

West Central Child Care Connection now offers a free online child care search. The Quality Counts Online Child Care Search offers families an easy way to find a list of child care providers in your area. However, families need to have confidence in their child care arrangements. Finding quality, convenient and affordable child care is not an easy job. The options and tips below will help you get started. Take a moment to read these before you start your search. You will find the link to the online search page below. If you have any questions about Quality Counts Online Child Care Search call West Central Child Care Connection at 1-800-782-7318 or 217-222-2550.

## What child care options are available?

### Family Child Care

Some families choose for their child to be cared for in a home-like setting. Family child care providers fulfill this need by offering care for children in their homes.

**Licensed Family Child Care providers\*** may care for up to eight children (including their own), or up to 12 children with an assistant.

**Licensed Family Child Care Group Home providers\*** may care for up to 16 children (including their own) with the help of a full-time assistant.

**License-Exempt Family Child Care providers** (such as Family, Friend and Neighbor care) may care for three or fewer children (including their own), or children from one family.

*\*Licensed family child care providers and licensed family child care group home providers must meet Illinois Department of Children and Family Services standards for health and safety including child to staff ratios and required space per child.*

### Child Care Centers & Programs

Child Care Centers provide care for groups of children outside of a residential setting. Children are usually grouped by age. Types of centers include: child care, Early Head Start/Head Start, State pre-kindergarten, preschools, school-age programs, and summer programs.

**Licensed Child Care Centers** must meet Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) standards for health and safety including child to staff ratios and required space per child. For licensed centers the following staff to child ratios and maximum group sizes are set by DCFS.

Age of Children	Staff to Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size
Infants (6 weeks to 14 months)	1 to 4	12
Toddlers (15 through 23 months)	1 to 5	15
Two Years	1 to 8	16
Three Years	1 to 10	20
Four Years	1 to 10	20
Five Years (preschool)	1 to 20	20
School-Age (Kindergarten to present)	1 to 20	30

**License-Exempt Child Care Centers** are also recognized by Illinois, such as those serving children 3 years and older and operated by public or private elementary or secondary schools, faith based organizations, institutions of higher education or other accredited schools registered with the Illinois State Board of Education. Since these settings are not licensed they are not held to standards for health and safety, staff to child ratios or maximum group size set by DCFS.

## **What to look for in your search for quality child care**

### **Play & Learn**

Quality child care offers many opportunities for all children to play each day. Counting, reading skills and problem solving are just a few things learned through play. **Here's a Tip:** Look for a provider who focuses on all aspects of your child's development including language, social, emotional, physical and cognitive.

### **Qualifications**

There are different caregiver qualifications for different child care settings. Training, education, experience and credentials prepare a child care provider to meet your child's development needs.

**Here's a Tip:** Request a provider's qualifications and references to learn more about their child care experience.

### **Positive Interactions**

A quality child care provider guides children, helping them to get along with others in caring positive ways, and encourages you to be involved as well. **Here's a Tip:** Look for a provider who is enthusiastic, attentive and encouraging.

### **Program Quality**

Child Care Programs can participate in the Illinois Quality Counts Quality Rating System (QRS) or national accreditation. Programs that have a Quality Counts QRS certification or accreditation have met voluntary standards for quality child care that are higher than the state licensing requirements. **Here's a Tip:** Ask the provider if their program has a Quality Counts QRS certification or is accredited.

### **Environments**

A quality child care environment is safe, clean and provides children with many learning opportunities.

**Here's a Tip:** Look for a setting where the children are supervised at all times, nutritious meals and snacks are served and where toys and learning activities are based on the age of the child.

### **Financial Assistance**

The Illinois Department of Human Services Child Care Assistance Program provides financial help for families who meet income and work or education/training requirements. **Here's a Tip:** To find out if you qualify for help with your child care costs check with us.

You have taken the time to learn about your child care options and a few tips to finding quality child care. **Click below to start your Quality Counts Online Child Care Search.**

<http://nw.inccrra.org/naccrrajsp/servlet/naccrra.servlets.MaskSearchServlet?pid=j50x9oqz034bf6r>