



## Child Care Aware of Washington Can Help You with Your Child Care Decisions

Child Care Aware of Washington is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to helping families find safe, affordable, high-quality child care. We also help child care providers improve their quality.

### Licensed Child Care in Washington State

#### What Types of Care are Licensed?

Washington has a licensing system to set basic standards in child care. This licensing system applies to two types of care – child care centers and family child care homes. Part-day pre-school programs, nanny and babysitting services in a child's home, care provided by relatives, community recreation programs and informal parent cooperatives and playgroups are not regulated by the state.

#### Child Care Centers

Child care centers offer full or part-time care. Children are grouped with others the same age and participate in age-appropriate activities. Smaller centers may have mixed-age groups for parts of the day.

*Advantages* – Child care centers tend to provide a dependable, year round service, offering opportunities for children to interact with others their own age and a regular process for staying in touch with parents.

*Disadvantages* – Child care centers are usually less able to meet the needs of parents with late, early or fluctuating work schedules. Sometimes a center's large groups or staff turnover can pose difficulties for children and families.

#### Learn more online about:

- the different kinds of child care
- facts about Washington State child care regulations
- what to look for in quality child care
- a checklist to help you when you visit a potential child care
- sources of financial assistance
- other resources for families

<http://wa.childcareaware.org/families>



## Family Child Care Homes

Family child care homes offer full or part-time care in a person's home. Children are in mixed-age groups.

*Advantages* – Family child care homes may be desirable for some families because they give children a smaller group setting and the chance to form a close bond with the caregiver. This option also may be more flexible for families who work part-time or nonstandard hours and it may cost less. Additionally, siblings of different ages can stay together during the day, instead of being separated into different age groups in center-based care.

*Disadvantages* – Back-up care will be needed when the provider is ill or on vacation and the program may close if a provider's personal situation changes. Parents and providers need to be able to communicate and work closely together. Conflict can arise, especially if child-rearing values and styles differ.

## Five Steps to Finding Quality Child Care

1

### Start early and think about your family's needs and values

Give yourself as much time as possible to find the best situation for your child. Think about your needs. Do you want child care close to work or home? Do you need full-time or part-time care? Does your child have special care needs? What is most important to you about a child care setting?

2

### Connect with Child Care Aware – [www.childcareawarewa.org](http://www.childcareawarewa.org) 1-800-446-1114

The experts in the Child Care Aware of Washington Family Center can help you understand different types of child care and what to consider when trying to find a program suitable for your family. We can provide referrals to specific programs, information about financial assistance and ways for you to identify quality child care (see Elements of Quality Care, below).

3

### Call, visit and ask questions

Begin calling potential providers. Ask about openings, hours, the enrollment process and fees, weekly/monthly costs and whether subsidies are accepted. Find out what the program is doing to maintain and increase quality. If a child care seems like it could work for you, make an appointment to visit, even if it's a virtual visit. Spend time talking to the provider, observe activities and interactions and imagine your child in the environment. Use our Checklist to help measure the program's quality and decide whether it will work for your family.

4

### Make a choice

Choose the program that best meets your family's needs. It may be necessary to have alternates if your first choice falls through.

5

### Stay involved

The key to ensuring quality child care is to stay involved. Have parent-caregiver meetings regularly. Get to know other families. Be there for your child's birthday and, when you can, take part in field trips and other special events. Keep as close to agreed-upon drop-off and pick-up times as possible. Ask your child what he or she does during the day. Spend a few minutes each day talking to the caregiver about your child. Show your appreciation and ask questions.



## Working with us at Child Care Aware of Washington

The Child Care Aware of Washington Family Center is available Mon - Fri at 1-800-446-1114 and online at [www.wa.childcareaware.org](http://www.wa.childcareaware.org). We offer free information and referrals for families seeking child care. Your conversations with us will be kept confidential. We provide referrals only, not recommendations. The information we offer is self-reported by child care programs. It is up to you to decide whether a program is a good fit. You may need to visit several providers to determine which is best for your family.



## Washington State Child Care Licensing Regulations

### How Providers Become Licensed

Staff in licensed child care centers and family child care homes must pass a criminal background check, attend initial and ongoing training and pass health and safety inspections.

### Staff/Child Ratio Requirements

The number of children who can be cared for by one adult is limited by licensing regulations. Before choosing a program, ask to see the license and observe for yourself that the number of children does not exceed the number allowed.

### Child Care Center Staff/Child Ratios and Group Size

Age of Children	Staff/Child Ratio	Group Size
1 to 11 months (Infant)	1 to 4	8
12 to 29 months (Toddler)	1 to 7	14
30 months to 5 years (Preschool)	1 to 10	20
5 years and older (School-age)	1 to 15	30

### Family Child Care Home Staff/Child Ratios and Group Size

Rules for family child care homes differ from those of child care centers and do not fit easily in a small chart. If there are any children who are not yet walking, the number of children per adult should be six or fewer. If all children are walking and age two or older, two staff can care for up to twelve children. The group size will be smaller if there are up to four children not walking. For more information or if you have concerns, contact the Child Care Aware of Washington Family Center or the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Details of the State Licensing rules are at: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/licensed-provider>.

### Provider History

A provider's license must be in good standing in order for Child Care Aware of Washington to provide a referral (this means there are no current investigations of a serious enough nature to prevent referrals). Before you select a provider, we recommend that you view the provider's licensing record online by visiting Child Care Check at <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/child-care-check> to check if there are any new complaints and to review the complete licensing and complaint history.

