Your Guide to Mastering Child Care Enrollment

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Introduction

Enrolling new families into your program is a rewarding part of running a child care center. But this can also be a tricky time for child care programs without an efficient registration process. If families can't easily complete the process – or have too many questions about what to expect from your center – you risk losing them to your competitors.

Don't let your enrollment process prevent success. We created this eBook to assist you in developing a child care enrollment process that runs smoothly for both families and staff. Read on for our tips on streamlining the process, developing enrollment policies, simplifying billing and attracting families to your child care center.

By following this guide, you'll be better equipped to keep new and current families happy and save time so you can focus on what really matters – caring for children.

Section 1:

Streamlining the Child Care Enrollment Process

Your enrollment process is often one of the first interactions families have with your center. A smooth, simple enrollment process is critical in providing a positive experience right away. Additionally, streamlining this process saves staff hours, simplifies reporting and makes sure nothing is missed.

Set Clear Expectations with New and Returning Families

Families should know what to expect before and after enrolling their child in your program. For example, families might be wondering….

- How soon will I know if my child is accepted?
- Is there a wait list for enrollment right now?
- Will I be able to change my child's care schedule?
- Will my other children get priority enrollment?
- If my child was previously enrolled, do I get preferential enrollment?
- Do you offer discounts or special pricing for multiple children?

This is by no means the full list – families are bound to have many more questions. After all, choosing a temporary caregiver for your child isn't an easy decision.

Instead of answering these questions a dozen times over the phone, email or in person, add them to your child care handbook and share it with families right away so they know what to expect. (You'll find more information about building this handbook in the next section.) You can also create an FAQ page on your website or include answers to common questions in a Welcome email.

Move Your Child Care Enrollment Process Online

Enrolling a new child often means printing and receiving forms, in-person visits to verify information and a certain amount of back and forth with families. Instead of dealing with that, move the entire process online so parents can take their time and complete the process from home.

Online enrollment is also a big time-saver for your staff. Moving the process online allows your staff to review submitted information right away and approve enrollment quickly. If you partner with a child care management system that allows you to store documents online as well as print them on demand, you're guaranteed to comply with federal regulations and retention schedules.

Offering a user-friendly online enrollment process also helps you make a better impression with your families. After all, you don't want your first few interactions with new parents to be back-and-forth emails about missing fields or messy handwriting!

Stay Organized – and Meet Regulations – with a Reliable Online Enrollment System

You can find enrollment software that simply handles the forms, but that's not enough to make a difference. Streamlining your child care program enrollment means partnering with a system that can handle the entire process, from collecting and saving child information to accepting payment and handling schedules.

Look for a child care enrollment system that offers custom enrollment forms and manages family records, such as Smartcare. Keeping everything in one place makes it simple to find information when it's needed, make updates in the future, track attendance, handle billing and more.

Section 2:

Creating the Right Enrollment Policy for Child Care

Take the time to develop strong child care policies that meet parent expectations. Even if you're a well-established child care professional with years of experience behind you, it's still a good idea to regularly review your policies. Consider creating and updating policies based on questions you've received from parents in the past. For example, if you frequently get questions about wait lists, make sure you have a clear policy for it.

How Will Your Center Handle Child Care Enrollment?

Your program's enrollment policy will need to include more than just information about returning registration forms. Families will also need to know about your center's...

- Enrollment fees.
- Wait list process.
- Child eligibility for care.
- Re-enrollment process.
- Discounts for families with multiple children.
- Child care availability.
- Priority enrollment options.
- Process for withdrawing from care.

Consider your rates and budget, as well as family retention, when putting this child care enrollment policy together. For example, you could offer to bill by family instead of per child. Or you could offer priority enrollment for families with a child already enrolled in your program.

Your enrollment policy can affect whether families stick with you or go to a competitor with better options. Don't miss out on this opportunity to increase enrollment in your child care center.

Put Together a Child Care Policy Handbook

Creating a physical and digital handbook of your child care center's policies is a great idea. You can use this handbook to set clear expectations about how your center operates and what families can expect while their child is in your care.

Your child care handbook should include your center's policies as well as information about your mission and program. Here is a list of items you should include in your child care policy handbook:

- Your mission and values.
- Child care schedules and facility hours.
- A child care enrollment policy.

- Your center's drop off and pick up policy.
- A [child care sick child policy](#) that establishes guidelines for families to follow when their child is sick or becomes sick under your care.
- A detailed billing policy.
- A daily schedule, so parents know what their child will be doing at any given time.
- Behavior management and codes of conduct for children and staff.
- Communication expectations.
- Health and safety procedures to comply with state and federal regulations.
- Child care certifications.

Depending on what your child care center offers, you can also include meal and nutrition offerings and field trip policies.

