

# A Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care



## Congratulations!

You have already taken the first step to begin your child care search by contacting Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R). We give information about:

- Child care options that may meet your needs.
- Requirements providers must meet.
- Licensing and registration laws.
- Choosing the provider that is best for you.
- Referrals to other community programs that may meet your needs.

The information you share with CCR&R is confidential. There is no cost for our referral service. The names provided are referrals only. We cannot promise the information is correct. We cannot suggest any provider. We cannot assure you that any provider gives quality care.

## Disclaimer

Child Care Resource & Referral does not monitor the programs we refer. The programs self-report the majority of the information we collect. Examples of information we are able to verify include:

- Registration and Licensing status.
- Provider's rating in the Iowa Quality Rating System (QRS).
- Participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- ChildNet certification.



## Starting the Process

You are the expert when it comes to deciding what is best for you and your child. It is okay to be choosy. Trust your instincts to help you decide what is best for your family.



- Use this book to make a list of questions you want to ask (see page 14).
- Call providers to determine if they meet your basic needs.
- Schedule a visit to tour and ask questions.
- Observe the provider and their interaction with the children.
- Ask for names of other parents who took their child there. Contact them to ask about their experiences.
- Interview several providers for comparison.

Review the information and call Child Care Resource and Referral back if you have questions. If you are not comfortable with the child care setting, keep looking. If you find a provider you like whose program is full, ask if they will put your name on a waiting list. If you need more options, call your CCR&R again.

Talk positively with your child about the new child care arrangement. Take your child to visit the provider before the first day. Ask the provider if your child can bring a favorite toy, teddy bear or blanket. This may help ease the transition.

## Your Responsibility

Programs need to keep records on file. Before the first day, give your provider:

- Records of physical exams, medical history and shots.
- Telephone numbers of the child's doctor, dentist and medical insurance.
- Emergency numbers where the provider can reach you.
- A list of people who can pick up your child.

After enrolling your child:

- Call if you are going to be late.
- Give notice and follow your provider's policy if your child will not attend for a period of time.
- Follow your provider's policies for ill children.
- Provide items your child needs (diapers, spare change of clothes, etc.).
- Pay on time.

# Comparing the Different Types of Care

You can choose from four basic types of child care.

## Center Based Care

- May have a more structured program.
- If staff is sick, a substitute is available.
- Children of similar ages may be in one group.
- May have a larger number of children in one group.
- Siblings of different ages are in separate groups.
- Children may have more than one caregiver during the day.

## Home Based Care

- Hours may be more flexible and may offer evening or weekend care.
- Siblings are in the same group.
- Small group size and ages of children in the group vary.
- Child may have the same provider throughout their childhood.
- Rates may be less.

## Preschools

- Part-time programs for children three to five years of age.
- May serve children for shorter periods of time or fewer days of the week.
- Usually only open during the school year.

## School Age Programs

- Care for school-age children.
- May be open only before and after school.
- May be open all day in the summer or during school breaks.



## Department of Human Services

### Background checks and inspections

Type of Care	Background Checks <sup>1</sup>	Inspections <sup>2</sup>
Licensed centers and preschools	All licensed center and preschool staff 16 or older that have contact with a child have had an Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check. Those over 18 years have had fingerprinting.	Before receiving or renewing a license, one announced and at least one unannounced visit each year. May have a provisional license to give them time to meet regulations
Registered Child Development homes	An Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check on everyone 14 years or older that lives in the house. Those over 18 years have had fingerprinting.	Within the first year of registration, and each year afterward
Non-registered homes receiving Child Care Assistance payments	An Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check on everyone 14 years or older that lives in the house. Those over 18 years have had fingerprinting.	Only if Iowa Department of Human Services receives a complaint
Non-registered homes referred by CCR&R	An Iowa Abuse Registry record check on the provider	

Department of Education programs follow Department of Education standards for background checks and inspections.

