

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

A Marketing Guide for the
Early Childhood Sector



Simple strategies for boosting the profile of your service



Your work as an early childhood education and care provider is unique and important, and we want to help you put your best foot forward so families looking for care can find your service fast.

To ensure your service stands out in the increasingly crowded early childhood marketplace we have developed this free Marketing Guide for the Early Childhood Sector, which outlines a range of simple strategies for boosting the profile of your service.

You don't need fancy qualifications to market and promote your early childhood service, but you do need an understanding of what makes your centre special and how to communicate this to families.

Our Marketing Guide will help you identify the unique aspects of your service and leverage these to develop a compelling and authentic marketing plan.

Marketing made easy

The pillars of our Marketing Guide are supplied below, and they can be read in order or you can click ahead to the article of most interest to you.

[Sell yourself - Developing a marketing plan](#)

[Making a great first impression](#)

[Converting lookers to bookers](#)

[Cheat Sheet](#)

At CareforKids.co.nz we work hard to create and deliver resources which make it easier to run your service, and we hope you find this Marketing Guide to be a useful tool.

SELL YOURSELF

Developing a marketing plan

In an increasingly crowded market it's important to ensure your service is doing everything it can to attract new families. Gone are the days when families defaulted to the provider closest to them, or the easiest one to get their child into.

With more information, more options and high standards, families are happy to shop around until they find a provider which ticks all their boxes. To ensure your service can secure its slice of the pie you need to be actively promoting your business to the local

community and other market segments you have identified.

Developing a cohesive and consistently applied marketing plan is the first step in promoting the unique benefits of your service.

Here's how to do it:

1. Develop a unique value statement

Your unique value statement (UVS) is the reason a family will choose your service over another and it's incredibly important to have a very clear understanding of what it is. In early childhood settings a UVS can be anything that differentiates your service from your direct competition: Is it your bi-lingual staff? Your vegetarian kitchen? Your focus on sustainability? Or your physical location?

If you are unclear what your UVS is, ask parents why they chose your service, hold a brainstorming session with staff and research what your competitors are doing. Your UVS doesn't need to be complicated or extravagant it simply needs to demonstrate what it is that you are doing that is different to everyone else.

Once you have determined and succinctly defined your UVS you need to communicate it widely so that staff, existing families and potential customers have a good understanding of your point of difference.

2. Apply and promote your unique value

Actions speak louder than words and it's important to live the values you espouse. For example, if your UVS is your focus on sustainable practices then this needs to be reflected in every aspect of your service, by all your staff members.

Your UVS should also be described and promoted in all of your inward and outward marketing material: your website, social platforms, brochure, enrolment pack, electronic learning journals, printed posters, newsletters and flyers.

Consistently applying your UVS in all aspects of your business will help to consolidate the positive opinion of

existing families and build your reputation among potential new customers. Collect stories, case studies and examples of how you are living your UVS, explain how children and families are benefiting and use these examples in your promotional material.

3. Define and understand your stakeholders

Effective marketing requires you to communicate your message to everyone you hope to engage with your centre. This means current and future families, potential staff, the wider community, suppliers, competitors and supporters. Obviously, families with small children are an important financial market, but raising awareness about your brand and UVS more widely are also important. Defining and knowing your stakeholders and what they want and expect of your service will help you maximise the impact of your marketing efforts and expenditure.

4. Be strategic about your marketing mediums

Marketing mediums are the platforms, printed and electronic collateral and networks you use to disseminate your marketing messages. It's no longer necessary to print swathes of expensive glossy flyers as many families are equally as happy with an electronic version, while Facebook case studies and Instagram snaps are a great way of promoting your UVS in action.

Some easy ways to make quick marketing gains are to update your website regularly with pictures, news and updates. Maintaining a topical blog is an effective way of attracting traffic on a regular basis. Ensuring your centre has good street appeal is also important, first impressions count, and a neat and tidy exterior enhanced by an attractive well-maintained sign is invaluable.

