

Choosing Child Care

What's Best
For
You & Your Child

Funded by
Delaware Department of Health and Social Services

This booklet is designed to help parents choose child care. It can help you:

- learn about your choices,
- pick a program, and
- monitor how well it suits your needs.

It can seem hard to choose child care. But there is a lot of help available and parents do succeed. Finding child care that is best for you and your child may take a good deal of time. You will need to make phone calls and visits and then make choices among programs. Many sources of help are listed in a box in this brochure.

What types of Child Care Will I Find?

Most child care programs in Delaware are required by state law to be licensed. Licensed programs must meet minimum standards for the children's health, safety and well being, and they must allow parents to visit at any time. The programs are checked from time to time by the state to help find out if children are in a safe and healthy place. You can also hire someone to come into your own home to provide child care; no license is required. Licensed child care programs provide care, education, protection, supervision and guidance in the following types of settings:

- **Family Child Care Homes** are private homes with one professional provider who cares for between one and six children. Family Child Care Homes are licensed to care for up to six children. A Family Child Care Home is inspected soon after it gets a license, and some homes are inspected during the year to make sure they meet state requirements. The provider must certify in writing that the home meets regulations concerning the health and safety of children. The provider must give parents a copy of regulations that apply to licensed Family Child Care Homes.
- **Large Family Child Care Homes** offer care in a private home or a non-residential setting. Large Family Child Care Homes are licensed to care for between seven and twelve children with two professional providers.
- **Child Care Centers** serve 13 or more children in a non-residential setting. These programs must be licensed. The number of professional providers depends on how many children are enrolled in the program and their ages.
- **Head Start Programs** enroll three and four year old children from low income families. The Federal Government sets standards for services that must be offered including learning activities, parent involvement, health care, and services for children with special needs.
- **School Age Care Programs** are available to children before and after school hours, on holidays and in the summer. Although licensing is not required, many providers of School Age Care are licensed.

What If My Child Has Special Medical, Physical or Developmental Needs?

Child care is available for children with special needs. There are many providers who offer quality care for children. You can get more information by calling the numbers in the box.

How Do I Find Child Care?

Finding child care can be challenging. Many parents get information from other parents, their employers or community agencies. You can get a list of child care providers near your home or workplace by calling the agencies listed in the box.

Important Numbers For Help

To Find Child Care

Family and Workplace Connection (no fee)	1-800-660-6602 or 479-1660
Partnership Group (\$40 fee)	1-800-847-5437

For Subsidized Child Care

Northeast Service Center	577-3233
Fourth Street DSS Office	577-3632
Hudson Service Center	368-6774
Loockerman Street DSS Office	739-6920
Georgetown State Service Center	856-5469

For Head Start

Wilmington Head Start	762-8038
New Castle Head Start	452-1500
Kent County Head Start	739-4730
Seaford Head Start	629-7904
Sussex County Head Start	856-7761

For School Age Child Care

Family and Workplace Connection	1-800-660-6602 or 479-7761
---------------------------------	-------------------------------

To make a complaint

Office of Child Care Licensing, Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families	739-5487 or 1-800-822-2236
--	-------------------------------

- For instructions on filing a complaint <http://www.state.de.us/kids/occlcmpt.htm>

How Do I Choose a Child Care Program?

When you have found several child care providers that you want to know more about, make a list of those providers. Then make a list of the questions you want to ask them. You can then telephone the providers and ask the questions on your list. This will help you to decide which providers to visit.

Some questions to ask over the phone:

- Are you licensed?
- What kind of program do you have? What is a typical day like?
- Do you have an "open door" policy? When am I allowed to visit my child?
- What are your days and hours? Do I need to bring and pick up my child at the same time every day? What holidays do you take?
- What does it cost? Do I need to pay daily or weekly? What is included? Diapers, other supplies?
- Do you serve meals or do I have to pack a lunch?
- What is the size of your program? How many other children do you have and what are their ages?
- What kind of space is there? Is there an outside play area?
- What kind of training or education in child development do you and the other providers have?