- <sup>1</sup> Ask who else will be there when children are present. Guests, salespeople, etc. may have contact with a child, but will not have a background check. Provider or staff may have a criminal record and still work in child care, depending on what and when the crime was.
- <sup>2</sup> You can review licensed or registered inspection reports and complaints of programs at <http://dhs.iowa.gov/childcare>.

## Types of Care

Licensed Centers and Preschools					
Age of child	# of Adults	# of children	Age of child	# of Adults	# of children
0-24 months	1	4	4 years old	1	12
2 years old	1	6	5-10 years	1	15
3 years old	1	8	> 10 years	1	20
Child Care and Child Development Homes					
Type of Care		Birth-Preschool Capacity	Elementary Capacity	Additional Part-time Capacity	
<b>Registered Category A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be 18 years or older</li> <li>• Three reference letters</li> </ul>		6 children: Only 4 can be under 24 months, and of those 4, only 3 can be under 18 months.	2 children Care can only be for less than 2 hours at a time.	0 children	
<b>Registered Category B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 years or older</li> <li>• HS diploma/GED</li> <li>• 2 years of experience</li> </ul>		6 children: Only 4 can be under 24 months, and of those 4, only 3 can be under 18 months.	4 children	2 children	
Requires an assistant at least 14 years of age if providing care for more than 8 children					
<b>Registered Category C1 (one provider)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be 21 years or older</li> <li>• HS diploma/GED</li> <li>• 5 years of experience</li> </ul>		8 children Maximum of 8 children at any one time Of those 8, there is a maximum of 4 children under 24 months with no more than 3 children under 18 months.			
<b>Registered Category C (two providers)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be 18 years or older</li> <li>• HS diploma/GED</li> <li>• 5 years of experience</li> </ul>		12 children No more than 4 under the age of 2 years	2 children Care can only be for less than 2 hours at a time.	2 children	
* This category needs a co-provider that meets the requirements of a category B provider. The co-provider must be present when there are more than 8 children and/or when there are 4 infants under 18 months in attendance.					
Non-registered Must be 18 years or older		No more than 5 children at one time			0 children

# Training and Environmental Requirements

All child care programs should be safe, clean and free of cigarette smoke.

Type of Care	Training	Environment	Eligible to participate
Non-registered child care homes	Pediatric First Aid and CPR or Pediatric First Aid with rescue breathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicines and cleaners are locked up</li> <li>• Emergency plans</li> <li>• Materials that can catch on fire are kept at least 3 feet away from heat sources</li> <li>• Heating stoves and elements are blocked</li> <li>• Safety gates at stairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>• DHS Child Care Assistance Program</li> </ul>
Registered Category A Registered Category B Registered Category C1 Category C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pediatric First Aid and CPR or Pediatric First Aid with rescue breathing</li> <li>• Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter</li> <li>• 12 hours of approved training per registration year</li> </ul>	Everything above plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet area for sick children</li> <li>• Fire Extinguisher</li> <li>• Smoke detector in each child occupied room</li> <li>• Ample spaces for active and quiet play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>• DHS Child Care Assistance Program</li> <li>• Child and Adult Care Food Program</li> <li>• ChildNet certification</li> <li>• Quality Rating System</li> </ul>
Licensed Centers and Preschools	<p>All Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter</li> <li>• Universal Precautions</li> <li>• 4-10 hours per year</li> </ul> <p><i>Staff working at least 20 hours/week</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Aid and Infant, child &amp; adult CPR</li> </ul>	Everything above plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet area for sick children</li> <li>• A place for children to store their own things</li> <li>• Bathroom and diapering areas are safe and clean</li> <li>• Staff inspects outdoor play areas monthly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care Resource &amp; Referral</li> <li>• DHS Child Care Assistance Program</li> <li>• Child and Adult Care Food Program Quality Rating System</li> </ul>
Department of Education	Follows Department of Education standards	Follows Department of Education standards	

You can find all Iowa Department of Human Services licensing and registration requirements at [http://iowaccr.org/providers/licensing\\_requirements/](http://iowaccr.org/providers/licensing_requirements/).