SELL YOURSELF / Developing a marketing plan

Remember, word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing mediums for early childhood services. Make all interactions with potential customers, whether by phone, email, Facebook, or in person, as positive, constructive, and informative as possible. You only have one chance to make a great first impression so make it count!

5. Track your progress

Taking the time to create a marketing plan is only sensible if you also make the time to monitor, track and measure your progress. View your marketing plan as a work in progress and be prepared to tweak it based on the results of your follow up research.

Tracking the effectiveness of your marketing efforts is relatively straightforward, you can ask people over the phone/email how they heard about your service. Add it as a question on your enrolment form and/or monitor the number of people who like your Facebook/Instagram page when you add a new post.

Remember, families and communities are different, a city-based early childhood service may find technology based marketing mediums are effective, while a service operating in an area with a high culturally and linguistically diverse community may find phone based communication to be a more effective means of converting leads to customers.

Taking a flexible approach to your marketing plan is the most effective way to ensure it delivers results in the long term. With 5,000+ providers, [CareforKids.co.nz](https://www.careforkids.co.nz) is here to support the early childhood sector, and we're here to help, email support@careforkids.co.nz at any time and tell us your thoughts.

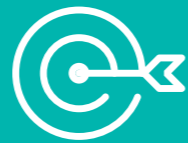
References

Marketing tips and raising your centre profile - *Gowrie NSW*

The Ultimate Child Care Marketing Guide - *Kris Murray*

Help us help you!

Remember, [CareforKids.co.nz](https://www.careforkids.co.nz) has 18+ years of experience supporting Australian and New Zealand early childhood education and care providers to connect with families looking for care, and our website is the ideal platform to showcase your service.



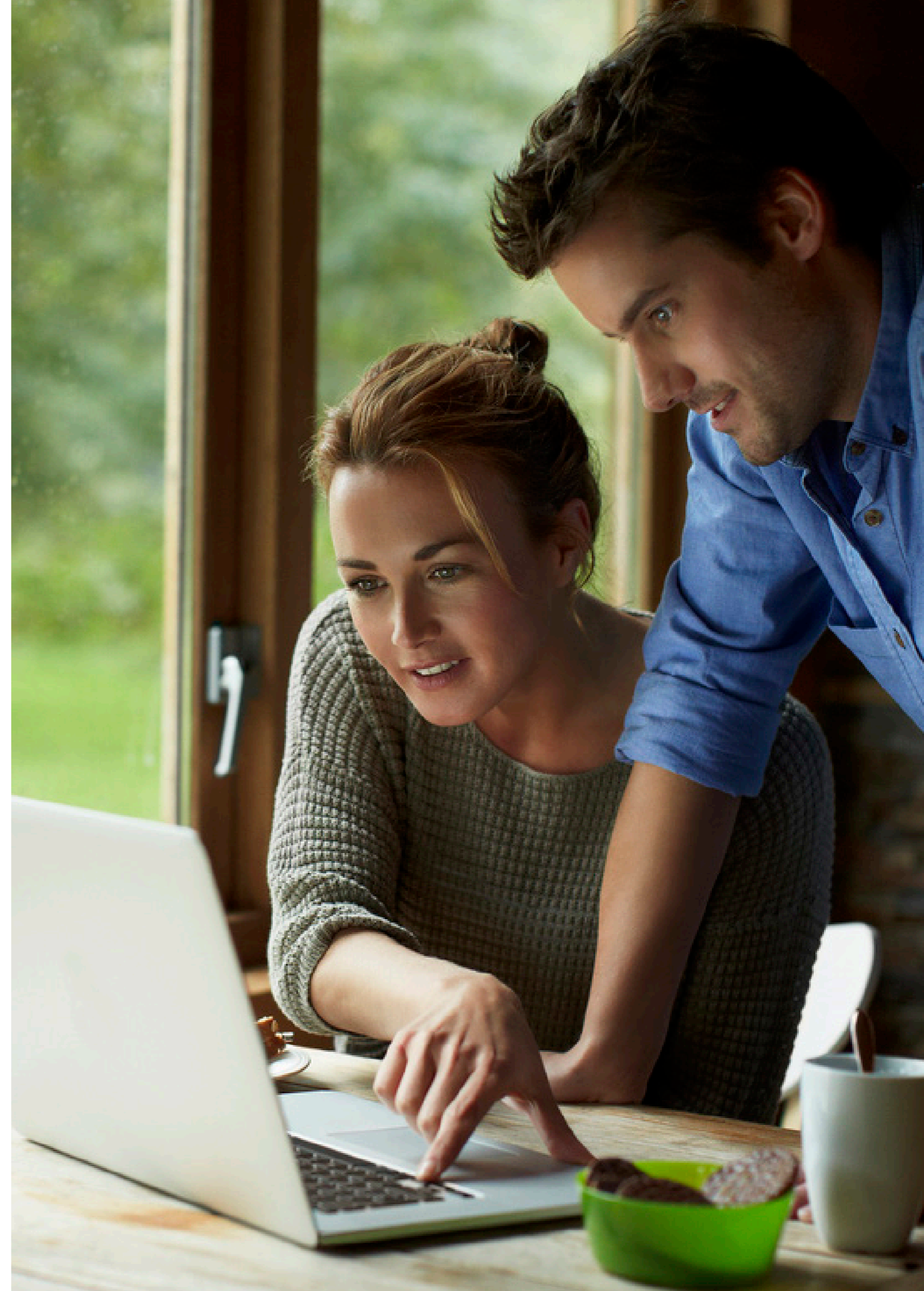
Try the simple tips below to boost your marketing reach and fill vacancies more easily and efficiently.

