



ECE Staff Recruitment and Retention

One of the Main Business Challenges

Recruiting and retaining staff in early childhood education (ECE) is currently one of the industry's steepest hurdles. As of 2026, data shows that over **53% of program leaders** cite staffing as their primary concern, with national turnover rates in childcare reaching as high as **33% to 47%**.

Staff Recruitment

- Finding the right fit!
 - One bad apple spoils the bunch!
 - A strong cultural fit for your program will equal long term success
- Where to look?
 - -People who have experience with younger siblings, baby sitting, summer camps
 - -Look in unexpected places where people interact with children like working at a recreation center, library, museum, zoo, indoor child play areas
 - -Post ads for staff in Healthy Child Care Colorado and Nextdoor for locals
 - -Post in ECE Colorado and nearby parent groups for people who have experience and a passion for young children
 - -Provide a recruitment bonus for families and staff if they refer someone and they stay with your program



Recruitment Considerations

- Traditional job postings are often insufficient in the current market. Successful recruitment now focuses on **speed, accessibility, and clear pathways**.
- **Speed to Hire:** Candidates in this field often apply to multiple centers simultaneously. Centers that respond within 24–48 hours and offer "on-the-spot" initial screenings are significantly more likely to secure talent.
- **Alternative Pipelines:** Look beyond traditional applicants. Many centers are successfully recruiting from:
 - **Career Changers:** Individuals leaving retail or hospitality who seek more "meaningful" work.
 - **"Grow Your Own" Programs:** High school students or parents within the center who are supported in earning their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential while working.
- **Transparent "Career Ladders":** Don't just hire for a role; hire for a career. Show candidates exactly how they can move from an Assistant to a Lead Teacher or Director, and how the center will fund that journey.

Interview Wisely~

Ask about their values

Ask situational interview questions:

- Tell me about a time when a child was really testing your patience and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time where you disagreed with a co-worker and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to tell a parent bad news about their child's behavior. What did you say?

Have applicants try out in the classroom and observe their interactions.
Solicit feedback from co-workers in the classroom.



Be a Welcoming Environment~



You have been invited to a dinner party by a friend who also invited 12 other friends.

Scenario 1: You arrive and she shows you the wine, cheese platters, and says, “Mingle and have fun!”, then walks away.

Scenario 2: You arrive and she introduces you to the other guests and while doing so, she tells each person what they have in common with each other in order to break the ice.

How are you making new staff feel welcomed to your program?

Retention 1/2

Retention is rarely about a single factor like pay; it is usually a combination of **financial stability, professional respect, and daily work-life quality.**

The Financial Foundation

- **Wages vs. Inflation:** In 2026, educators are increasingly leaving the field because salaries haven't kept pace with the **29% increase in childcare costs** and overall inflation.
- **Creative Benefits:** If high raises aren't immediately possible, centers are turning to:
 - **Childcare Subsidies:** Providing free or deeply discounted care for the staff's own children.
 - **Retention Bonuses:** Small, periodic "longevity" bonuses (e.g., every 6 months) rather than one annual raise.

