



Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals: Information for Course Planners

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Introduction

Northern Lights at CCV monitors and supports the Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals course. Any sponsor of a Fundamentals course must meet three requirements:

1. The course instructor must be a Certified or Master instructor in the Vermont Instructor Registry (or be willing to join);
2. The Sponsor and the Instructor must use the Fundamentals syllabus as outlined on the Northern Lights website; and
3. The Sponsor and Instructor must maintain contact with Northern Lights including completing the provided evaluations.

The Fundamentals section of the Northern Lights website has many documents to help you plan and implement the course. Sponsors of the course are also given access to a secure part of the Northern Lights website which includes other necessary documents.

The purpose of the class is to build a foundation of knowledge and best practice skills for professionals working with groups of children ages birth to eight years old. Participants may be new to the field of early childhood care and education, experienced professionals, or people interested in but not yet working in the field. It is a requirement that each student have some regular contact with young children (between ages birth to 8) during the time they are taking the Fundamentals course.

Northern Lights is committed to providing quality instruction based on adult learning principles. The Fundamentals course supports this by:

- Matching instruction to student abilities and needs
- Connecting knowledge and skills gained in the course with experiences working with children and families
- Connecting students to resources and systems of support
- Modeling, supporting, and practicing reflection

This course is based on Vermont's Core Knowledge and Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals: Level I. They are an important resource for students and instructors and can be found on the Northern Lights website.

The course was designed to have multiple benefits for students:

- It offers one way to meet the coursework requirements for Level I of the Vermont Early Childhood Career Ladder.
- It includes the Basic Specialized Care training required for all Specialized Child Care programs



- It includes Introduction to Child Care Licensing
- It incorporates components of the Child Development Associate (CDA) – both training in required subject areas and practice in CDA components (see modules and the back of letter of completion)
- It includes an opportunity to practice planning, being observed, and getting specific responsive, positive feedback about working with young children
- It introduces and provides practice in creating an Individual Professional Development Plan

Guide to the Curriculum Format:

The curriculum outlined below is a suggested course sequence. There are ten modules which total fifteen, three hour sessions. The order of the modules was created based on the unfolding development of the course content. The instructor or sponsor may choose to move sections around based on the actual schedule, access to the special presenters, the needs of the learners and other circumstances.

Fundamentals Course: Outline of Modules

Module #	Hours	Topic
1	3	Introduction to Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals Health, Safety, and Nutrition in group settings
2	3	The Early Childhood Learning Environment
3A + 3B	6	Child Development: Emotional Development; Introduction to Observation and Recording Behavior; and The Influence of Culture
4	3	Child Development: Cognition and Intellectual Development
5	3	Child Development: Language and Literacy
6	3	Communication: Building Relationships
7A + 7B	6	Child Development: Social Skills and a sense of oneself; Social Skills and understanding others
8A	3	Introduction to Child Care Program Licensing Regulations
8B + 8C	6	Basic Specialized Care training
9	3	Positive Workplace Environments and Family-Centered Practice
10A + 10B	6	Professionalism



A syllabus template, details and resources for each module, resource links, and many more tools and resources are available on the Northern Lights website.

Each Fundamentals module has multiple parts:

1. A title, the specific child development associate credential areas, and the core competencies addressed in the module;
2. A synopsis of the topics covered in the module;
3. It may include a lead-in activity: A short experiential activity to engage the student in observation and reflection. This can be used as a short assignment provided at the preceding class to get participants thinking about the upcoming topic;
4. Suggested adult learning activities to use in this unit with the participants;
5. Suggested resources to supplement instruction and learning (including readings, websites, videos, helpful agencies, and other tools) to be used at the instructor/ course planner's discretion.

Fundamentals: Instructor Guidance

This course is designed as introductory experience offering a broad overview of the early childhood field. It includes opportunities to bring experience back to the Fundamentals classroom and to apply classroom ideas back to the workplace. The assignments reflect the minimum skills expected as a result of course completion, with the hope that the average student will get more than the minimum. Your regional Resource Advisor is a key partner in implementing this course.

This course is offered as a full 45 hour course, but some students may only take some of the modules. The person handling the registration (usually your Northern Lights Resource Advisor) will notify the instructor when child care providers sign up for a single module, so the instructor can plan for course materials, etc. Module 8 in particular may have other students dropping in to take the module.

The course is designed to have consistent components which can be designed to be responsive to the individual and group needs of the class, as well as the skills and style of the instructor. It is often easier to start with the more concrete topics, such as health and safety to create a common ground, before the more abstract topics, such as building relationships. All modules can address confidentiality and diversity, include a balance of theory and practical application, and incorporate an ongoing cycle of observation, reflection, and response. Instructors and participants recognize the unique needs of each child, including children with special needs.

It is a requirement that each student have regular experience with young children (between ages birth to 8) during the time they are taking the Fundamentals course. This may be paid or volunteer work. This experience allows them to connect and apply class content. It also allows them to complete several required observation assignments. Observation and Reflection is embedded in many different sessions of the course in order to provide on-going practice and a foundation for developmentally appropriate practice. Students' observation of children as well as observation of the students working with children, are requirements of the course. Reflection should also be built into every session. One



regular way to do this is to make sure that the back of the professional development form for each module is completed each week. It provides space and guidance for the student to recall and reflect on the class session. The cycle of observation of children – reflection on the meaning of their behavior, planning and implementing a responsive curriculum, and observing again – can be taught and reinforced again and again, through the modules.

