requirements

To legally operate an FCCH in Mecklenburg County, you must meet North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) licensing requirements:

- **Age and Education:** You must be at least 21 years old and have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- **Criminal Background Check:** Required for all individuals in the household aged 15 and older. Access the application at [Criminal Background Check Application](#).
- **Pre-Licensing Consultation:** A licensing consultant will inspect your home and review compliance with safety regulations.
- **Training:** Must complete First Aid and CPR Training from an approved agency. For details on approved agencies, refer to [NC DHHS CPR and First Aid Training Information](#). Must complete Infant Toddler Safe Sleep (ITS-SIDS) training if caring for infants under 12 months. View the most recent [CCRI Training Catalog](#) to register for ITS-SIDS training.

- **Lead and Asbestos Testing:** All programs must register and complete a questionnaire with [Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids](#) to determine lead-based paint and asbestos testing needs. Each program must also register to complete water testing for water used for drinking or food preparation through this same site.
- **Well Water Testing:** Provide negative bacteriological testing results of well water, if applicable to your property.
- **Initial Assessment:** After meeting all requirements, a temporary license (valid for six months) will be issued by the lead licensing consultant.

For more information, refer to [DCDEE Licensing](#).



### **Building Inspection (FCCH serving more than 8 children or CIR only)**

A building inspection ensures compliance with the North Carolina Building Code. This inspection is not required for an FCCH serving 8 children or less. For FCCH or CIR zoned as R-4 occupancy, refer to the required form [R-4 Occupancy Building Inspection Form](#).

The following areas are evaluated:

- **Structural Safety:** The home must meet safety standards for Group R-4 occupancy.
- **Emergency Exits:** Each child care room must have access to two remote exits or a direct exterior exit.
- **Fire Safety:** Includes fire alarms, smoke detectors, and emergency lighting. For more information, refer to [NC Fire Prevention Code](#) and [Fire Inspection Information and Forms](#).
- **Heating and Ventilation:** The system must be inspected and free from unvented fuel-burning heaters.
- **Electrical & Plumbing Compliance:** Must adhere to state electrical and plumbing codes.

