

Quality Child Care... Priceless!



Parents and Providers
Partnering for Quality Care

Types of Care



About Child Care Centers

Child care centers provide full time, sometimes part time, care in a facility where children are grouped by ages in a classroom setting. In Illinois, The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the licensing agency for all child care programs. Although there may be a few exceptions, most centers are required to be licensed. DCFS regulates and monitors programs to meet minimal health, safety and

staffing requirements. Each classroom offers materials and activities which support a planned curriculum. There is often a range of experience and education among staff. Those who have direct contact with children are required to have background checks for criminal activity. Centers provide substitutes during staff absences or vacations. Rates can vary and some programs offer a sliding fee scale.

Family Child Care Homes

Family child care is provided for children in the home of the caregiver. In Illinois, family child care providers who care for more than three children, including their own under the age of 12, are required to be licensed by DCFS. Background checks, CPR and First Aid certification, annual training hours, and other health and safety factors are monitored by DCFS. A family child care provider may be licensed for up to 8 children including their own with no more than 3 under 24 months. A provider with a qualified assistant could potentially be licensed for 12 or 16 children.

Family child care offers a blending of ages in a smaller environment allowing children the ability to relate to others older and younger than themselves. Family child care may be in your neighborhood or school district and may be able to be more flexible depending on your work or school schedule. A few providers may offer care in the evenings or weekends when centers are not open. Hours and fees vary and are set by the provider herself.

Preschools

When you are considering child care programs, your decision may include a Preschool, a PreK program or Head Start. These programs provide an educational curriculum appropriate for children 3 to 5. However, most offer part time programs several days a week. They range from privately run

preschool programs with tuitions to no cost PreK and Head Start programs based on the needs of the child and/or family income. You will want to see what is available in your area. Often you will still need additional child care to cover your daily working hours.

School Age Programs

School-age programs may care for children before and/or after school, on non-school days during the school year, and summers. These programs might

be offered in schools, community centers, YMCAs or park programs. Child care centers and family child care often care for school age children also.

License Exempt

If a provider cares for fewer than 3 children including their own, the provider is not required to be licensed. Relative care, a “nanny” who comes into your home, or having a family friend or neighbor care for your child while you work might be a license exempt option. Choosing someone you know may give you a sense of trust and also make a child feel secure.

However, communicating openly about what is expected on both sides (the caregiver and the parent) can start the child care arrangement off on the right foot. Honest dialogue to establish a mutual agreement on care issues (health/safety, nutritious meals, schedules, rates and expectation of payment) can make a positive impact on your child care relationship.





How do I Begin?

Choosing the right child care arrangement for your family is not only one of the most important decisions a parent can make but also one of the most difficult. You will need to consider availability, affordability, and most importantly, quality when determining the best match for you and your child. This booklet contains some information you will find useful as you explore your options in child care.

The first step in developing your child care plan is to make a list of practical considerations that will influence your choice.

For starters:

- What child care programs are available in my area?
- How are these programs different?
- What is the location and hours of operation?
- What ages do they serve?
- What are the policies and requirements of these programs?
- What are the fees and rates and how will I budget for them?

Begin your search once you are clear about your family's needs, your needs and most importantly, your child's needs.

If at all possible, give yourself plenty of time to look for an arrangement. Child care in many areas is scarce. Waiting lists exist in many programs especially for infants and toddlers. Planning ahead will give you the reassurance that you have had plenty of time to look at all your options.

However, if you need care immediately, don't panic. Consider making some temporary arrangements with friends or family to allow you more time to visit programs and make careful choices. You may have to expand your search by location or higher fees.



You are a major part of the world of your child
and sharing the parenting role isn't easy...

Children need healthy bonds with adults and caregivers in order to grow.

Choose a child care setting that is warm and nurturing and develop a partnership with the caregiver. It's a priceless gift you give to your child.

Making Contacts

You can establish your initial contact by phone. Be clear about what you are needing and ask if it is a convenient moment to answer a few questions. Tell the provider how many children you are looking for care for, their ages, your schedule and a start date. If you can be flexible, this would be a good time to share that. She might have care available at a later date and you might be able to make temporary arrangements until then. Additional points to discuss would be openings, hours, group size, and the number of children cared for by the caregiver as well as other things that might be important to you. Is there a waiting list you could put your name on if there are no openings at this time? If you are interested in the care being offered based on your conversation, schedule a visit to see if this is an arrangement that would be a good fit for your child and family.

Visiting Family Child Care Homes

You may want to schedule your first appointment with the caregiver at a time when children are not present. This way, the provider can spend time with you to answer all your questions without taking their attention away from the children. After seeing the family child care home and talking with the provider, arrange to visit at a later time. Schedule your visit at a time of day when you will be able to best observe the interactions between the caregiver, your child, and the other children. Very often, a morning visit will give you an idea of the types of activities available and the relationship between the provider and the children.

