

If you've ever started a new job, you probably remember feeling a little lost while you learned the new lingo and systems to help you do your job well. For first-time parents or caregivers, it is normal to feel the same way raising a young child. As you learn about your child's development, health and social needs, it is also helpful to have a general understanding of the early childhood world.

Early childhood commonly refers to the first five years of life. Ninety percent of the brain is shaped during this window. That's why getting a great start in life matters in helping your child become ready to learn, grow, and succeed in life. Having a basic understanding of terms, program types and requirements can help you feel informed as you make important decisions for your child. Many terms in early childhood are used broadly although they have different meanings. Below, we define some common terms to explain the differences.

## Early Childhood Education Defined:

**Child Care**- Licensed or certified care for children that families pay for privately or receive assistance to pay. Care is provided in a center, home or faith-based location. Many programs begin offering care for children as young as 6 weeks old.

**Early Head Start**- Federally funded program for children from birth to age three from families with an income at or below 160% of the federal poverty level. It is available in approximately 40 Kentucky counties.

**Head Start**- Federally funded program to help at risk children arrive at Kindergarten ready to learn. It is available for children ages three to five from families with an income between 100%-130% of the federal poverty level. Head Start serves all 120 Kentucky counties.

**Kindergarten**- The first year of elementary school. In Kentucky, all children are eligible to start kindergarten if they turn five years old by October 1. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, the entry date will change from October 1 to August 1.

**Preschool**- Formal education program for children ages three to five prior to beginning kindergarten. Can be provided through schools, child care centers, or faith-based locations. Sometimes referred to as Pre-K, however, Pre-K is technically the year before kindergarten.

**Public Preschool**- State-funded education program eligible to four year olds whose family income falls within 160% poverty level income and for three and four year old children with disabilities. It is voluntary to enroll your child. Many are held at a school and follow a school calendar. Head Start provides a minimum of a half-day developmentally appropriate program.



## Services

**Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)**- Financial assistance to help families pay for licensed or certified child care. Eligible families must be at or below 160% of the Federal Poverty Level, be a Kentucky resident with a child who is a U.S. citizen or qualified alien, and the parent must be working a minimum number of hours or pursuing education.

**First Steps**- Statewide early intervention system that provides services to children with developmental disabilities from birth to age three and their families. Services can be provided in the home, center or clinical setting.

For more information visit <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/firststeps>

**Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS)**- Voluntary home visitation program for new and expectant parents of children up to age three. Home visitors share resources to promote healthy development and answer any questions or concerns related to the child's first years. Parents must enroll during pregnancy or before the child is three months old.

For more information visit [www.kyhands.com](http://www.kyhands.com)

# EARLY CHILDHOOD TRENDING TOPICS

#ECE

Early childhood education continues to gain media and political attention. Here are some common popular topics.

**Kindergarten Readiness**- Also known as school readiness. This means that a child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success. It includes five developmental domains: social-emotional development, language and communication development, general knowledge and mathematics, approaches to learning, and health and physical well being. These skills are suggestions not requirements for kindergarten.

**Kindergarten Screener**- Within the first two weeks of beginning kindergarten, all children in Kentucky take the Brigance Screener. It is a statewide tool to help provide teachers with a snapshot of each student's current development and abilities. This helps teachers develop effective lesson plans and meet individual needs. It does not affect kindergarten eligibility. The only kindergarten enrollment requirement is to meet the legal age. The screener has two parts: a one-on-one assessment of skills and a parent survey.

**STARS Rating**- Programs are rated based on measures of quality including staff qualification, classroom quality, administrative and management practices, and family engagement. Ratings can help families choose high quality child care. In July 2016, a new five-star rating system called Kentucky All-STARS will be launched. Ask your early childhood education provider about their STARS rating.