Visiting Child Care Programs

Your phone calls will help you to narrow your choices. When you have selected two or three programs that may be suitable for your child, you should call to arrange a visit. A visit is the best way of getting "first hand" information about the program, the provider, and other children.

Here are some questions to think about during your visit:

- Is the facility clean and cheerful? Is the license posted?
- Are the children happy and involved in positive activities?
- How does the provider manage behavior? Is the provider warm, loving and gentle with children?
- Is the facility safe? Are the electrical outlets covered? Are any dangerous objects available to children? Check for safe toys.
- Is there room for indoor and outdoor play? Are there enough cribs or spaces for naps?

Provider and Parent Responsibilities

The child care provider you choose has responsibilities to you; you also have responsibilities to your provider. Taking these responsibilities seriously is important to the relationship between the child, the parent and the provider.

Provider Responsibilities

Your child care provider is responsible for:

- making you feel welcome to see your child at any time

- giving you information on how your child spends the day
- answering your questions and talking openly about your concerns
- keeping the environment safe and healthy for your child
- telling you about any changes in activities, staffing, or hours
- giving you information about how emergencies are handled, including how you will be notified and which hospitals will be used.

Parent Responsibilities

Parents also have responsibilities for making child care arrangements work well. You should not ask that a provider do anything that will violate their licensing agreement. Remember that providers must consider the well being of all children in their care. For example:

- do not bring a sick child to child care
- do not bring extra children to child care
- try not to be late to drop your child off or pick your child up
- pay the provider on schedule
- talk to your provider about your concerns
- always leave emergency phone numbers.

Monitoring Your Child's Care

Monitoring your child's care means that you should visit the program regularly to make sure that your child is safe, happy, and involved in positive activities. It is your responsibility to make sure the setting is right for your child and meets your needs.

Monitoring also means listening to your child. Even very young children can tell you about their fears. If your child tells you something that concerns you about the type of care they are receiving, talk to the provider. Providers need to know your needs, expectations and concerns. If, after discussion, you are not satisfied, you can change providers. It's not unusual for parents to change providers, but it is best to do this only after you have tried to solve problems and could not.

If you have a specific concern because your provider is not following requirements, *and it has not been corrected* after you have talked about it with your provider, you can call the numbers listed under "To Make a Complaint" in the box.

How Can I Afford Child Care?

Child care can be expensive, but there may be help in paying these costs. Ask about discounts for more than one child, scholarships, and sliding fee scales.

Subsidized Care

If you qualify for Subsidized Care because your income is low, you may choose to use a provider under contract with the Division of Social Services (DSS) or you may choose to receive a certificate to

help pay for child care. A certificate allows you to arrange for care with providers who agree to follow the rules of the program but who are not under contract with DSS.

DSS will also give you a booklet to help you choose your provider. It includes information about types of child care, licensing, and health and safety requirements. It will also tell you about other things to look for in a program and give you information on your rights, such as being able to see your child at any time. After you select a provider, you will visit with a DSS child care worker who will explain the subsidy program in more detail and authorize child care services.

Earned Income Credit and Dependent and Child Care Tax Credit

Most working families can get tax credits on their state and federal income tax returns for child care costs. For the Earned Income Credit and Child and Dependent Care Credit, call **1-800-TAX-1040** toll free or contact the Wilmington IRS Office at 573-6270 for information about the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) clinic. For information about Delaware child care tax credits, call 577-3300.

Because we believe that Delaware's children and families are the fundamental building blocks of our communities; it is our goal to do all we can to provide the assistance required for their success in today's society. We hope that the information in this booklet will help parents choose the child care that is best for their family.

Carmen R. Nazario

Secretary

Department of Health and Social Services

One of the primary goals of my Administration is to strengthen Delaware's families. This child care brochure gives each parent the facts needed to find access to quality care.

Thomas R. Carper

Governor

Delaware Department of
Health and Social Services
P.O.Box 906
New Castle, Delaware 19720-0906
(302) 577-4450