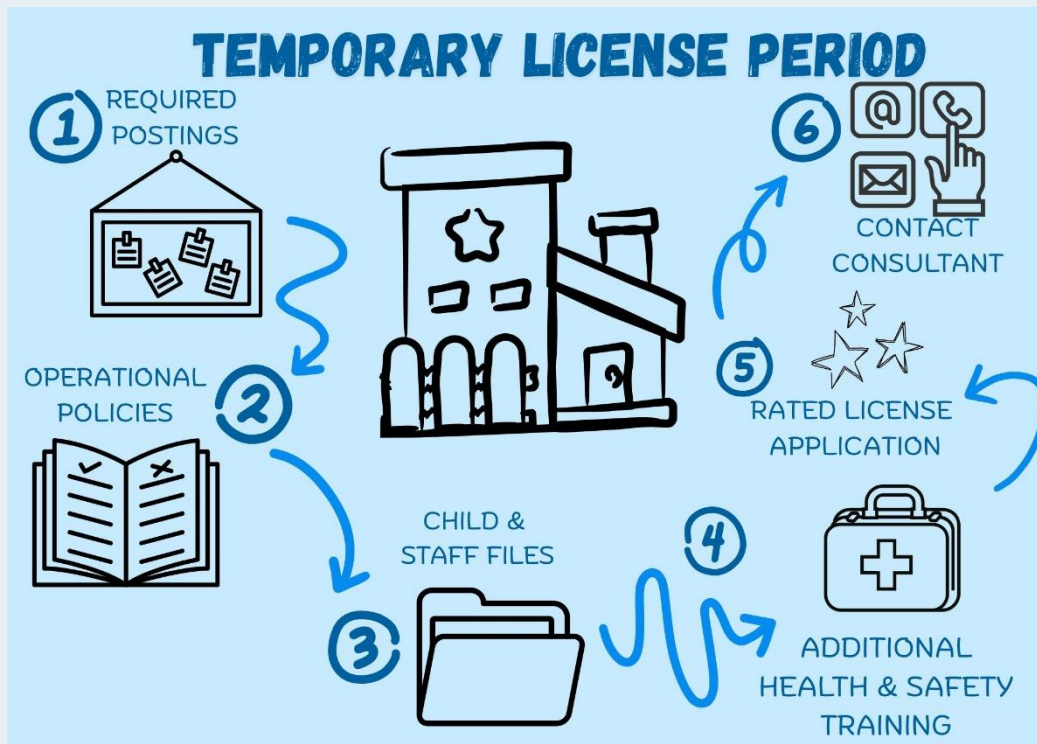
## Health and Safety

To maintain a safe and sanitary environment, FCC operators must comply with NC and Mecklenburg County Health Department regulations found at [Mecklenburg County Environmental Health-Lodging, Child Care and Institutions](#).

- **Routine Inspections:** Annual inspections ensure compliance with sanitation standards.
- **Food Handling:** Proper food storage and preparation practices must be followed.
- **Handwashing & Hygiene:** Providers must enforce strict handwashing policies for children and staff.
- **Safe Water Supply:** Refer to [Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids](#) for information on water testing.
- **Training:** In addition to required First Aid and CPR training and ITS-SIDS training, see “Training Requirements” in Section II

## Section II: Temporary License Period

Once all requirements are met, a temporary license will be issued for 6 months. During the temporary license period, the program must maintain a minimum of 75% compliance history with licensing regulations.



### Training Requirements

Document required trainings using the [Health and Safety Training Record](#).

- Recognizing and Responding to Suspicions of Child Maltreatment within 90 days of licensure. Access this training at [Positive Childhood Alliance NC](#).
- Additional health and safety training topics to be completed within one year of licensure, unless completed within one year prior to license issue date:
  - Infectious disease
  - Medication Administration
  - Emergencies due to food and allergic reactions
  - Safety including building and physical premises, and hazards that can cause bodily injury
  - Emergency Preparedness and Response planning (EPR)

- Operator must create EPR plan and upload to online system within 4 months of course completion date
  - Hazardous Material Storage/Biocontaminants
  - Transportation Precautions

Refer to [NC Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center](#) for information on how to access required trainings.

## **Operational Policies**

Per Section .[1700 rules governing FCCH in North Carolina](#), each FCCH Operator shall have written operational policies that are provided to and signed by parent/guardian on or before each enrolled child's first day of attendance. Parents/guardians shall also be notified of any changes to policy in writing. These policies should include but are not limited to the following categories:

- (1) the days and hours of operation
- (2) the age range of the children served
- (3) admission requirements and enrollment procedures
- (4) parent fees and payment plan
- 5) information about services provided by the operator, such as number of meals served, before and after school care, and transportation
- (6) items, if any, to be provided by parents
- (7) a schedule of daily, weekly, and monthly cleaning duties
- (8) written procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect
- (9) the operator's discipline policy for behavior management
- (10) a description of opportunities for parent participation
- (11) nutrition policies

Refer to [FCCH Operational Policies Checklist](#) for more information.

## **Record Keeping**

Every FCC Program is required to maintain files for the operator, children, the program and any other staff. Refer to the following forms for guidance on required documentation:

[Program File Checklist](#)

[Children's File Checklist](#)

[Operator's File Checklist](#)

[File Checklist Additional Caregiver or Substitute](#)

Centers in Residence will use Child Care Center forms, which can be found at [Child Care Center Documents and Forms](#).

### **Written Plan of Care**

FCCH Operators may need to complete routine tasks during care hours such as running errands, meeting family and personal demands, attending medical appointments, or attending professional development. Operators must follow licensing regulations for routine tasks found in section 10A NCAC 09 .1712 of the [Chapter 9 Child Care Rules](#), including a [Written Plan of Care](#) for these circumstances.

### **Rated License Process**

Effective July 2025, the NC Child Care Commission began implementation of the modernized Quality Rating and Improvement System, Pathways to the Stars. The information below is subject to change. Please refer to [QRIS Modernization Updates](#) for the most recent information.

During the temporary license period, Operators may complete the [Application for a Two Through Five Star Rated License](#). Operators opting not to apply will automatically be assigned a one-star rating. In addition to the program's compliance history during the temporary license period, three pathway options are offered to earn the star rated license. All pathways include education and program standards.

