WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN CHILD CARE SOFTWARE

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LET'S RAISE AMAZING CHILDREN

What to Look for in Child Care Software

No one wants to deal with buyer's remorse. Especially when the purchase is as important as child care software.

But knowing what's important in software can feel daunting at first. There are so many options available on the market at this point.

Using our more than 20 years of childcare center management experience, we've created a guide on what to look for in software. Get started researching your options armed with these important details.

ATTENDANCE TRACKING SOFTWARE

A child care attendance app ensures you bill correctly. But it can also provide valuable insights in your reports. Monitor your teacher-child ratios throughout the day.

Pull an attendance report for valuable data about your child care center. See when parents drop off and pickup children to schedule staff appropriately.

Centers that receive child care subsidies, must show accurate attendance data for reimbursement. This can help your bottom line and make it faster and easier to get your payments.

And in case of any questions about when a child was at your center, you'll have validated proof. Your child care business can pull up the online attendance tracker anywhere at any time if there's a question.

The best ways to confirm attendance are through digital signatures and photo validation. iCare Software offers both authentication methods. That way, you can prove when a child arrives at your center and when they left.

In co-parenting situations, this can also be beneficial. The other parent can log into the parent portal and see drop off or pickup times. It puts data at everyone's fingertips. This creates an honest, transparent and easy process for attendance tracking.

PARENT TEACHER COMMUNICATION

How teachers communicate with parents can be a deciding factor in customer loyalty. It can dictate whether parents choose to stay with your daycare business.

Regular communication with parents helps keep them engaged and involved in their child's care. When done well, parents almost feel like they've been there with their child throughout the day.

Some important tools in helping keep parents informed are the following.

Messaging: allow parents to send messages throughout the day. They can check up on their child and ask the teacher questions.

Photo sharing: in the daycare business, a photo really is worth a thousand words. Now, parents can connect with their children about their activities.

Online calendar: parents will appreciate an easy way to stay up to date on what's happening at your center. An online calendar makes it simple for parents to check in on pajama day. And they'll never miss an important event when they can check via the parent portal at any time.

Notes from the day: give teachers a way to take notes during the school day to share with parents. These notes can be simple updates or documenting important milestone developments. Using notes like the iCare Software Journal can help parents see the value you bring.

Daily summary: at the end of each day, send parents a daily summary. For infants, this should include feeding and diapering times. Older children might showcase more about what crafts they did during art class. Share the stories you read in the classroom at circle time. You'll help parents engage with their children about their day.

With the right tools, daycare centers can stay in close communication all day. Communication can be an important tool in building customer loyalty.

You'll also find that communication empowers your teachers. Communication gives teachers important information about their students.

CHILDCARE ACCOUNTING AND AUTOMATED TUITION PAYMENTS

One of the largest challenges that childcares face is accurate child care billing. This is especially true when centers offer part-time and flexible schedules.

A daycare accounting system must connect to attendance data to ensure accurate bills. Separate systems will make for heavy workloads for office staff. And then the staff has to check to see if parents paid the right amount.

A good child care software system will show the center when a credit card is about to expire. Our software pulls the new expiration date from the card processing server automatically. That way you don't have to do anything, and you'll never miss a payment.

Input estimated expenses alongside anticipated tuition. Now you can see how your finances look for the next few months and make adjustments where needed.

Run reports to show how much you're spending on teacher wages and then look at your attendance data. You might find opportunities to adjust your staffing to meet your accounting goals.

Another expense some childcares don't consider is the cost of payment processing. Look for software with strong payment processing agreements that provide low-cost processing. This is a strong area where you could save a great deal of money.

MORE CHILDCARE BILLING OPTIONS

Flexible childcare billing software offers options for when to bill parents. Some childcare centers opt to give options to parents as far as how often they're billed. That's why flexibility in the software can be great.

We have an extensively developed Rate Chart Modeler, which makes it easy for centers with complicated billing rules. The Rate Chart Modeler has more than 25 factors you can configure. Some factors include income-level, sibling discount, number of days and hours, age, and program.

Look for software that allows you to set client billing. Or, you can decide billing at the classroom level. The simplicity of flexible payment schedules might surprise you. And you'll be keeping parents happy.

SAVE TIME AND MONEY WITH THE MOST MODERN SOFTWARE IN THE INDUSTRY.