# What to Look for in Finding Quality Child Care

There are many signs of quality care to guide you in your selection. Visit several programs to compare. Ask if they work with the CCR&R Child Care Consultants. Their free services are available to improve the quality of care.

## Health & Safety

- Parents always have access to their child.
- Staff supervises children at all times, even when the children sleep.
- Substitutes must be approved by the Iowa Department of Human Services.
- Program has written emergency procedures.
- All providers and children wash their hands often, especially before and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- They keep toxic substances like cleaning supplies and pest killers away from the children.
- Group sizes meet legal requirements.
- The staff put infants to sleep on their backs.
- Cribs are free of pillows, bumper pads, blankets and toys. Cribs meet Consumer Product Safety Commission requirements. For information, review the CPSC website at [www.cpsc.gov/en/Safety-Education/Safety-Guides/Kids-and-Babies/Cribs/](http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Safety-Education/Safety-Guides/Kids-and-Babies/Cribs/).
- Staff notifies parents if someone develops an infectious disease.
- One person on duty has certification in First Aid and CPR.
- The program participates in the Child Care and Adult Food Program (CACFP). If they do, your child will receive nutritious meals and snacks.
- The program has liability insurance that covers children in care.

## Interactions

- Provide a balance of time for play, stories, activity and rest.
- Have minimal use of television and other electronics.
- Plan activities for inside & outside.
- Provide time for free play.
- Have books, toys, blocks, and art supplies are available all day.
- Have books, pictures and toys that represent other cultures.
- Provide activities that enhance language skills.
- Infants and toddlers have opportunities to move about on their own.



## **Provider Education & Turnover**

A quality program has little staff turnover. This helps children learn to trust and have a chance to be with the same caregiver throughout their childhood.

## **Written Agreement**

A written agreement helps set the stage for open communication. It should explain what you can expect and what your responsibilities are. Review the contract and policies to make sure they cover all areas of concern.



## **Family Involvement**

- The caregiver should let you know about your child's day.
- Tell the provider about any changes at home that might affect your child.
- Make sure you can visit any time they are open.
- Staff should cooperate with you on efforts such as toilet learning.
- Program involves family members. They may have parent conferences, ask parents to provide materials or supplies and help on field trips.

## **Checking References**

Your provider should be able to give you the name and phone number of at least two parents who use or have used their services. Calling other parents can give you information you cannot get any other way.

### **Questions to ask the other parents:**

- How long has your child been in the home or center?
- How does your child feel about the provider?
- What do you like about the provider and the program?
- Is there anything you do not like?
- Is it easy to talk to the provider?
- Does the provider meet your child's individual needs?
- What kind of guidance or discipline does the provider use?
- How does the provider deal with problems or concerns?

# Quality Indicators

## Iowa's Quality Rating System (QRS)

The Quality Rating System guides programs to improve the quality of child care they provide. Programs do not have to participate. QRS is a five level rating system. Level five is the highest level a program can achieve. Training, experience and improvements to the child care setting determine their level. For further information, go to [www.dhs.state.ia.us/iqrs](http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/iqrs).

## ChildNet Certification

ChildNet is a series of twenty-five hours of training for home child care providers. Providers learn how to operate a successful child care business in their home.

To be certified, a home provider must:

- Complete all coursework.
- Be registered with the Iowa Department of Human Services.
- Participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
- Have the CCR&R Child Care Consultant complete an in-home checklist.
- To maintain certification, the provider must complete an in-home checklist every two years. They must also attend four hours of training each year plus their annual required hours.

