

# Putting the Pieces Together . . .



# . . . Solving The Child Care Puzzle



America's most trusted child care resource.

1-800-424-2246

[ChildCareAware.org](http://ChildCareAware.org)



Looking for child care for the first time can be an unfamiliar experience that raises many questions. These questions can leave you wondering, *“Will I be able to find care for my child(ren)? Where do I start?”*

Together with local Child Care Resource & Referral agencies, Child Care Aware® helps parents become informed consumers of child care. One way we do this is by answering your child care questions. This publication starts at the beginning. We introduce you to child care topics you may come across as you begin your search.

***Let's get started . . .***

## What types of child care are there?

Not all child care programs are the same. Different families have different needs. Below you will find various descriptions of child care programs. Your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R) will work with you to determine what programs are available in your area.

- ✦ **Child Care Center:** A nonresidential program, often with children separated by classrooms or age groups. Child care centers have program directors, lead teachers and assistant teachers, and additional staff. Child care centers are likely to offer children a structured curriculum.
- ✦ **Family Child Care Home:** Child care offered in a provider's home. You see more mixed ages in a Family Child Care setting. Staff includes the provider/owner and maybe one or two additional staff. Family Child Care providers may or may not offer a structured curriculum.
- ✦ **Preschool/Pre-K/Pre-Kindergarten:** An early education program for children ages 3-5. Preschool programs offer curriculum to help your child prepare for school. Some child care programs may refer to the 3-5 year old classroom as the Pre-K classroom.
  - **Part-Day Preschool:** A program 2-3 hours a day, for 3-5 days a week. These programs focus on early education and school readiness. With a part-day preschool program, you may need to look for additional child care options to accommodate your work schedule and the schedule of the program. These programs may be available to all families.
  - **State-Funded Pre-Kindergarten Programs:** Programs targeting children ages 3-5, focusing on early education and school readiness. Some states offer these programs at either a low or no cost to eligible families. Programs may be part-day or a full school day. With a state-funded pre-kindergarten program, you may need to look for additional child care options to accommodate your work schedule and the schedule of the program.

*\*It is always important to clarify what a particular program means when someone refers to "Pre-K".*

- ✦ **Head Start Programs:** Child development programs funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



- ✦ These comprehensive programs offer an educational setting, health and nutrition information, and various parent involvement opportunities. Head Start programs typically have income eligibility guidelines.
- ✦ **Inclusive Child Care:** Programs that offer child care services to families of children with special needs. These programs strive to keep all children in a common environment or classroom. Inclusive programs eliminate the separation of typically developing children and children with special needs.

## What age group is your child in?

In different child care settings, the age of your child may determine what classroom or group he is in. It may also affect the amount you pay for child care. It is good to familiarize yourself with these age classifications.

- ✦ **Infants:** Birth to age 12-18 months (may vary by setting)
- ✦ **Toddlers:** 12-18 months to 36 months
- ✦ **Preschoolers:** 3 to 5 years old
- ✦ **School-age:** 5 to 12 years old

## What help is available to pay for child care?

At times, you may find yourself looking for help with your child care payments. Financial assistance options vary by location, but here are some examples that may be available to you.

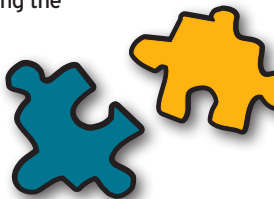
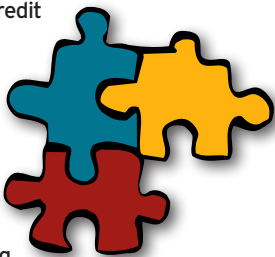
- ✦ **State Programs:** Federally funded financial assistance programs, or subsidy programs, that pay a portion of an eligible family's child care fees. These programs are offered by state agencies and distributed through state or local programs. Income eligibility requirements vary by state.
- ✦ **Local Programs:** In some areas, there may be local programs available to your family that will assist with your child care costs. Programs may be offered through local governments, nonprofit agencies or service organizations.
- ✦ **Employer Programs:** Some employers may offer child care assistance through Dependent Care Assistance accounts or other Employee Assistance Programs.
- ✦ **Provider-Specific Programs:** Child care programs may offer financial assistance for families. Incentives to ask a prospective provider about include sliding fee scales, scholarships or sibling discounts.
- ✦ **Tax Credits:** There are various tax credits your family might be eligible for if you have qualifying children. Visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for specific information.
  - Earned Income Tax Credit
  - Child Tax Credit

- Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit
- State Tax Credits

## Why is screening important?

When you return to work or school, you want to know that you have selected the most suitable child care environment for your child. By screening prospective child care programs, you will have done your homework and made an informed child care choice.