Consider a **premium or enterprise subscription** to help you to fill your vacancies

Regularly update your profile on [CareforKids.co.nz](https://www.careforkids.co.nz) and be rewarded with higher search rankings

Proactively invite parents to rate and review your service – this information is invaluable to families looking for care

Highlight and promote special events and offers (available to Premium and Enterprise subscribers only)



MAKING A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

It's fantastic when you get a new enquiry or customer lead for your early childhood service, and tour bookings are even better. But how many of these do you manage to convert into a successful enrolment? Selling your service to someone who has already shown interest or initiated contact is always going to be far easier than marketing to the masses.

So how do you do it? According to child care marketing expert, Kris Murray, it's all about creating trust.

The two key situations that are essential for initiating a bond with parents are phone calls and tours.

MAKING A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

Building trust online

Before we get into those two areas though, we need to touch on the importance of your online presence. Around 60 per cent of parents do all their research for an early childhood education and care provider online, before they even pick up the phone.

So, regardless of whether someone has referred you or parents have found you on Google, making a great first impression and establishing trust in the online world is equally as important as making a great impression in the 'real world'!

Ensure you have a visually appealing website with lots of information and photos which highlight:

- Your facilities
- Menu and dietary information
- How you educate and care for children with additional needs
- Daily programs and extra curricular activities
- Vacancy and fee information
- Educator profiles
- Engaging images and videos
- Active social media accounts
- Clearly visible contact details and/or enquiry forms

A **Premium listing** on CareforKids.co.nz can help you put your best foot forward every time, by showcasing all of the features that make your service unique. This includes full contact details, a logo, photos, directions, video content, links to your social feeds and more.

Another effective way to build trust online is by including ratings and reviews of your service

by currently enrolled families. You are much more likely to convert browsers into bookers by including ratings and reviews, as parents love reading what other parents think of a service.

CareforKids.co.nz makes it easy to collect ratings and reviews from parents in your service and comments can be viewed for accuracy before going live.

For many providers, an email or Facebook direct message enquiry might be the first point of contact with new parents so it's important to respond quickly and attempt to take the lead further.

Ideally it's best to make a phone call shortly after receiving an online enquiry, however, if you're responding online just be sure to adopt a friendly tone, answer any specific queries, and suggest a time for a phone chat and/or a tour.

Also check your email and social media account inboxes regularly so that all opportunities to connect with a new parent are maximised.

Turning a phone call into more

In many instances a parent's first contact with an early childhood education and care provider is over the phone. The importance of this initial contact cannot be overstated and how you answer the phone and handle calls will, in many cases, determine the likelihood of a parent coming in to view your service in person.