Schedule Management

Manage your classroom schedules all in one place. From the infant room to after school care, you can help teachers stay on task with a preset schedule. Adjust it for special days, such as holiday parties or parent-teacher days.

You're in full control of each classroom's schedule. And you can make adjustments as needed throughout the school year.

Another important aspect of schedule management is staffing. The right staffing makes a huge difference in your childcare center's bottom line. You need to have enough staff to cover your student-teacher ratio in each classroom. But overstaffing means you're spending money you don't have to.

Start planning out your staffing using attendance data in your daycare management software. As children graduate from one classroom to another, your needs will fluctuate.

Generally speaking, student-to-teacher ratios increase as children age. This means that the balance of your students' ages will affect how many teachers you schedule.

Knowing when children will be out of the classroom can help inform your staffing decisions. Integrate your staffing and attendance data for more informed scheduling decisions. You'll reap the benefits in your bottom line.

Plus, if you offer part-time or flexible attendance options, your teacher scheduling is more complicated. Reports through your preschool software will inform your decision-making.

It will help you offer more attendance options to maximize your customer base. You won't have to turn away a customer based on special attendance needs.

CHILDCARE PARENT PORTAL

Keeping parents informed means opening continuous lines of communication. A parent portal can allow parents to send messages after hours or whenever it's convenient.

Additionally, a parent portal can help highlight the progress that a child makes in your program. That's because parents can log in at any time and review journal notes and developmental milestones.

Parents who have access to information about their child's education are less likely to shop around.

Another benefit of a parent portal is that it allows parents to update their contact information. No more forms that the parent fills out and then you have to manually input. Instead, give parents the power to make these changes.
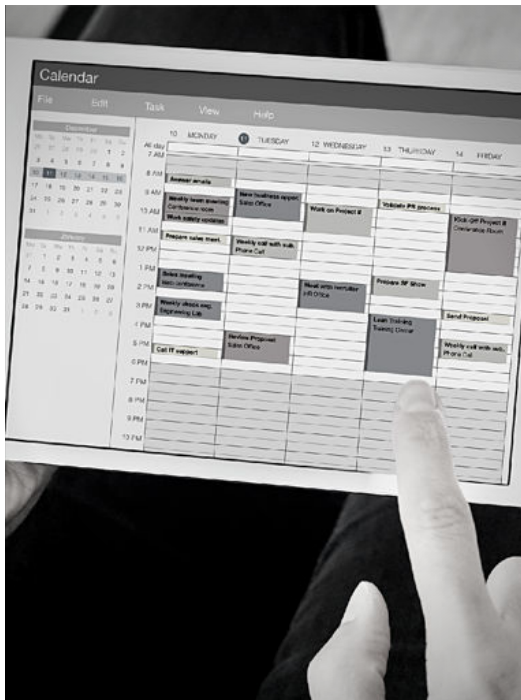
EASY SETUP FOR PART-TIME, DROP-IN AND FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES

A great way to keep enrollment full is to allow for part-time, drop-in or flexible schedules. But creating these programs, tracking attendance and billing tuition is a large task. That's why many preschool centers and childcares only offer a full-time option.

Software can make flexible schedules easy. Pre-program your billing based on a per-day or half-day basis. Instruct teachers on proper attendance tracking for more flexible students. And let the back-end of your software do the rest.

You shouldn't have to prepare special bills for unique attendance schedules. The right tools make it possible.

And because you'll be able to work with parents to match their needs, you can attract more customers. Be sure that you adjust your staffing based on part-time students. Otherwise, you'll spend more than you need to on their care.

Developmental Milestone Tracking

In some areas, developmental milestone tracking is now required for preschools. Other areas don't require it but provide a list of milestones children should achieve by a certain age.

There are two big benefits to tracking these milestones, whether required in your area or not:

- Subsidy payments could be contingent on children reaching milestones

- Seeing the value your center provides a family can delight parents

Seek daycare management solutions that document and track progress toward important milestones. Each software will have a unique way of tracking this important information. Some are better than others in making it easy.

iCare Software allows you to preset your state's developmental milestones or create your own. You can use Montessori milestones, if applicable.

Once you set up your milestone tracking, teachers select the option from a dropdown to add it to a student's record. Then, parents will get notified based on their settings. And, you'll have an easy paper trail to submit for subsidy payment.

Another benefit of tracking milestones is that you can use aggregate results in your marketing. For example, you can highlight your students' achievements to show readiness for kindergarten.

