

Parent Tip Sheet



Finding child care can be a difficult task, whether you are a new parent, have recently moved to a new area, or looking for a new provider. A safe and nurturing early learning environment allows children to get ready for school and parents to focus on their job or education. The good news is that there are resources available to help you find and choose a child care program.

Start with licensed care. While not a marker of quality, licensing standards set minimum health, safety and program standards for the legal operation of child care programs. Ask to see a copy of your provider's state license. Many states make licensing information and inspections reports available online.

Quality matters. Licensed child care providers can choose to go above and beyond licensing standards in order to increase the quality of their care. Participating in a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) or pursuing a national accreditation are ways that child care programs can show their commitment to offering quality child care.

Child care is often a major expense in a family's budget. Visit our web page on Budgeting for Child Care to access tools to help you budget for child care costs.

Need help paying for quality child care? Check out the following resources:

- **Child care subsidies or vouchers:** States, tribes, and territories receive federal funds to help low-income families pay for child care; eligibility requirements vary depending on where you live. Find contact information and the website for your state's program on our State by State Resource Map (click on your state, then choose the Financial Assistance tab).
- **Head Start or Early Head Start:** These programs help prepare children for school and provide other health and wellness services to children and their families. Head Start serves 3- to 5-year-olds; Early Head Start serves children from birth to 2 years old. Funds are also available for American Indian and Alaska Native children. Use the Head Start Locator to find sites near you.
- **State pre-K:** Many states offer state funded pre-K programs, though eligibility and fees vary from state to state. Ask your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R) if this is available where you live.
- **Military Fee Assistance Programs:** If you or your spouse are active in the military, you may be eligible for military child care assistance. Each branch's program is different—visit the Military Fee Assistance website for more information.
- **Tax credits:** Check with a tax preparer to see if you are eligible for the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, or other state or federal tax credits.
- **Employer or School Programs:** Ask your employer or school if they have any programs to help pay for child care.



Consider the following **four steps** to choosing quality child care:

1. **Get a Child Care List.** Your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R) can give you referrals for licensed child care programs that meet your needs. They will talk to you about the different types of child care providers in your area, ask you questions about you and your child, and create a list of child care providers for you to contact based on your child care needs.
2. **Do Your Homework.** Check out the provider before you call or visit. Look for or ask about the following information to see what standards a child care provider is following:
 - a. Licensing report and health and safety inspections – visit our State by State Resource Map to find out how to access licensing and inspection information in your state.
 - b. Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) – our map can also tell you whether your state offers a quality rating system for child care.
 - c. National accreditation information – ask your local CCR&R if any of the programs on your referral list are nationally accredited. This means that the program has chosen to follow higher standards to increase the quality of their care.
3. **Call Providers.** Call the providers you wish to visit and make an appointment. Ask prescreening questions over the phone to make sure you are visiting providers that meet your needs.
4. **Take the Tour.** Write down questions you want to ask and use our checklists to help you make the right choice for your family. Ask the child care provider for references, and ask questions about the other families' experiences with the program.