While many providers, especially smaller operators like family day care educators, may not be able to afford to have someone solely responsible for answering the phone, that is not an excuse to neglect this line of communication.

Every phone call you have with a prospective client is your opportunity to convey your personality, professionalism and the aspects of your service which are unique.

Cathy Abraham offers these expert tips on how to maximise the potential benefits from your phone engagement and remember, everyone who answers the phone should be familiar with these basics:

- **Train staff:** Designate which staff members are responsible for answering the phone and train them on how to handle enquiries so there is consistency. Conduct role plays and also make calls to the centre yourself (or ask someone else to do it), to test their phone answering and enquiry skills so you know what areas need improvement.
- **Answer by the third ring or have an answering service.** If you work on your own and struggle to answer the phone promptly during the day, ensure you have an answering service which informs the caller of your name and advises them of a time frame within which you will call back. Ensure you check this answering machine regularly and return calls as soon as possible.
- **Think about after hours:** For many working parents it can be hard to make personal calls during the day, so be sure to have an answering service in place for after hours calls and return them quickly.

- **Return enquiries:** If one of your staff has taken an enquiry on your behalf in your absence, call the person immediately upon your return.
- **Answer the phone with a smile in your voice:** Sound warm, friendly and happy to be there no matter how busy you may be and try to be calm, confident and relaxed. If you need to move to a quieter room, place the person on hold and move somewhere more suitable.
- **Use a professional greeting:** A warm, friendly, professional greeting should identify both the company's name and the person answering the phone. End your greeting with a statement that lets the caller know you are there to help. Something like, "Good morning, XYZ Childcare, Monica speaking. How may I assist you?" Do not rush through your greeting. You want the caller to know they've reached the correct number, who they are talking to, and that you want to help them.
- **Use enquiry cards:** Keep a pile of pads and pot of pens at every phone so you're never struggling to find one when required.
- **Build rapport:** Ask questions to show interest in the caller and their child and to gather basic information. Use their names in the conversation and comment on something the caller has said such as the age of the child. Be warm and friendly!
- **Listen to their needs and address them:** Ask them what they feel is important for their child. Listen to what they're really saying and identify what their concerns are so you can address them. For example, if they're worried about their child being shy, talk about all the ways you would attempt to make their child feel welcome and help develop their social skills.



Offer to send parents more information on your service so they can make informed choices.


Here are a few more ideas for how to take the phone conversation further:

- **Sell your service:** Tell the parent of a two-year-old what an amazing older toddler room you have, and how fortunate you are to have such wonderful teachers in there. Advise the parent of your ERO rating and the programs you have in place to further develop and enhance the service. Give specific examples of the great things you do. Talk about what you offer that competitors may not (security, staff longevity, menu, extra-curricular activities, etc.) Know your service's advantages!
- **Invite them to tour:** Don't be shy in asking the parent to commit to coming in to see the service and meet the educators. Offer a choice of tour times.
- **Offer to send more info:** Emphasise that you understand what a big decision it is for parents choosing an early childhood service, offer to email or post them more information on your service so they're as informed as possible about their choices.

- **Close the call on a friendly note:** Thank them for calling, ideally using their name. And if they've made a tour appointment let them know you're looking forward to meeting them on (time/date).
- **Follow up:** Write a personalised, handwritten note with any materials being sent by post; send a follow up email and/or make a phone call following the initial enquiry to help secure a tour appointment or enrolment and answer any questions.

Active listening

To ensure a really effective phone call, practice active listening and reflective paraphrasing as parents identify and clarify their individual needs. Demonstrate empathy and understanding and aim to make someone feel 'heard'.



Active listening requires:

1. An open mind
2. Focus on the caller
3. 'Mirroring' the caller's thoughts by summarising and repeating back to them
4. A quiet inner voice
5. Giving the caller your complete attention
6. Not responding while the other person is still speaking



The inquiry call

The inquiry call is your chance at making an amazing first impression. If the person answering the phone does not sound friendly and knowledgeable, chances are you will never see that potential parent or enrolment.