PANDEMIC PROTOCOL MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic showed that the childcare industry has vulnerabilities. But technology plays a role in helping childcares manage their risk. Whether it's a pandemic or a mild flu outbreak, technology can help you overcome the challenge.

Everything that the industry learned from the pandemic is applicable for many years to come. Here's a look at the pandemic tools iCare Software created. You'll see how they can be useful after the pandemic.

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Teachers can educate children in the classroom and children at home at the same time. Opening a virtual classroom can provide extra income for your center. Children in rural areas can attend your preschool from home. Or children suffering from illnesses or unable to attend in person can log in from a safe environment. This can help children undergoing cancer treatments or other difficulties still attend preschool.

CONTACTLESS CHECK-IN APP

Offer parents ease and convenience with a check-in app on their phone. The app activates when they're in your childcare center. It's a pain to wait in line behind other parents to sign in at a shared tablet or other devices. Though designed to reduce high-touch areas during the pandemic, the app is useful long-term.

PANDEMIC PROTOCOL MANAGEMENT

When a child runs a fever, ensure parents pick them up promptly. The pandemic protocol management sends alerts to office staff when a child's temperature reaches a certain threshold. That way, the office staff can contact parents quickly to remove the child from the classroom. It also sends alerts when children exhibit certain symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TRAINING

As you review child care software systems, ask about customer service and training. Some software companies make you pay extra for support and training.

When you hire new teachers and office staff, you'll need to set up a training plan for your Montessori software. Look for a software company that offers ongoing training resources and support.

We provide customer service calls to all our customers to ensure their success with the software. Our team can help you set up specific rate charts, add development milestone tracking to the Journal and much more.

Online, you'll find many training videos. These provide information on topics from completing a new student enrollment to running reports. Everything we do focuses on providing childcare management solutions for our customers.

READY TO UPGRADE YOUR CHILDCARE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE?

SCHEDULE A FREE CONSULTATION
WWW.ICARESOFTWARE.COM

OUTSTANDING DATA SECURITY

Moving private information to a cloud environment can feel nerve-wracking. Data breaches seem to be commonplace. Make sure your data is safe by choosing a secure daycare software program.

Our software runs on AWS, one of the best and most secure servers on the market. This means that you have peace of mind in knowing that your data is safe with us.

Parents might also worry about data security as they consider where to send their child for preschool. Explain to them the security measures of every parent, teacher and office staff member having their own login for the software.

Explain your photo policy of only placing images in the software and not on social media unless you have permission. This can put parents' minds at ease, and they'll enjoy the easy communication channels they'll have with their child's teachers.

Ask about data security during software demos to ensure protection for you and your customers.

HOW TO CHOOSE CHILD CARE SOFTWARE

Today's daycare management requires software. Parents are extremely connected via their smartphones. So they expect to be connected to your services via a daycare app.

As you seek a management solution, take these important steps to choosing the right software for your center operations.

- Make a list of your needs
- Outline any special requirements your center has
- Understand your budgetary limitations (but don't forget, changing software systems could save you money)
- Schedule demos
- Ask follow-up questions as you learn more

If this is your first time purchasing software, it's a good idea to set up demos with many companies. This will enable you to compare and contrast different services.

Try to schedule your demos within a week or two so that all details are fresh in your mind. And as you go through the demos, you might have follow-up questions to ask the various companies. Make sure to get contact information before the end of the demo to stay in touch and freely ask those questions.

Don't rush the process too much. But also know that the right software can free up time for you to run your childcare center while empowering effective teachers.

IS CHANGING DAYCARE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE WORTH IT?

Every busy child care manager knows they don't need one more thing on their to-do list. So the big question becomes, is it worth it to change software systems. After you've been through the selection process once, you likely don't want to go back through it.

If your software isn't keeping up with new tech advancements and innovation, your center might start to lag behind the competition. Re-evaluating your software needs can help your center stay desirable and earn referral business. Happy customers are your best marketing and the right software can do wonders for delighting parents.

It never hurts to see some demos from today's modern childcare software systems to see if yours stacks up. And if not, catching up to modern technology now will keep your customers happy.

SCHEDULE A DEMO

Schedule a demo to see iCare Software and its robust tools. We customize our demos to meet your needs so that we never waste your time. Learn about our free setup, data transfer and onboarding.

Call to schedule your demo at 978-266-0224.

Or visit our website to book your demo at iCareSoftware.com

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