Parents are suggested as co-presenters, especially for Modules 6 or 9, and this requires some additional planning. Feel free to include parent co-presenters in other modules, as you deem appropriate. Their perspective can provide a powerful message that is often heard differently by practitioners when they are not providing care for that parent's child. It is a message often professionals cannot provide. In the resource section of the module is a list of agencies that can help you find parent presenters. Your regional Building Bright Futures Council, Parent Child Center, Head Start program or other programs can also help you find local parents to co-present with you. Instructors who have used parent presenters know it is important to discuss with the parent ahead of time what your expectations are for parent presenter, how it fits into the class curriculum and what to expect from the students. It is also important to allow sufficient time in class for parents to tell their family story. It is useful for the students to prepare questions for the parent so the parent is prepared to respond to them when they come. It is respectful to offer to pay the parent a stipend for their time.

Integration of Fundamentals into the Professional Development System

The course was designed to have multiple benefits for the student. As the instructor, it is important that you know these benefits and can discuss them or refer students to resources in the community who can help students understand how these benefits relate to the system of child care regulation and professional development in Vermont. These benefits and the instructor/sponsor's role are described below:

Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) This Vermont data management system is owned and operated by the Child Development Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families. One section of BFIS is specific to professional development, and is referred to as the Quality and Credential account. Northern Lights is charged with entering data into this section of BFIS. The sponsor of Fundamentals is responsible for connecting to BFIS in the following ways:

- Entering course information into the Northern Lights training calendar so we can enter it into the statewide, online course calendar
- Sending attendance for each course session to Northern Lights so it can be entered into each student's individual Quality and Credential Account
- Sending information about the students who successfully complete the course (and received letters of completion) to Northern Lights for us to enter into BFIS
- Providing complete Documentation of Professional Development Forms to participants, for each class session.



Level I of the Vermont Early Childhood Career Ladder One way to meet the required coursework for Level I of the career ladder is completion of the Fundamentals course. Students successfully complete the Fundamentals course when they finish all assignments and attend at least 13 of the 15 weeks of class (or have documentation of module completion elsewhere). Each student should get documentation of the Fundamentals course in the form of a letter of completion or incompleteness, signed by either the instructor or sponsor of the course. If a student submits documentation of missing coursework within twelve months of the end of the course, they can still earn a letter of completion for the course. Practitioners with successful completion of the Fundamentals course and a year of part- or full-time work in the field can apply for the Early Childhood Career Ladder Level I certificate. A copy of this letter plus a completed application for Level I should be sent to Northern Lights at CCV and once verified, the practitioner will receive a Level I certificate.

Basic Specialized Care training (Module 8 part B,C) This training is required for staff working with children in Specialized Child Care programs and is included as part of the Fundamentals course. The instructor, working with the sponsor, is responsible for identifying a trained instructor to present these 6 hours of training. In some cases, practitioners may get this six hour training elsewhere, and as long as they have verified documentation, they can count toward the course completion requirements. Additional students may also attend just these 6 hours in order to qualify as specialized care providers.

Introduction to Child Care Licensing (Module 8 part A) The instructor or sponsor is responsible for contacting a licenser from the Licensing Unit of the Child Development Division, to arrange the 2 hour workshop presentation during the course. Using the local licenser is ideal, so the practitioners can become familiar with that person.

Components of the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential It is important that the instructor be familiar with the CDA credential components and the process for becoming a CDA. Information about this national credential is on the website of the Council for Professional Recognition which administers the CDA credential: <http://www.cdacouncil.org> Information and local resources can also be found on the Northern Lights website.

Three of the elements required to get a CDA credential are addressed in Fundamentals:

1. **Training Hours:** Fundamentals meets 44 of the 120 required training hours covering the 8 CDA subject areas (see also CDA subject area covered by each module). The completed and signed professional development documentation forms for each module are required as documentation for the CDA credential candidate.
2. **Practice Writing Competency Standards:** The CDA credential application needs to include six statements of competency based on the six CDA goals. The child observations and reaction papers assignments provide practice in writing these statements. The CDA credential booklet details and gives examples of how to competency statements. The statements need to be written about current practice - within the last six months before the application is submitted. Therefore, it is likely the candidate will not be able to use the statements written for class in their CDA credential application, but the writing practice as well as practice observing, describing and analyzing practice are all important skills for practitioners.



- 3. Resource Collection:** The Council for Professional Recognition specifies 17 items that need to be included in a resource collection. Some of these items can be collected during the Fundamentals course such as: “a summary of the legal requirements (in Vermont) regarding child abuse and neglect... and your program’s policy regarding your responsibility to report child abuse and neglect” which can be collected as part of the presentation or assignment during Module 8, Basic Specialized Care. In this way the Fundamentals course can introduce the students to the importance, use and organization of a resource collection as well as jump start the process for those pursuing a CDA credential.

Observation Resources: See the Northern Lights website for resources to help you complete observations with your Fundamentals students including: Guidelines for the Observation of the Practitioner, Observation of the Practitioner form, and more.

Evaluation and Documentation

When the Fundamentals course is finished, instructors are asked to complete a short evaluation form and share an evaluation link with each student and ask them to complete it. Instructors should also send complete attendance for each class session to Northern Lights along with detailed information about the students who received the Letters of Completion. In order for Northern Lights to enter Fundamentals course completion into the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) we need the students’ name, contact information, workplace and BFIS Quality and Credential Account number. All this information should be listed on the weekly attendance sheets. We will share the results of these evaluations with you.