

HR essentials

Hiring, paying, leading and protecting the team at the heart of your centre.

01 Why HR matters

Your staff are the heartbeat of your centre. The way you hire them, treat them, pay them, and lead them shapes everything else — how children are cared for, how parents experience your centre, and how long staff stay.

Good HR is not complicated. It is clarity, fairness, and consistency.

02 Step 1: Every staff member needs a signed contract

A contract turns expectations into a written agreement. It protects you. It protects them. And it is required for UIF, inspections, and registration.

◆ Every contract should include:

- ◆ Employee details — full name, ID number, job title.
- ◆ Start date — when they began working.
- ◆ Salary — amount, payment date, method (cash or EFT).
- ◆ UIF and PAYE — who deducts and pays.

- ◆ Working hours — days, start and end times, total hours per week.
- ◆ Leave — annual leave, sick leave, public holidays, family responsibility leave.
- ◆ Duties — a short list of daily responsibilities.
- ◆ Code of conduct — punctuality, dress code, confidentiality, phone use.
- ◆ Termination — how either party ends the contract (usually one month's written notice).

Keep one signed copy in the staff file. Give one to the employee.

◆ **South African leave basics (Basic Conditions of Employment Act)**

- ◆ **Annual leave:** 21 consecutive days per year (15 working days) for full-time staff.
- ◆ **Sick leave:** 30 days over a 36-month cycle.
- ◆ **Family responsibility leave:** 3 days per year.
- ◆ **Maternity leave:** 4 consecutive months.

You can be more generous, but not less.



You do not need to write your contracts and policies from scratch. Visit **Grow ECD's Resource Centre**, where you can download and adapt employment contracts, HR policies and a wide range of other resources for ECD centres.

You will need to register and sign in to access the resources.

Visit the Resource Centre →

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Step 2: Register for UIF (and PAYE if needed)

◆ **UIF — for every employee**

UIF (Unemployment Insurance Fund) protects staff if they lose their job, go on maternity leave, or become too ill to work.

- ◆ Employee pays 1% of their gross salary.

- ◆ Employer pays 1% on their behalf.
- ◆ **Total:** 2% paid monthly to the Department of Employment and Labour (through SARS).

UIF applies up to a salary ceiling (currently R17,712 per month). Above that, the contribution is capped.

Example: A teacher earning R5,000 — employee contributes R50, you contribute R50, total R100 paid monthly.

◆ **PAYE — only if salary is above the threshold**

PAYE (Pay As You Earn) is income tax deducted from staff salaries.

- ◆ For 2024/25, the threshold is R95,750 per year — roughly R7,979 per month for staff under 65.
- ◆ If a staff member earns less than this, no PAYE is deducted.
- ◆ If above, you must register for PAYE with SARS and deduct it monthly.

Use the SARS Tax Calculator to work out the exact deduction.

◆ **Submitting monthly (EMP201)**

Each month, employers submit an EMP201 return through SARS eFiling. It covers PAYE, UIF, and SDL (if applicable). Pay by the 7th of the following month.

At the end of the tax year, you issue each staff member an IRP5 certificate showing what they earned and what was deducted.

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Step 3: Write down your policies

Policies protect everyone. They mean staff are not guessing what is expected — and you are not having the same conversation over and over.

Every centre should have written policies on:

- ◆ Working hours, tea and lunch breaks
- ◆ Leave (annual, sick, family, maternity)
- ◆ Punctuality and attendance
- ◆ Dress code and personal presentation

- ◆ Phone use during work hours
- ◆ Confidentiality (about children, families, and centre business)
- ◆ Social media conduct
- ◆ How staff speak to children
- ◆ How staff communicate with parents
- ◆ Discipline process
- ◆ Substance use (alcohol, drugs)
- ◆ Conflict and grievance procedures

Discuss these with your team. Have everyone sign.

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Step 4: Delegate

Being a principal does not mean doing everything yourself. Strong leaders share the load.

When you delegate well:

- ◆ Everyone knows what is expected.
- ◆ Tasks match people's strengths.
- ◆ You check in for support, not to take over.
- ◆ Staff feel trusted and respected.

◆ A simple delegation method

- ◆ Choose the task. Be specific. ("Set up the snack table by 9:30 each morning" — not "help with snacks.")
- ◆ Choose the person. Match the task to their strengths.
- ◆ Explain the why. People work harder when they understand the purpose.
- ◆ Show them once. Demonstrate, then let them try.
- ◆ Check in. Briefly, kindly. Not to take over — to support.
- ◆ Trust them. If they do it differently from you, but the job gets done, that is fine.

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Step 5: Handle discipline fairly

When something goes wrong, the way you handle it teaches your whole team something — about you, and about how to treat each other.

◆ **Be firm on standards, gentle with people**

- ◆ Address concerns early. Small problems are easier to solve.
- ◆ Speak privately, not in front of others.
- ◆ Assume good intent until proven otherwise.
- ◆ Let the staff member explain. There is always a story.
- ◆ Separate the person from the behaviour.

◆ **A fair process**

- ◆ Verbal warning — a private conversation, with clear expectations for change. Note the date.
- ◆ Written warning — if the behaviour continues. Use a simple form: what happened, what must change, by when.
- ◆ Final written warning — if behaviour continues. Clearly state next steps.
- ◆ Disciplinary hearing — for serious misconduct or repeated issues. Both sides present their case. A decision is recorded.

Keep records of every step. They protect you and your staff.

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A final word

Treat your staff the way you would want to be treated. Pay on time. Listen well. Give credit. Apologise when you are wrong.

The centres with the lowest staff turnover are not always the highest-paying ones. They are the ones where staff feel respected.

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**Be firm on standards, but gentle
with people.**

Part of the **Centre Management** guides for ECD principals and centre owners. For coaching, mentorship and more support, contact your PAL.

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