Train Staff on Policies

Staff members who understand your center's policies can answer enrollment questions and correct misunderstandings for both current and prospective families. You can get in front of any misinformation or missed opportunity by making sure staff are well-versed on your center's enrollment policies.

Reserve time during regular staff meetings to go over policies, especially if you have a new or recently updated one. This is the time to discuss questions parents might have, how to apply certain policies or recommend updates to existing policies.

Section 3:

Improving Child Care Billing

Handling billing is a fundamental aspect of managing a child care center. It is also one of your more tedious, time-consuming tasks. By establishing clear policies and taking the time to set expectations with enrolling families, you can cut back on hours spent tracking down payments.

Create Clear Child Care Billing Policies

As a child care professional, you know billing is never straightforward. Families considering enrollment at your center will want to know the typical billing information, such as frequency and rates. (For more guidance on setting your child care rates, check out this article here.)

But families will also want to know how your center handles:

- Refunds.
- Late drop off or pickups.
- Rate changes year-to-year.
- Changes to family schedules.
- Discounts.
- Families eligible for subsidized child care.

Make sure your center decides how to assess and track late pick-up fees, whether to provide discounts for families with multiple children and when to issue refunds. And, of course, make sure you're using a billing system that makes it easy to apply those fees or discounts to invoices.

When you're clear and up-front about your billing policies, families will feel comfortable knowing there won't be any unexpected fees or price changes after enrolling. Plus, you'll be able to stand out from competitors who don't offer their pricing ahead of time, which can help increase enrollment in your child care center.

Make Your Child Care Billing Process More Convenient

Paying for child care should be as easy as paying any other bill. Make the process simple for your parents by accepting multiple payment options, including cash, checks, credit and debit cards.

Allow families to pay online for enrollment fees, program materials, snacks, field trips and anything else. When it's convenient for parents to pay, collecting fees on time is much easier.

Make sure you're partnering with a child care enrollment system that can process payments (and discounts) as well as track child care subsidies. It's also a good idea to offer autopay, so families won't need to think about manually paying bills each week, month, quarter or year.

Offer Flexible Billing Options for Every Type of Family

Every family is different, which means many families will need to make payments in different ways. Make sure you offer flexible options for parents splitting payments or switching payment frequency and for families receiving subsidies from other organizations. Don't make it more difficult to set these payment options up, or you risk alienating families and causing issues between staff and families.

Here are a few recommendations for handling these unique situations:

- Have separate child care billing agreements for each parent so you can track payments separately.
- Provide separate tax statements to each family member responsible for tuition to file for the Child Care and Dependent Care tax credit at the end of the year.
- Offer families the option to choose how they split payment.

Setting up a flexible billing process will make enrollment so much smoother. Families will be able to sail through the enrollment process without needing to contact staff about specific payment needs. Some child care management systems can help manage unique billing situations as well as assisting with tracking payments, automating reminders and creating tax statements.
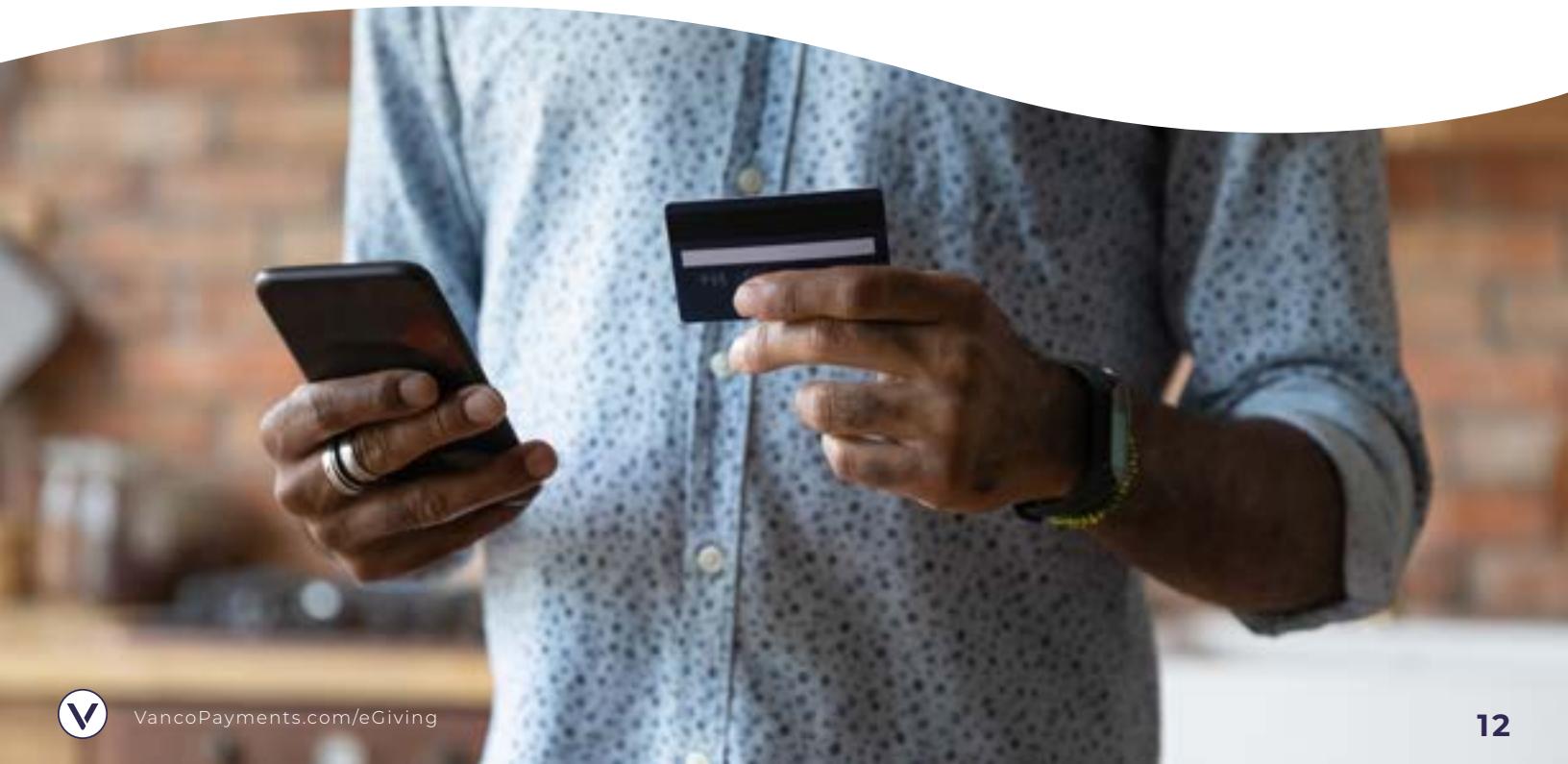
Section 4:

How to Increase Enrollment in Your Child Care Center

Many child care centers struggle with the question, "How do I attract parents to my child care center?" The problem is, marketing your center can feel like a full-time job on top of caring for your children. Here are a few tips to help you attract parents and increase enrollment in your child care center.

Be Everywhere to Attract Parents to Your Child Care Center!

Families won't know about your child care center if they've never heard about it. You will need to create a child care advertising plan to increase enrollment. Use multiple communication channels to connect with families, including social media, flyers and newspaper ads.

Reach out to school districts in your community as well. Some schools might let you share flyers with teachers and parents, or even advertise on their website. Schools with before and after school care likely know families with children too young to participate yet, making them great candidates for your center.

Offer Incentives to Increase Your Child Care Enrollment

Make your program more competitive and attractive by offering financial incentives to families. Depending on what you can afford, offer special pricing, discounts or even gift cards. Consider offering a year at a lower rate or waiving the registration fee. You can also offer families special pricing for enrolling multiple children.

As much as you want to attract new families to your child care center, you also need to keep current families happy. Here are a few ideas for making sure families return year after year:

• Offer a free month of care or discounted fee at the time of re-enrollment.
• Give a discount for families with multiple children enrolled.
• Offer priority enrollment for your families with additional children who will be eligible to enroll in the future.

Keep Track of Prospective Families

Do you know how your enrolling families found out about your center? Are you keeping track of where you're attracting families from? Understanding which outreach efforts are most effective will allow you to prioritize your time. If most families hear about your center from open houses and community events, focus your marketing efforts (and dollars) in those areas.

Make sure you're regularly reaching out to prospective families. When a family is about to welcome a new child and is looking for a child care center for the future, make sure they don't forget about you. Don't let any of these prospective families fall off your radar!

Doing all of this manually is a lot of work, though. Instead, use child care software with lead management to keep track of these families. Find a system that allows you to keep notes and add statuses to families so you can clearly see where they're at in the decision process.

Conclusion

Building a child care enrollment process that is fast, easy and stress-free can feel like a monumental task. But it's one worth undertaking. Having a great process gives enrolling families a positive experience from day one, which is important in developing a long-term relationship with them.

By following the guidance in this eBook, your child care center will be set up for success. You'll be ready to set clear expectations from the start, provide detailed policies to keep families in the know, offer flexible billing options to include everyone and attract parents to your child care center.

To further streamline your program's enrollment process, partner with a child care management software that can take much of this administrative work off your hands.

Vanco's Smartcare is a child care administration software designed to simplify the process of managing your program. Smartcare allows you to move enrollment online, securely store data, automate billing, accept payments and communicate with parents – all from one comprehensive platform.

Request a demo today to see how Smartcare can transform your child care center and allow you to become an enrollment master.

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