Visiting Child Care Centers

Make appointments with the child care centers you decide to visit so that you can meet with the director(s). While visiting the center, plan to spend the morning in the room where your child will be and talk to the specific teachers who will be caring for your child. Spend enough hours at the center to see several different activities. As you visit, use the checklists included in this guide to help you evaluate the program. Make plans with the director to visit again and bring your child along!

Child Care Choices for Parents

Choosing child care is a very individual decision and should reflect your values and expectations. The more you know about a program, the better able you will be to find an arrangement where your child will thrive.

West Central Child Care Connection offers training and technical assistance to help give caregivers the tools they need to offer high quality, responsive care. Ask your provider about the trainings and/or education she has completed. Many providers take pride in being knowledgeable about child development. They can be a resource to you by understanding the needs of your child and a partner in helping your child succeed.



Checklist

The Caregiver

- ☐ The provider allows drop-in visits.
- ☐ The caregiver appears to be warm, friendly, calm and loving, and seems to enjoy children.
- ☐ The provider understands what children can and want to do at different stages of growth. The provider encourages and understands child development.
- ☐ Children are allowed to make choices.
- ☐ The provider talks with the children and encourages them to express themselves through words and creative activities.
- ☐ The provider holds and touches the children in a caring manner and responds to an infant's cries to be fed, changed, or held.
- ☐ The caregiver handles conflicts without losing patience or displaying anger. Children are encouraged to resolve conflicts between themselves in an acceptable manner.
- ☐ The provider sets limits in a way that does not punish or shame children, and has policies for discipline, toilet training and feeding that are acceptable to you.
- ☐ The provider uses a positive reinforcement approach when disciplining and guiding children.
- ☐ The provider has previous experience or training in working with children at different stages.
- ☐ The provider is someone who listens to what you want for your child and asks questions about how you do things.
- ☐ The provider has explained about the possibility of different caregivers for your child if care crosses different shifts or a substitute is needed.

- ☐ Your child responds well to the provider. Each child receives individual attention.
- ☐ You can expect the same person to care for your child for the next year.
- ☐ The provider is flexible and understanding enough to work with the various moods of the children.

The Space

- ☐ An up-to-date license is posted.
- ☐ The environment is attractive, clean and well-lit.
- ☐ The play area is orderly enough to foster constructive play but not so orderly to be restrictive.
- ☐ There is a variety of equipment and materials to help children learn and grow mentally and physically.
- ☐ Children can reach materials and supplies without asking for adult assistance.
- ☐ The educational equipment and surroundings reflect ethnic and cultural diversity.
- ☐ The cribs, high chairs and other equipment are safe, suitable and in good condition.
- ☐ There is a place for the child if he/she chooses to be alone.
- ☐ There is enough space indoors and outdoors so all the children can move freely and safely, and different kinds of space are available for quiet play.
- ☐ The outdoor space is free of waste, protected from traffic and safe for all ages to play.
- ☐ There is a place for a child's own belongings.
- ☐ There is a proper sleeping place for nap time.
- ☐ There are first aid supplies and fire extinguishers.
- ☐ The provider is trained in CPR and First Aid.
- ☐ Bathroom and diapering areas are separate and sanitized. There is water nearby for hand washing.
- ☐ The kitchen is clean and safe.
- ☐ The meals and snacks are fresh, nutritious and appealing.

The Program

- ☐ There is time for children to work as a group.
- ☐ There is time to play alone and also to interact with friends.
- ☐ The teacher/provider has described what a typical day's schedule might be like for your child.
- ☐ The schedule shows active and quiet times throughout the day.
- ☐ The cost is within your budget, and what the fee includes is clearly explained.
- ☐ The values of the program are compatible with your values.
- ☐ Parents are involved in the program.
- ☐ The educational program and philosophy are clearly stated.
- ☐ The hours are suitable for your needs.
- ☐ How children may be transported has been discussed.
- ☐ The group sizes and child-to-staff ratio are acceptable.

Making Your Decision

Check References

Contacting references is an important way to get more information. Ask for names of two to four parents who are using or have used the provider in the past.

Trust Yourself

After considering all the information you have collected, you are ready to make a decision. You have a right to be particular. This special place for your child should leave you feeling at ease with the provider and the other children. If you feel hesitant about a situation, ask more questions or continue to look until you are confident that your decision will result in good care for your child. You know your child best, so let your parenting instincts be your guide.

Easing the Transition

Once you have selected a child care arrangement, prepare yourself and your child. Transitions can be difficult regardless of the age of your child. This can be an emotional experience for both of you. The first goodbyes can be difficult but caregivers are there to help smooth this transition.

