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Early Childhood Education Is My Business

Kindergarten readiness is not just about academics. Yes, I want children to recognize letters, understand early math concepts, and love books. But I'm equally focused on emotional regulation, independence, and social skills. I teach them to wait their turn, solve small conflicts, follow routines, and express their feelings with words.

I've been a family child care provider since January 1997. For nearly three decades, my classroom has been my home, and my work has been rooted in a simple belief: young children learn best when they feel safe, loved, and deeply known. Today I'm licensed for eight children, and my program is full. I hold a five-star rating, and I care for children from infancy through preschool, plus a small after-school group. Most of the children who enter my home as babies stay with me until they walk into kindergarten.

My path into early childhood education didn't follow a straight line. I graduated from high school in 1988 and enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to study elementary education.

I made it to my senior year, took the postal exam, and made a decision that surprised even me: I left school to carry mail! I worked for the post office for four years.

Then, in my twenties, I had a daughter. I was a

single mother, and I wanted work that allowed me to raise her myself. Because I already loved working with children, opening a family child care home made sense. I was living with my parents at that time and started my program in their house. Eventually I married and moved my business to our own home.

For many years then, I poured everything into raising my daughter and running my business. When she graduated from high school in 2013, I started thinking about the education I'd left unfinished. With support from the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, I enrolled at Central Piedmont Community College and earned my associate degree in 2017. That success reminded me how much I love learning. I returned to UNC Charlotte and completed a bachelor's degree in Sociology with a minor in Children's Literature in 2021, graduating in the middle of the pandemic. In 2024, I finished a master's degree in Birth-Through-Kindergarten Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Now I'm pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with an expected graduation in 2028.

All of that education feeds directly into what I do every day with children. My philosophy is play-based, but it's intentional play. I use a structured curriculum as a guide, then build around children's interests. If they're fascinated by letters, bugs, or construction trucks, I expand that curiosity into learning opportunities. I set up the environment so children discover concepts naturally. They feel like they're playing, but I'm scaffolding their learning step by step.

Preparing children for kindergarten is my number one professional goal. Because most of my children start with me as infants, I see their development from the beginning. I watch their language emerge, their motor skills strengthen, and their social confidence grow. I conduct regular developmental screenings and communicate closely with parents. If I notice a delay or concern, we talk early and seek intervention when needed. I've referred

children for services before, and seeing them thrive afterward confirms how important early action is.

Kindergarten readiness is not just about academics. Yes, I want children to recognize letters, understand early math concepts, and love books. But I'm equally focused on emotional regulation, independence, and social skills. I teach them to wait their turn, solve small conflicts, follow routines, and express their feelings with words. By the time they leave my home, they know how to function in a group, listen to an adult, and feel confident trying new things. Parents often tell me they're amazed at how smoothly the transition to school goes.

My program is also shaped by my values. I describe it as a Christian child care home. Alongside cognitive and physical development, I intentionally nurture kindness, empathy, and gratitude. Families choose my program largely by word of mouth. Many of them are my neighbors, and right now all but one of the children I care for are Black. Many of my families are highly educated professionals; others rely on subsidies. All of them are looking for a stable environment where their children are known as individuals. I try to keep my rates affordable because I understand how expensive child care is.

After 28 years, I still see myself as both a teacher and an advocate. I train other early childhood professionals and participate in networks that support home-based providers. The work can be exhausting and isolating, but it is also deeply meaningful.

Every day I'm shaping the earliest learning experiences of children who will soon enter our schools and communities. When I watch a child I've cared for since infancy walk proudly into kindergarten, ready to learn and unafraid of the world, I'm reminded why I started in 1997 and why I'm still here. My education gave me language and theory. My experience gave me wisdom. Together, they allow me to build a foundation for children that I hope will carry them far beyond my front door.