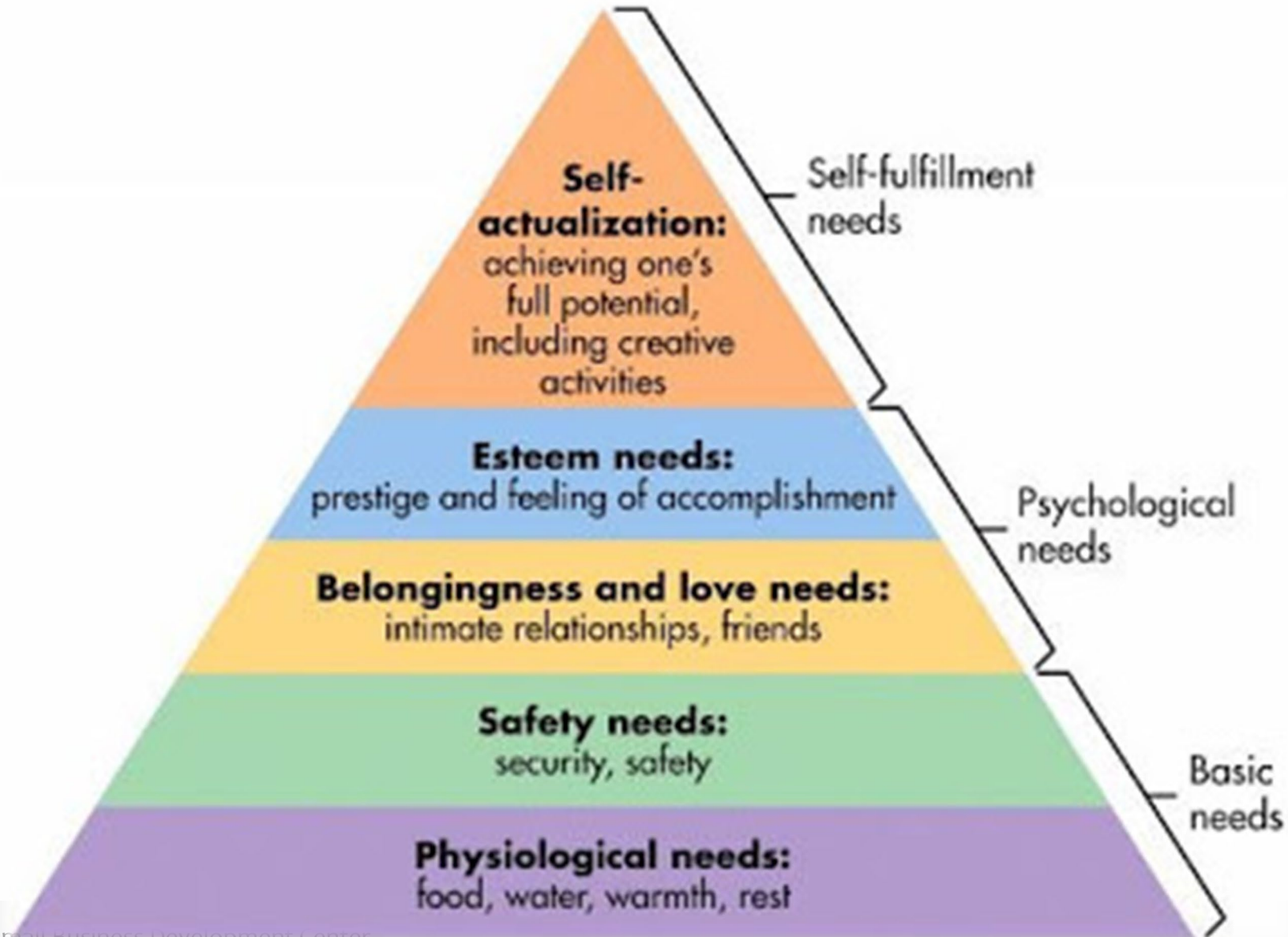




Professional Growth & Culture

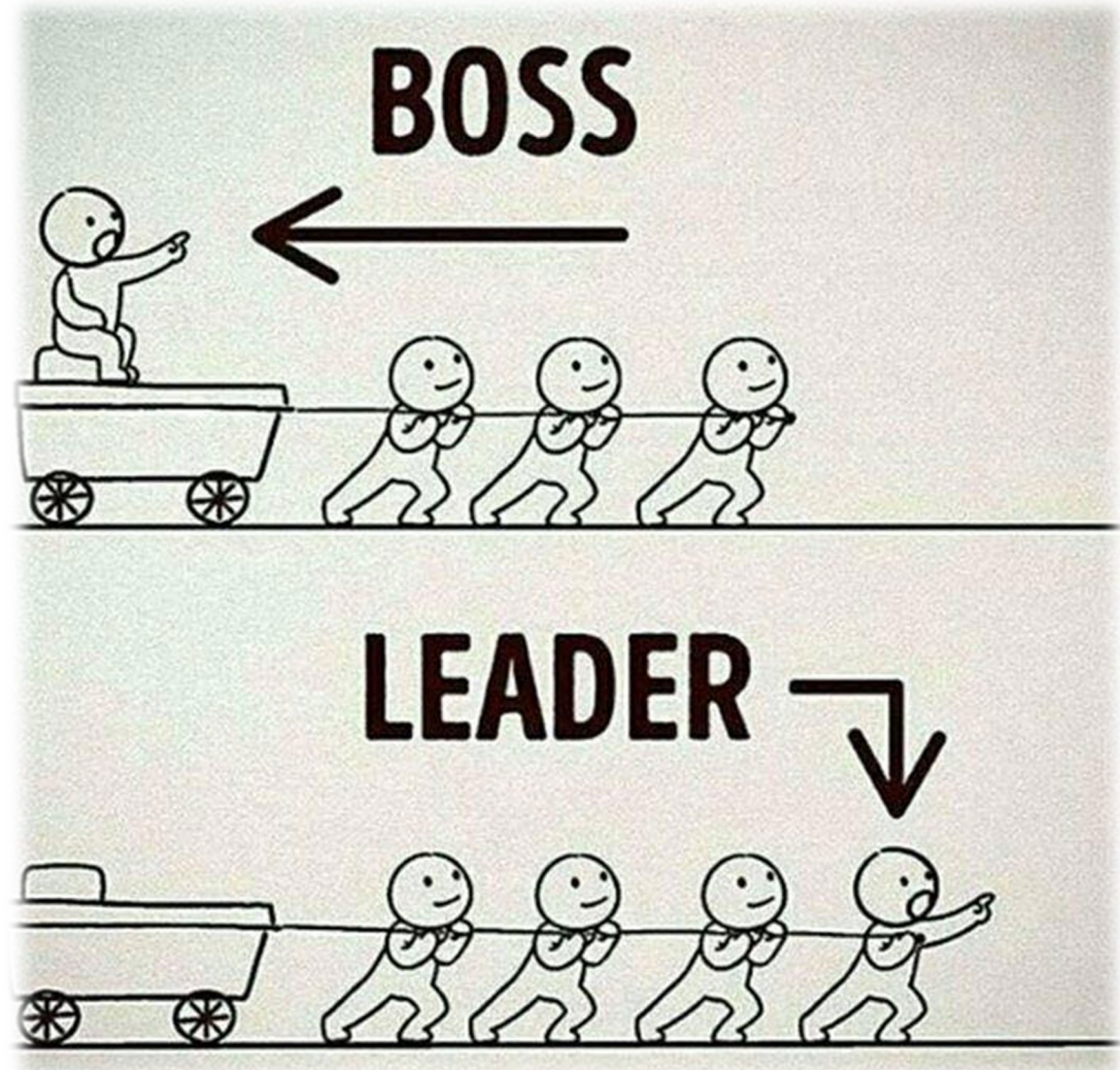
- **Paid Professional Development (PD):** 62% of teachers cite **time** as the biggest barrier to training. Retention increases when PD is built into the workday rather than "after hours."
- **Mentorship Models:** New hires who are paired with a "buddy" or mentor are 40% less likely to quit mid-year. This reduces the isolation and "burnout" that 43% of ECE staff report experiencing.
- **Operational Support:** Using automation software for tasks like attendance, incident reporting, and parent communication can save teachers significant time, allowing them to focus on the children rather than paperwork.