Here are some things to remember:

- Designate someone to answer the phone when you are not in the building and train them thoroughly.
- Make sure there are plenty of 'Inquiry Cards' and pens by each telephone.
- Follow up on any inquiries as soon as you return.
- Give your staff on-going feedback on how they answered the phone whenever you call the service.
- If you have to answer the phone while in a classroom, move to a quieter place if necessary and possible.
- Create a sense of urgency. Don't relay that you have ten open spaces in a room. Put the caller on hold to double check for availability, then let them know that you have a space, not ten.
- Build on "yeses." After telling a parent about a positive activity that is done, ask them to agree with you... "Isn't that great?"; "Is that a skill you feel is important for Sally?"
- You need to become comfortable "asking" for the tour, and actually "asking" for the enrolment at the close of the tour in order to secure it.
- If your service is not at capacity, how you handle an inquiry call will probably be one of the most important things you do all day!

MAKING A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

Role-play scenarios

For training support staff or practice, try practising these scenarios:

SCENARIO 1:

A parent calls and just wants to know the price. They seem disinterested in any other information.

SCENARIO 2:

A parent calls wanting information but doesn't seem to know what to ask.

SCENARIO 3:

A parent calls and wants to know "what programs and support you have in place for special needs children?"

SCENARIO 4:

A parent calls sounding like she has had 12 cups of coffee, and she wants to tell you all about her divorce.

SCENARIO 5:

A parent calls and wants to know if they can start their child tomorrow, asking no questions.

Running through these training scenarios with your staff is an excellent way to ensure everyone is conveying the maximum amount of useful information in a clear and consistent fashion.

Prepare for tours

You may think that the hard work is done once you've booked a family in to tour your centre, however if you don't continue the effort, that potential new enrolment could easily slip through your fingers. Additionally, if someone doesn't have a positive experience during their tour, they could share their experience with others, which could have a negative impact on your reputation.

With this in mind it's important to plan your tour carefully from beginning to end. Aim to highlight your centre's best features and leave parents feeling inspired. Be sure to brief your staff and on top of this all staff need to be briefed on tour protocol and made aware of when one is scheduled.

Here are some other tips on how to conduct a great tour:

- **Always watch the children:** Teachers will often chat to each other in the playground which is fine, but if they're not watching the children it doesn't look good. Encourage staff to constantly watch the children, and if they want to talk to each other tell them to stand back to back so their eyes are still scanning the area.
- **Walk into the classroom:** Don't stand outside and let the parent look into the class through a glass window. Take the parent inside, let them meet the teacher and see all the action for themselves.
- **Be friendly, warm and prepared:** Brief your staff so they don't look like a deer in headlights when confronted with a potential new parent. Everyone should be friendly, relaxed and helpful, ready to answer any questions.
- **Engage and excite:** Make families feel welcomed during their tour by providing refreshments and offering a small goodie bag to keep their child entertained throughout the tour.
- **Prompt enrolment:** Be confident about asking if they want to enrol at the end of the tour. Good feelings can fade so you want to get the parent to sign on while they're there if possible, before they visit a competitor.

Thanks to Kris Murray from Child Care Marketing Solutions and Cathy Abraham from Child Care Lounge for their tips on how to maximise enrolments from leads and enquiries.

CONVERTING LOOKERS TO BOOKERS

With many areas experiencing issues of over supply and providers struggling to fill vacancies, now, more than ever, it's important to make a great first impression on families and to run a professional and informative tour, which leads to touring families converting to enrolments.

Tours are your opportunity to connect with families and to demonstrate your service's approach to the education

and care of children as well as your facilities and the programs on offer.



CONVERTING LOOKERS TO BOOKERS

When planning and running tours of your service it's important to think about which of your staff members are best placed to showcase your service in its best possible light, answer questions and provide a warm and welcoming tone to the tour.

Child care marketing expert Kris Murray says that many early childhood directors are rightly employed for their experience as an educator, their staff management skills and their ability to keep the service running smoothly, but that these skills aren't necessarily what is required for running an effective tour.

