

Childcare Centre Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Childcare Centre Manager roles are usually run by a panel that includes an area or operations manager and sometimes an HR representative, and often finish with a walk through the centre so you can see the rooms and meet staff informally. Panels are checking whether you can run the business side of a service while keeping compliance and family relationships solid at the same time.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience leading staff, handling underperformance or managing a difficult family relationship, usually asked as 'tell me about a time'.
- **Scenario or judgement:** Hypothetical incidents, complaints or compliance issues where the panel wants to see how you'd think through a decision under pressure.
- **Process:** Walk-through questions on how you'd handle recurring operational work like budgeting, rostering or the Quality Improvement Plan.
- **Technical or regulatory:** Direct questions checking your working knowledge of the National Quality Standard, licensing conditions and reporting obligations.

Most panels open with a couple of general questions about your background and why you applied, move into behavioural and scenario questions that make up the bulk of the interview, then ask one or two technical questions on compliance or budgeting before a site tour and a chance for you to ask your own questions.

1. Tell me about a time you had to manage a staffing shortfall that put ratios at risk.

Why they ask

Ratio breaches are a serious compliance issue, so the panel wants evidence you can solve staffing problems quickly without cutting corners.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and why ratios were at risk, the specific action you took to resolve it that day, and the outcome, including any changes you made afterwards to reduce the risk of it happening again.

Example answer

"At short notice two educators called in sick on the same morning in a room that needed to maintain ratio. I first checked our casual and relief list and called through it, and while I waited to hear back I moved a qualified staff member from an under-ratio room to cover, adjusting the roster for the rest of the day. I also contacted a few families to let them know about a slightly later drop-off window while we sorted cover, which most were happy to do. By late morning we had a relief educator in place. Afterwards I reviewed our relief staff pool and added a couple more educators to it, since that shortfall showed we were relying too heavily on the same two people."

2. Walk me through how you would approach developing or updating a Quality Improvement Plan for this service.

Why they ask

The QIP sits at the centre of how a service demonstrates its practice against the National Quality Standard, and the panel wants to know you have a genuine process rather than treating it as paperwork.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walk-through: how you gather input from educators and families, how you self-assess against each NQS area, how you prioritise improvements, and how you track progress over time.

Example answer

"I'd start by pulling together the current QIP and going through each National Quality Standard area with the room leaders, asking them where they think practice is strong and where it's inconsistent, since they see the day-to-day reality better than I do from the office. I'd also look at family feedback and any incident or complaint records for patterns. From there I'd prioritise two or three improvement areas that are realistic to work on in the next few months rather than listing everything at once, assign an educator to lead each one, and set a rough timeframe to check progress. I'd keep the QIP as a working document we revisit in team meetings, not something that only comes out before an assessment and rating visit."

3. A parent comes to you upset about how an educator handled an incident involving their child. How do you respond?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement in a client-facing situation that touches on both family trust and staff management, both of which matter to how a service is rated by families and regulators.

How to structure your answer

Talk through the immediate response, the balance between supporting the family and being fair to the educator, and the follow-up steps, showing you can stay calm and procedural under pressure.

Example answer

"I'd first listen to the parent fully before responding, because often what they need in the moment is to feel heard rather than an instant fix. I'd check the incident report and speak with the educator involved to understand exactly what happened, then get back to the parent with a clear explanation and, if something did go wrong, an honest acknowledgement of that along with what we're doing differently. If the incident raised a notifiable issue I'd follow our reporting obligations to the regulatory authority. With the educator, I'd treat it as a coaching conversation first, working out whether it's a training gap or a one-off, rather than jumping straight to a formal process."

4. How do you approach budgeting and fee setting for a service?

Why they ask

Financial sustainability is a core part of the role, and the panel wants to know you understand where the money actually comes from and goes in a childcare service.

How to structure your answer

Explain your process: reviewing income against Child Care Subsidy arrangements and family fees, tracking wage costs against enrolments, and adjusting throughout the year rather than only at budget time.

Example answer

"I build the budget around enrolment projections and wage costs first, since wages are the biggest expense in most services, then map fee income against that including the impact of Child Care Subsidy on what families actually pay out of pocket. I track actuals against budget monthly in MYOB so fee or cost issues show up early rather than at year end. If I need to adjust fees I try to time it with clear communication to families well in advance, and I look for savings in areas like consumables or relief staffing before considering a fee increase."

5. Describe a time you had to manage an underperforming staff member.

Why they ask

People leadership is central to this role, and the panel wants to see you can handle a difficult conversation fairly and follow it through.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: outline the performance issue, the specific conversation and support plan you put in place, and the eventual outcome, whether that was improvement or a more formal process.

Example answer

“An educator was consistently late completing observation and learning documentation, which was affecting our programming quality. I raised it directly and privately, asked what was getting in the way, and it turned out she felt unsure about how much detail was expected. We agreed on a simple template and a weekly check-in for a month, and I gave her some time during quiet periods to catch up. Her documentation improved and stayed consistent after that, and I used what I learned to update our induction process so new educators get clearer guidance on documentation expectations from the start.”

6. What do you know about the National Quality Standard and how does it shape your decisions as manager?

Why they ask

This checks your working regulatory knowledge, since the manager is usually the person accountable for translating the NQS into daily practice.

How to structure your answer

Give a direct, structured answer: briefly outline what the NQS covers, then give one or two concrete examples of how it influences a decision you make regularly.

Example answer

“The National Quality Standard sets out the quality areas services are assessed against, covering things like educational program, children's health and safety, staffing arrangements, and governance and leadership. As manager it shapes decisions I make every week, for example when I'm rostering I'm not just filling shifts, I'm making sure qualification and ratio requirements under the Education and Care Services National Law are met at all times. It also shapes how I think about the physical environment and program planning, since those decisions eventually get looked at during an assessment and rating visit, but more importantly they affect what children experience day to day.”