Work Needs



Be a LEADER!

- Integrity
- Open, honest communication
- Connect with staff
- Encourage personal and professional growth
- Positive attitude
- Teach don't tell
- Set clear goals and expectations
- Solicit Feedback
- Be open to new ideas



Key Metrics of Hiring and Retention

Metric

Why it Matters

90-Day Turnover

High rates here suggest a problem with the **onboarding** or "culture shock."

PD Completion Rate

Shows if staff feel they have a **future** and growth path at your center.

Staff Wellbeing Score

Periodic anonymous surveys can catch **burnout** before it leads to a resignation.

Hiring and Onboarding Checklist 1/2

- **Phase 1: Pre-Recruitment & Brand Prep**

- Before you post the ad, ensure the "product" (the job) is attractive.
- **Audit the Compensation Package:** Check local competitors and even retail rates. If you can't lead on hourly pay, highlight your "soft" benefits (e.g., free childcare, paid mental health days, or no-cost CDA training).
- **Define the "Unique Value Proposition" (UVP):** Why should they work for you instead of the center down the street? (e.g., "We have a \$500 classroom supply budget for every teacher.")
- **Create a "Day in the Life" Graphic:** A simple visual showing the schedule, break times, and support staff availability helps set realistic expectations.

- **Phase 2: The High-Speed Posting**

- In 2026, the best candidates are often hired within **5 days** of starting their search.
- **Optimize for Mobile:** Ensure your application takes less than 5 minutes to complete on a smartphone. Avoid long "account creation" hurdles.
- **Use "Action" Keywords:** Include terms like *Growth Opportunities, Mentorship, Team Culture, and Immediate Opening.*
- **Post Beyond Indeed:** Use local Facebook community groups, Instagram, and "Grow Your Own" flyers at the front desk for current parents to share.

Hiring and Onboarding Checklist 2/2

- **Phase 3: The Interview & Assessment**

- The goal is to assess "heart" and "skill" simultaneously.
- **The "Speed-Dial" Screen:** Call promising candidates within **24 hours**. A 10-minute phone screen to check basic requirements and "vibe" saves hours of wasted in-person time.
- **The Working Interview:** Never hire based on a conversation alone. Have them spend **30–60 minutes in a classroom**.
 - *Watch for:* How do they get down to the child's eye level? Do they initiate engagement or wait to be told what to do?
- **Culture Fit Questions:** Move past "What are your weaknesses?" Ask: *"Tell me about a time a child's behavior frustrated you. How did you respond?"*

- **Phase 4: The Offer & Background Checks**

- The "gap" between the offer and the start date is where most candidates are lost to other jobs.
- **The Verbal "Yes":** Make the offer immediately after a successful working interview.
- **Clear Background Roadmaps:** Provide a simple, step-by-step PDF or checklist for fingerprinting and medical clearances. If possible, offer to **reimburse these costs** immediately rather than after 90 days.
- **The "Welcome" Text:** Have the Lead Teacher of their future classroom send a short, welcoming text or video: *"Hi! I'm Sarah, so excited to have you join the Bluebird Room!"*

Hiring and Onboarding Checklist

- **Phase 5: Onboarding (Day 1 – Day 30)**
- Retention starts on Day 1.
- [] **The "First Day" Kit:** Have a clean apron/shirt, a name tag, and a small "welcome" snack or coffee card waiting for them.
- [] **The 1-Week Check-in:** Schedule a formal 15-minute sit-down on Friday of week one. Ask: *"What has surprised you most? What do you need more help with?"*
- [] **Assigned Mentor:** Ensure they aren't just "in the room" but are paired with a veteran teacher who is incentivized to help them succeed.

- **Pro-Tip for 2026: The "Ghosting" Prevention**
- If you have a candidate you love, check in with them **every 48 hours** via text until their first day. In a high-demand market, silence is often interpreted as a lack of interest, and they may accept another offer in the interim.





Questions?



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