- I. [Pathway # 1: Program Assessment](#)
  - a. [Requesting a Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale-Third Edition\(FCCERS-3\) Assessment](#)

**\*Rated License Assessment must be requested through your lead licensing consultant within 90 days of the temporary license issue date\***

- II. [Pathway # 2: Classroom and Instructional Quality](#)

- III. [Pathway # 3: Accreditation and Head Start](#)
- IV. Operators and additional caregivers must create an account with the [Workforce Online Reporting and Knowledge System \(WORKS\)](#) to have their education level evaluated.

### **Child Care Regulatory Agencies**

Mecklenburg County Health  
Department

2145 Suttle Avenue

Charlotte, N.C. 28208

Phone: (704) 336-5100

Mecklenburg County Residential  
Plan Review Department

2145 Suttle Avenue

Charlotte, N.C. 28208

Phone: (980) 314-2633

N.C. Department of Health and  
Human

Services

Division of Child Development

Phone: (800) 859-0829

Mecklenburg County Fire Marshal  
(outside city of Charlotte)

Phone: (980)-314-3070

City of Charlotte Fire Prevention

Phone: (704) 336-2101

City of Charlotte Zoning

2145 Suttle Avenue

Charlotte, N.C. 28208

Phone: 311 or (704) 336-7600

Mecklenburg County Zoning  
(includes zoning for Davidson,  
Cornelius,

Matthews, & Pineville)

2145 Suttle Avenue

Charlotte, NC 28208

Phone: (980) 314-2633

Town of Huntersville Zoning

Phone: (704) 875-7000

Town of Mint Hill Zoning

Phone: (704) 545-9726

## Section III: Resources and Supports

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### Child Care Subsidy

The **Subsidized Child Care Assistance (SCCA) Program** helps families afford child care services. Providers can participate by:

- **Meeting Licensing Standards:** Must have a 3-star rating or higher.
- **Enrolling in NC FAST:** Submit an application through the [NC FAST Provider Portal](#). For assistance with NC FAST, refer to [NC FAST Provider Preparation Guide](#).
- **Signing a Provider Agreement:** Agreement must be electronically signed in the NC FAST system.
- **Receiving Payments:** Reimbursements are issued monthly based on attendance records submitted via the Provider Portal.

**\*Please note:** FCCH and CIR on a temporary license may enroll in NC FAST and accept subsidy, but in order to maintain their participation, must come off of their temporary license at a 3 star rating or higher. FCCH and CIR that come off of their temporary license at a 2 star rating or below will no longer be able to participate in subsidy once the ongoing star rated license is issued.

For more details, contact **Child Care Resources Inc.** at (704) 376-6697 or visit [CCRI Website](#).

### Child and Adult Care Food Care Program (CACFP)

The **Child and Adult Care Food Program** promotes good nutrition and healthy eating. As an extension of the National School Lunch Act, CACFP is intended to assist child care facilities with the cost of providing nutritious meals and snacks and improve the quality of nutrition and eating habits of children. This is done by providing reimbursement to qualified caregivers for meals and snacks served to participants. CCRI provides services as a sponsor of the CACFP for family child care homes and centers. Find additional information at [CACFP Information](#).

### Training and Technical Assistance Resources

1. [Child Care Resources, Inc.](#)

Our Child Development Specialists offer technical assistance and training on a variety of topics such as pre-licensing, business practices, rated license assessment, room arrangement, interactions, and more.

- Core Services Child Development Specialists
- Quality Every Day Coaches
- Social Emotional Teacher Coaches and Healthy Social Behavior Coaches
- Raising A Reader Program

The CCRI website has a tab dedicated to [Technical Assistance](#). Refer to [childcareresourcesinc.org](http://childcareresourcesinc.org) for more information on how CCRI Initiatives support FCC in Mecklenburg County.

2. [NC CCR&R Statewide Family Child Care Project](#)

3. [NC Child Care Health and Safety Resource Center](#)

Child Care Health Consultants provide technical assistance and training on health and safety regulations, resources, and supports. Their website houses information on state resources for health and safety as well as downloadable postings required for FCCH licensing. For contact information for your local CCHC, refer to [Find a CCHC](#).

4. [North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project](#)

NCRLAP offers free contact hour earning online training in addition to helpful resources, files, and guides for all topics related to the rated license assessment process.