Arranging several short visits before you leave your child all day may help ease your child into this new routine. Talk to your child about the new arrangement and what it will be like.

Listen to your child about their day care day! Be positive about this new arrangement. Provide your caregiver insight about your child's comfort items like bottle, pacifier, blanket, etc. and make sure they are available every day. Put a picture of your family in your child's backpack for reassurance. Do not prolong the goodbye process. Saying goodbye directly to your child and the provider and reassuring your child you will pick them up after work helps him to establish trust in the adults important to him.

A Child with Special Needs

The Americans with Disabilities Act assures that children with special needs will be considered for admission into child care programs. Your decision will be based on what is available in your community, how specialized your child's care may need to be, and what you think will work best for your child and you.

Does the Program Fit?

You may find that despite careful research and observation, the program you chose is not a good fit with your child. It may be hard to admit there are problems and that you'll need to reopen your search, but it is essential that both you and your child are happy with the program.

Stay Involved

Quality care for your child depends on both you and your caregiver. It is up to you to stay involved with the child care program and your child's progress. You have shared information about your child's personality, interests and temperament to give your provider a head start in developing a relationship with your child. Ask questions if there is something you do not understand. Ask your child what he did that day. Listen carefully to what your child has to say. If your child is too little to communicate verbally, pay attention to their cues. Spending a few minutes each day to talk to the provider about your child will keep you connected to the care he is receiving. Assure them that if she has any concerns that you are ready to listen and be open to talk about it. After all, she wants what is best for your child as well as you do. The provider will be working right alongside you to help nurture your child to grow to become happy, healthy and reach their potential.

Things Your Provider Should Expect From You:

OPEN COMMUNICATION: By keeping an open dialogue with the provider, the best interests of your child will remain a priority.

AGREEMENT ON TERMS: Understand fully the contracts and policies of your day care and know what you are



agreeing to. Now is the time for questions and answers about policies. See to it that your provider gets paid on time and that she has all the supplies she has requested you to bring. Pick up your child at the time you have agreed upon and call ahead if you are going to be late.

HONEST, TRUST AND RESPECT:

Trust yourself that you have chosen the best provider to give your child the care he deserves. Being honest and open will feed that trust. Respect the awesome and demanding responsibility your provider takes on every day. Know that the attachment your child makes to the provider does not diminish the love he has for you.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF CHANGES:

Sometimes things happen at the last minute of which we have no control. But providers deserve notice as quickly as possible if there is a change in your work hours, if you are planning time off or you are terminating the care.

DON'T SEND SICK KIDS: Providers are required to adhere to licensing standards concerning children who are too ill to come to day care. Colds and flu and other communicable diseases spread quickly in day care environments putting not only other children at risk but jeopardizing the health of the provider and their family as well.



Need Help Paying for Child Care?

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)

The State of Illinois offers child care assistance to families who are **income eligible**.

Child care assistance is determined by family size and income. To request an application or more information on eligibility guidelines contact:

West Central Child Care Connection

510 Maine St., Suite 610
Quincy, IL 62301
800-782-7318
217-222-2550

Hotline Information

Everyone is alarmed by reports of child abuse in child care programs. Concern about abuse can make some parents feel anxious about using child care at all. Be reassured that child care providers are caring and dedicated people who want your child to be safe and secure.

If you suspect or know of any incident of child abuse, call the 24-hour child abuse hotline:

1-800-25ABUSE

West Central Child Care Connection is a referral service only. We do not endorse or recommend any child care provider or center. A listing with our agency is not a guarantee of the quality of the program.

DCFS is the agency that investigates complaints about providers. They operate a day care information line that provides parents with licensing compliance information about licensed programs. The Day Care Information Line's number is 1-877-746-0829 or <http://sunshine.dcfs.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/Daycare/Search.aspx>

Love Kids?

Want to be Your Own Boss?

Consider child care in your home. West Central Child Care Connection has the tools and resources to help you get your business up and running. Explore the benefits of Family Child Care today.

Is it Right for You?

- Becoming a child care provider allows you to earn an income while enjoying the benefits of working from home.
- You can play a critical role in the development of young children.
- Families in every community are looking for quality child care.
- West Central Child Care Connection can help you get started and refer your business to families needing care.

Go to wccccc.com/starthere to learn more. Call our office today and request an orientation booklet.



West Central Child Care Connection
510 Maine St., Suite 610, Quincy, IL 62301
www.wccccc.com



West Central Child Care Connection (WCCCC) is a resource and referral agency dedicated to supporting children, families, and the child care community by promoting options in accessibility, affordability, and quality care. As part of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, WCCCC provides services to parents and providers in the counties of: Adams, Brown, Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Hancock, Jersey, Pike and Schuyler.

West Central Child Care Connection

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Office hours are
Monday through Friday,
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