

Early Childhood Director Search: Interview Questions

First Round Phone Interview Questions

The following are sample questions members of the Search Committee or some other hiring representative might ask during a preliminary phone interview. The “first round” interviewees are those who, through their resumes, have been identified as possible candidates. At this point in the interview process, it is unlikely that they have interviewed with anyone in person.

1. Why did you choose to focus on early childhood education as your career?
2. Describe your current position, the scope of your responsibilities and the size of the program.
3. Why are you leaving your current position?
4. How would you describe your Jewish background, orientation and skill set?
5. What does it mean to you to be working in a Reform Jewish setting?
6. If a visitor walked into your school, how would s/he know this was a Jewish ECC?
7. What are your signature qualities that you would bring to our school as the new director?
8. What do you see as the major role for the director?
9. What are the greatest challenges you see for early childhood educators?
10. How do you think parents at your school would describe you?
11. What are you most proud to have accomplished in your current job?

Second Round In-Person Interview Questions

The following are sample questions members of the Search Committee or some other hiring representative might ask during a secondary interview. The “second round” interviewees are those who had successful first round, phone interviews, and continue to be considered for the position. This might be the only in-person interview, or there might be a third round, depending upon the hiring practices as your congregation and early childhood center. It is recommended that you ask the questions in the order they are presented.

1. Based on what you’ve learned about our program, on what areas would you focus during your first year as the new director?
2. Give examples of how you bring the best out in your teachers. How would you motivate them to share their talents and be the best they can be?
3. Describe the guiding principles you look to when developing Jewish curriculum.
4. How would you determine the appropriate amount of Jewish content? How would you know if there is too little or too much?
5. How will you seek feedback from parents?
6. In your experience as a teacher, have you had to handle issues involving congregants whose children are students? If yes, give an example and describe how you resolved the problem.
7. How would you handle a situation in which there were more tasks than resources (including time)? Give examples. Describe a typical workday.
8. This is a role play question. You have asked the chairperson of the Early Childhood Committee to meet with you in your office. The chairperson is a congregant and the mother of one of your pre-K students. The purpose of the meeting is to explain why her child is not ready to move on to kindergarten. What would you say?
9. How would you best utilize an assistant or associate director? What key responsibilities would you delegate?
10. How would you handle the following problems?

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- member comes into work 15-20 minutes late several times a week. She states she has to wait for the bus to pick up her child.
- b. A teacher calls in sick and misses two days, then calls in and says that her child has chicken pox. The teacher will be out another week.
 - c. You walk into a classroom and the children are running around. The teacher is tending to an upset child in one corner of the room.
 - d. A parent complains that their child plays all day in the dress-up corner. She expects her child to learn in the program and be ready for first grade.
11. Describe the strategies/skills you use to deal with conflicts between:
- a. A parent and a teacher
 - b. Two (or more) teachers
 - c. You and a teacher
 - d. You and a parent
 - e. You and the Board of Directors
 - f. You and the rabbi
 - g. You and a colleague (not one of your staff members)
12. How do you remain positive, both personally and professionally, despite the many challenges this job presents on a daily basis?

Final Interview Questions

The following are sample questions members of the Search Committee or some other hiring representative might ask during a final interview.

The goal is to learn more about the candidate from different perspectives. The following guiding questions might be helpful as you continue the interview process:

Approaches to Learning

1. What early childhood approaches to learning are you familiar with?
(The idea is to find out if the candidate has a good handle on different approaches to early childhood education. Examples may include, but are not limited to: Reggio Emilia, Montessori, Bank Street, play-based, et al.)
2. Describe your management style and provide examples of what that looks like.
(Ideally, you're likely looking for a "collaborative" style, but it will be just as important to hear (and see) how the candidate actually interacts with people.)
3. What do you do to keep current in the area of professional development?
(Find out how the candidate keeps current in the field. To what organizations does s/he belong? Is the candidate active in a peer-led, online community? Does the candidate attend national, regional or local conferences?)
4. Do you consider yourself a good delegator? How do you go about managing a workload that sometimes can seem never ending?
(The job of an ECC director is a complex one. The person coming in will need to figure out how to manage the current workload and how to leverage others to help them. This might involve an

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having teachers help out, working with parents from the advisory committees for different roles, and so on.)

5. How do you avoid burnout?
(It's a tough job—how do you “fill your cup” in order to stay fresh?)

Communication Skills

Scenario: You have had a child observed/evaluated and there are some issues with the child. What do you do with this information? Do you share this information with the parents? If so, how do you go about doing that?

(The idea is that the director should not be afraid to get her/his point across and to deal with difficult issues, especially as it relates to speaking with parents about their children.)

1. Give an example of how you share positive feedback with parents.
(The director should not just be the bearer of bad or serious news. S/he should be in touch about the positive accomplishments of the children as well.)
2. How do you communicate routine information with parents?
(Does the candidate do this in person, with hard copy mail, with flyers in backpacks, via electronic communication? What about in-person/evening sessions?)
3. How do you communicate with your staff?
(Do they use email, regular staff meetings, hard paper memos, etc.?)

Scenario: We all do or say things that in hindsight we wish we could go back and change. Can you give an example of a situation where you did something or responded to someone in a way that, looking back, you wish you had done differently? Once you reflected on the situation, what did you do about it?

(The idea is to acknowledge that nobody is perfect, but that you want someone who is caring and compassionate, and can say “I’m sorry. I made a mistake.”)

1. Can you provide an example of written communication you’ve created? Maybe a newsletter or something like that?
(This person will be responsible for doing a tremendous amount of writing, including the ECC newsletter, monthly update for the temple bulletin, etc.)
2. Do you have an “open door” policy? If so, what does that mean? How do you deal with parents who constantly challenge you?
(Early childhood centers tend to have a passionate population and some parents who are willing to share their ideas and feedback—at all times! Staff have also been known to voice their opinion.)
3. What do you do for the professional development/continuing education of your team? What resources do you use? Can you please give us some specific examples?
(The idea is to find out how this person grows her/his staff, including the kinds of resources used to accomplish that task.)
4. Can you give us a written example of feedback you’ve provided to your staff?
(S/he can white out the names, but the idea is to see what kind of feedback the candidate is providing and how. If s/he hasn’t done anything in writing that might be indicative of something as well.)
5. How do you leverage the strengths/experiences of your individual staff members?
(The idea is to see how s/he might use the depth of experience of current staff, i.e., would s/he have different people lead internal training sessions? Would s/he let the staff create their own curriculum if/when it’s appropriate?)

experience in mediating conflict?

(Maybe create a scenario around this, because one of the things the director will need to do is manage conflict among the staff.)

Learning Differences

Question: Do you have experience working with children who are different learners? If that's not a strong part of your background, how would you go about working with kids who have differences? How do/would you go about educating your staff in that area?

(The idea is that the person should have a special education background and/or should be willing to bring in outside assistance to help with those children. In addition, s/he should be looking at how to help keep teachers educated in how to work with children with learning differences.)

Other

1. What kind of experience do you have writing policy?
2. What experience, if any, do you have with budgeting?
3. Ask for an example of their temple bulletin newsletter (if applicable).
4. Please provide references of people for whom you have worked, as well as people who have worked *for* you and parents from your community.