### Complaints

If you have a complaint or see licensing violations, discuss your concerns with the caregiver or center director. If this doesn't resolve the situation and you suspect child abuse or neglect in a licensed child care facility, call 1-866-END-HARM (1-866-363-4276) to report your concerns.



## Elements of Quality Care

### Health and Safety

Attention to health and safety is critical to high-quality care. The facility should look organized, safe and clean. Teachers should be alert to cleanliness and safety at all times.

### Learning Environment and Group Size/Ratio

Nurturing environments meet each child's needs and support the development of the whole child. The group size and number of children per caregiver can affect your child's ability to grow and learn. Often the smaller the group size, the better.

### Quality Improvement

Being accredited and/or participating in the state's quality improvement system Early Achievers <http://wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers>, shows that a program meets higher standards for child care than licensing requirements. Common accrediting organizations include the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC).

### Family Relationships and Participation

Participating in your child care program sends the message that you are interested in what your child is doing and learning. Providers should have an open-door policy, make meaningful efforts to engage all families and embrace diversity.

### Staff Professionalism, Training and Turnover

It is important that adults who care for children have the knowledge and experience to meet children's needs and to value the cultural, ethnic, religious and lifestyle diversity of families. Early childhood education, training, experience and low staff turnover often go along with higher quality care and successful relationships with diverse groups of children.

## Paying for Child Care

### Costs

Child care rates vary by region. Information about average rates in your area is available from Child Care Aware of Washington. Some providers offer a multi-child discount or a sliding scale based on income. When you interview providers, have a discussion about what you can or cannot afford and request written information about costs. Licensed providers are required to have a Parent Handbook with information on fees, deposits, hours, vacations, meals, etc.

### Financial Assistance

Many families use Working Connections Child Care Subsidies to help pay for child care. To find out if you qualify call 1-800-692-4089 or go to [www.dshs.wa.gov](http://www.dshs.wa.gov). Also, there are military programs, tribal child care funds, federal child care tax credits, and other forms of assistance that may help. For more information about some of the financial assistance programs available, visit us online at <http://wa.childcareaware.org/families/family-resources-1/need-help-paying-for-child-care>



# Child Care Quality Checklist

## COVID-19 Infection Prevention Strategies

- ☐ Is the program actively working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by practicing physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing and extra sanitizing?
- ☐ Are drop-offs and pick-ups handled in ways that minimize multiple family interactions and reduce the need for family members to enter the facility?
- ☐ Are health checks conducted for each child before entry to the program?

## Group Size/Ratio and Learning Environment

- ☐ Are there enough adults to care for your child? (See ratios and group sizes, p.3.)
- ☐ Are the activities appropriate for my child's age and interest?
- ☐ What is the typical daily schedule?
- ☐ Do the teacher's interactions encourage children to learn? Are the activities engaging?
- ☐ Do the children watch TV, DVDs or videos? If so, how frequently?
- ☐ Do the children have plenty of active outdoor play time each day? Do they go on field trips?
- ☐ Does the program reflect the cultural, ethnic, religious and lifestyle diversity of the families within the community?
- ☐ Does the staff encourage language, social and problem-solving skills when talking with children?
- ☐ Are you comfortable with the way the provider disciplines and resolves conflicts between children?

## Staff Professionalism, Training and Turnover

- ☐ What experience and education do the staff/caregivers have? Do they have their AA, BA, or MA in Early Child Education?
- ☐ How long has the staff worked at the center/home? Do staff/caregivers stay long enough to create a stable environment for children?
- ☐ What do you notice in conversations with the staff/caregiver that shows you they respect and value the cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic and lifestyle diversity of the families?

## Health and Safety

- ☐ Are meals and snacks scheduled at appropriate times and do they include a variety of nutritious foods?
- ☐ Are the emergency phone numbers clearly posted? Do they have a natural disaster plan?
- ☐ Is the center/home clean and free of clutter? Does the equipment appear to be safe and in good repair?

- ☐ Are fire drills held regularly and recorded? Are any fire exits blocked? Is the fire escape plan posted?
- ☐ Is the outdoor play area safe and fenced?
- ☐ What are the security measures surrounding drop off and pick-up times? How are strangers excluded?
- ☐ Is transportation provided to school or field trips? What safety measures are followed?

## Family Relationships and Participation

- ☐ Does the program accept different subsidy payments? Are all families, regardless of economic background, welcomed?
- ☐ Is the toilet training approach compatible with yours?
- ☐ Do staff provide developmental screenings for children and track their progress?
- ☐ Does the program prepare children for new transitions such as Kindergarten or a new classroom? Do they include families in the process?
- ☐ Does the program have ways to ask for your feedback on your child's experience?
- ☐ Is it explained that, legally, you can have free access to your child while they are in care?
- ☐ Does the program have a Parent Handbook? This is required for state licensing and should include: admission/enrollment procedures, hours, rates, meals and snacks, disciplinary philosophy, medical and emergency procedures, absence, illness and vacation policies.

## Quality Improvement

- ☐ Is the program participating in quality improvement efforts such as the Early Achievers program? It is free to both providers and parents and supports the quality improvement efforts of providers while providing parents with an easy-to-understand rating system on child care quality. Find more details at <http://wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers>.
- ☐ Is the center or home nationally accredited?

## Licensing, Complaints and References

- ☐ Before selecting a program, find out about its complaint history by visiting <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/child-care-check>
- ☐ Ask to see the provider's license and Investigative Reports for the past three years.
- ☐ Ask for references of other families who have used the provider and call them to learn about their experiences.