Ms Murray says it's very important for directors to identify the staff member who is best placed to 'sell' the service and then seal the deal by offering families the opportunity to enrol.

"Tour leaders need to be able to identify a parent's unique needs, emotionally connect with a family and demonstrate above and beyond that their service is the most well equipped to accommodate those needs. They also need to be comfortable asking for the business," she says.

Sealing the deal isn't necessarily easy, especially with high vacancy rates and parents enjoying the luxury of being able to choose between a number of high quality early childhood services.

To this end, here are eight tips from Kris Murray on how to convert tour participants into enrolled families in your early childhood service:

1. Before the tour begins, take a look at any information you know about the family coming in and see if there are any commonalities so you can better relate to them during the tour. If you don't have anything to work with beforehand, look for ways to build rapport throughout the tour. At minimum, make sure to address them by their names and reference their child's name.
2. Consider your mindset when giving a tour: Are you just hoping to seal the deal or are you actually taking the time to demonstrate how your school can provide solutions to the needs that that family is expressing?
3. Learn to be transparent during tours. You might fear not being able to check off all the boxes of a parent's checklist by doing this, but they will appreciate your open communication and transparency more than anything else. Whether or not that family is a fit for your school, they won't hesitate to share their pleasant experience when touring your school with their friends that are looking for care.
4. Rather than trying to sell families into your program, take a more authentic approach and "invite" them to enrol and register. You should be "inviting" them to join your community.

CONVERTING LOOKERS TO BOOKERS

5. The language you use around closing a tour will greatly influence your closing rate. You should be using language that sounds warm, genuine, and elegant.
6. If you don't invite a family to enrol with you as you wrap up a tour, you are doing them a disservice. If you have created a high-quality program, you should be doing whatever you can to convince that family that their child will significantly benefit from being enrolled at your school.
7. Every step within your enrolment process needs to have a call to action attached to it, including your tour. Sometimes clients need their hand held along the way and require some encouragement to take action.
8. If a family isn't ready to enrol right then, offer to follow up with them and make sure you follow through on that offer. You will amaze them with your professionalism and courtesy.

For more expert tips from Kris Murray visit the [Child Care Success Company](#).



If time is a little tight right now and it feels too tricky to think up and introduce a whole new Marketing Plan, then check out these **TOP 10 TIPS, small ideas that will deliver big results**, all from the safety of your [CareforKids.co.nz](https://www.careforkids.co.nz) dashboard:



01 Be Beautiful

Optimise the results from your CareforKids.co.nz profile, by making it as gorgeous as your service. Pictures, up-to-date info, reviews, it all helps to create a positive view of your service.



02 Be Reliable

Log in to CareforKids.co.nz every month and update your vacancy and fee information. We reward services which update regularly by moving them to the top of our search results list.



03 Be Honest

Make sure you only list vacancies which are available NOW (not where parents have to go on a wait list). Falsely advertising vacancies makes parents very grumpy.

04 Be Open

If you are doing a great job, why not invite parents to rate your service? It's the best way to win customers and parents love reading about the experiences of other families.



05 Be Clever

Consider new opportunities for filling vacancies quickly through opportunities such as a partnership with Care Corporate, which gives you direct access to a network of parents looking for care right now in some of Australia's biggest companies.



06 Be Different

If you want to stand out from the crowd then do something different. Use your CareforKids.co.nz profile to showcase a special offer or opportunity. Everyone loves a cherry on the top!



10 Be Yourself

CareforKids.co.nz enables you to showcase all the unique, amazing and excellent things about your service. Put your best foot forward and update your profile right here right now!



CareforKids.co.nz
Child care search made easy

Cheat Sheet

09 Be Responsive

We love hearing from you, so when we send a reminder email asking you to update your vacancy and fee details, please drop us a line to let us know where you are at.



08 Be Connected

Vacancy Alert provides access to an unlimited database of families that need care in your area right now. It's the fastest and best way to fill vacancies in your service.



07 Be Easy

Making life easier for families looking for child care will make them love you more. Enabling parents to waitlist with your service from your CareforKids.co.nz profile is a great example of this.

