

Certified Outdoor Nature Based Child Care



Getting Started

Getting licensed to provide outdoor nature-based child care is similar to the licensing process for other types of child care. This overview of the basic elements of a certified outdoor nature based (ONB) child care program is intended to help anyone that may be interested in starting a certified ONB program.

Time Outdoors

ONB child care programs spend all of their time outdoors. They may use indoor restrooms to meet the biological needs of the children and staff, but they do not spend time indoors on a regular basis. Care can be provided on private property or on public lands such as a state park. The program must have a consistent location that is approved for use by CCLD as part of the licensing process.

Qualification Requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Directors must have 20 hours of approved outdoor nature-based education or training, **and** 250 hours of work experience in an outdoor education environment. Directors also must have verifiable knowledge of management and supervision of adults and verifiable knowledge of child development for the primary ages served by the certified ONB program, evidenced by a combination of professional references, education, experience, or training.
- Teachers must have 10 hours of approved outdoor nature-based education or training, in addition to other qualification requirements.

Central Background Registry Enrollment

The operator, all ONB program staff, and any person 18 years of age or older who may have unsupervised access to children, must be enrolled in DELC's Central Background Registry (CBR) prior to the issuance of an initial certification. New employees may not be on site until fingerprinted and enrolled in the CBR. Online applications for the CBR can be submitted here: <https://secure.emp.state.or.us/ccd/>

Supervision and Ratios

For preschool-aged children the required ratio is one staff person to 8 children, with a maximum group size of 16 children. For school-aged children the required ratio is one staff person to 10 children, with a maximum group size of 20. Infants and toddlers are not allowed. ONB programs must have at least two staff onsite at all times, and sight AND sound supervision of children is required.

Space

The licensed space for ONB programs must have at least 4000 square feet of outdoor space per child which may be public or private land. The program must have a permanent location to be eligible for this type of licensing. A certified ONB must have an outdoor classroom space used for daily activities that allows for 75 square feet per child. Outdoor programs can use an indoor toilet, portable chemical toilet, toilet on public land (such as state park or nature center), portable toilet, composting/pit toilet, and may use backcountry toileting while hiking.

Lead Testing

A certified ONB program's water supply must be from a public water supply or well, and must be tested for lead, unless the certified ONB program uses a DELC approved alternative water source. If the water is brought to the ONB site from a different location, lead testing must be completed at that location. For more information on lead testing, please visit: <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/providers/pages/lead-testing.aspx>

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Philosophy

A certified ONB program must have a written curriculum philosophy that describes how the program supports child development through nature-based learning. The philosophy must address all age groups being served and must include, but is not limited to:

- (a) How nature is central to their curriculum and how children can develop emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically in nature and through nature-based experiences and reasonable risky play;
- (b) How learning and being outdoors in a nature-based setting impacts the ONB program of daily activities;
- (c) What ONB programming looks like or areas of focus for each age group being served;
- (d) How the certified ONB program will provide an inclusive learning environment for all children in care;
- (e) How to guide learning and social interactions; and
- (f) The importance of nature-based play to a child's learning process.

Emergency Plan

A certified ONB program must have a written plan for emergency preparedness and the plan must be specific to the certified ONB premises. (See OAR 414-320-0210(3) and (4))

Benefit Risk Assessment

If participating in risky play activities a certified ONB programs must have and follow benefit-risk assessments and risk management plans approved by DELC. These assessments and plans must be submitted to DELC on a form provided by DELC (CCLD-0938) and be available for DELC review at the time of initial licensing. An amended assessment or plan cannot be implemented until DELC has approved it. (See OAR 414-320-0215)

Inspections

CCLD licensing staff will provide an onsite pre-certification consultation visit to help you understand requirements and prepare for licensing. Approval by an environmental health specialist (sanitation inspection) and a Fire Official (if applicable) happen next and then CCLD will conduct a health and safety inspection before a license is issued.

Training

ONB Staff are required to meet initial training requirements (within 30 or 90 days depending on the training) and receive an orientation within 10 days of hire. Each year director, teacher and aide II staff are required to complete 15 hours of ongoing training during the licensing year. Initial training information can be found here: <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/providers/pages/required-training.aspx>

Resource Documents and Templates

There are many documents, resources, and helpful templates available in the DELC resource library, here: <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/resources/Pages/default.aspx#ResourceDocuments> If you can't find what you're looking for please reach out to your licensing specialist. We're always open to new ideas!

For more information, please visit DELC's Outdoor Nature Based website:

<https://www.oregon.gov/delc/providers/Pages/outdoor-nature-based> or reach out to DELC customer service by email at CCLD.Customerservice@delc.oregon.gov or by phone at 1-800-556-6616.