- ✦ **Interview:** Visit with prospective child care providers and/or center directors and teachers. Get to know a little bit more about who will be caring for your child.
- ✦ **On-Site Visit:** Be sure to visit the child care program. You may visit more than once. You might want to visit one-on-one with the provider. You will also want to visit with the children present. You will be able to observe caregiver and child interactions.
- ✦ **Training:** Learn about the training prospective providers have gone through to become a caregiver. Also ask about ongoing training opportunities.
- ✦ **Background Checks:** Check with both child care centers and family child care providers regarding the completion of background checks on all individuals/staff that will have contact with your child.
- ✦ **References:** Speak to other families, both past and current, about their experiences in the program.



## Who regulates child care?

Child care regulations vary from state to state. Each state has an agency that monitors child care providers to make sure that they meet the state standards. In addition, centers and family child care providers can choose to participate in programs to increase the quality of their care.

- ✦ **Licensed:** States have regulations in place for licensing child care centers and family child care homes. It is important that you check to see what the regulations are in your state. Your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency will be able to assist you with this information.



- ✦ **License-Exempt:** In some states, certain types of programs are not required to be licensed. These programs may include family child care homes with a small number of children, religious-based child care programs and programs offered in public schools.
- ✦ **Accreditation:** A voluntary program requiring child care providers to meet specific nationally recognized performance standards. These standards generally exceed state licensing requirements. Some accrediting organizations include:
  - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
  - National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs (NAC) [www.earlylearningleaders.org](http://www.earlylearningleaders.org)
  - National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA) [www.necpa.net](http://www.necpa.net)
  - National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)
  - Council on Accreditation (COA) [www.coanet.org](http://www.coanet.org)
- ✦ **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS):** Statewide or local programs created to evaluate, improve, and communicate the quality of child care programs. QRIS uses set standards to rate child care providers.

Now that you are prepared to begin your search for child care, keep in mind the choices you make will impact your child's future. Your child care provider will work with you as your child's nurturer, educator and cheerleader when you are not there to care for your child. Maintaining a solid, consistent, long-term relationship will positively impact your child's early experiences and preparation for school.



## What are you looking for?

There are many terms associated with full- or part-time care of your child. Most commonly, you might hear “child care” or “day care.”

- ✦ **Child Care, Day Care, Early Care and Education Programs:** Regular care and supervision of your child(ren), typically between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. These programs offer safe, structured learning environments that help prepare your child for school.
- ✦ **Babysitter:** Care offered on an as-needed basis through a friend, neighbor or young adult in your area. You may look for a babysitter when you need to run an errand in the evening or on the weekend.

## When do you need child care?

Families' schedules vary. You know best when you will need child care to accommodate everyone's schedule.

- ✦ **Traditional Hours:** Traditional hours include the 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work day, with time allotted for pick-up and drop-off. Generally a child care program offering care during traditional hours might be open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- ✦ **Nontraditional Hours:** This type of care may be more appealing to shift workers and families needing child care in the evenings and on the weekends. Nontraditional hours may include overnight or after-hours care.
- ✦ **Irregular Duty:** Families needing care for irregular duty may need a child care provider who can accommodate their nontraditional work schedule. Examples of irregular duty may include a rotating schedule with four days on shift, four days off shift.

---

### Additional Child Care Aware® publications to assist in your child care search include:

*Give Your Child Something That Will Last a Lifetime . . . Quality Child Care*

*Choosing Child Care for a Child with Special Needs*

*Selecting a Quality School-Age Program for Your Child*

*Five Steps to Choosing Safe and Healthy Child Care*

*Finding Help Paying for Child Care*

*Learning to Read & Write Begins at Birth - A Guide to Early Literacy in Child Care*

*Working Together for Kindergarten Success - Making the Transition from Child Care to Kindergarten*

For more information or to request one of these publications visit [www.ChildCareAware.org](http://www.ChildCareAware.org) or call toll free 1-800-424-2246.

Child Care Aware® is committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. In partnership with Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&R), Child Care Aware® builds consumer awareness and supports families in making choices for the care and education of their children.



America's most trusted child care resource.

For additional resources or help finding your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R), call:

**1-800-424-2246**

**TTY Line: 1-866-278-9428**

**ChildCareAware.org**

For local information contact:



Child Care Aware®, a program of Child Care Aware® of America, is partly funded by the Office of Child Care (OCC), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.