## Accreditation

An accredited program meets national standards of quality. The main organizations that accredit programs are:

- Homes - The National Association of Family Child Care [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)
- Centers - The National Association for the Education of Young Children [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- School-age - The National Afterschool Association [www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)



# Family Resources

## Child Care Assistance (CCA)

This program helps some parents pay for child care so they can work and/or attend school. Contact the DHS Eligibility Unit at 866-448-4605 or apply online at [dhs.iowa.gov/child-care](https://dhs.iowa.gov/child-care). You can also ask your local CCR&R or provider about additional resources or scholarships.

## Child Development Screening

A child's brain develops the most in the first five years of their life. Knowing how children develop will help you tell when your child is ready to learn new things. To find out more, go to [www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org) and click on child development or call 1-888-425-4371.

## Early ACCESS

If you have questions or concerns about how your child plays, hears, sees, talks, eats or moves, go to [www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org) and click on Early Access or call 1-888-425-4371.

## Energy Assistance

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program helps people with lower incomes pay their heating bills. To find your county agency, call 515-281-0859 or go to [www.dcaa.iowa.gov/bureau\\_weath/how\\_apply.html](http://www.dcaa.iowa.gov/bureau_weath/how_apply.html).

## Family Investment Program (FIP)

FIP is Iowa's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program. This program provides cash assistance to families who have children. For more information, or how to apply, visit the website at <http://dhs.iowa.gov/cash-assistance>.

## Food Assistance (also known as SNAP)

The Food Assistance Program provides assistance to families to purchase healthy food. Call your local DHS office for information, call 877-937-3663 or go to <http://dhs.iowa.gov/food-assistance>.



### **hawk-i (Healthy And Well Kids in Iowa)**

The hawk-i program offers free or low-cost health care coverage for children who are uninsured and less than 19 years of age. For information call 800-257-8563 or go to [www.hawk-i.org](http://www.hawk-i.org).



### **IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) and IEP (Individual Education Plan)**

See Iowa Family Support Network

### **Iowa Family Support Network**

Family support programs provide information on parenting, child development and problem solving. For information, go to [www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org), email [iafamilysupportnetwork@vnsia.org](mailto:iafamilysupportnetwork@vnsia.org) or call 1-888-425-4371.

### **TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)**

See Family Investment Program (FIP)

### **Tax Credits**

When enrolling your child, ask for your provider's Federal Employer Identification Number (IRS Form W-10) or Social Security number for tax purposes.

- The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit. For more information call 800-829-1040 or go to [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Search for the EITC in the search box.
- The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit offsets some of the costs that families pay for child care. If you pay someone to care for your child while you work, you may be able to claim the credit.
- The Child Tax Credit helps families offset some of the costs of raising children. Even families who owe little to no income tax can receive at least some of this credit.

Consult with a tax preparer on these tax credits. For further information and a list of free tax preparation sites, call 800-TAX-1040 or go to [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

### **WIC (Women, Infants & Children)**

WIC serves pregnant and postpartum women and children under the age of five. This program provides nutritious foods, nutrition education and referrals to other health care agencies. Call 800-532-1579 or go to [www.idph.state.ia.us/wic/](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/wic/).

# Child Care Program Complaint Policies

## Personality Related Complaints

You should try to resolve the following with your provider.

- Provider's point of view about child care.
- Interaction with the children that is non-abusive but troubles you.
- Any other issue that causes you concern.

Child Care Resource & Referral can provide ideas that may help reach a solution.

## Non-Compliance Complaints

Contact Iowa Department of Human Services if you think a provider is not following regulations. Reasons to call include:

- Caring for too many children at one time
- Unsafe conditions
- Provider's style with the children seems threatening or harmful

For homes, call the DHS Child Development Home Registration Unit at 866-448-4605. For centers, contact the DHS licensing consultant. Iowa regulations require centers to post the name and contact information of the licensing consultant. If you are unable to locate the name and phone number, call 515-281-6832 to obtain the information.

## Child Abuse Complaints

If you think a provider or staff is abusing a child, call 800-362-2178. Information about a report of suspected abuse and neglect is confidential.

## Child Care Resource & Referral Complaint Policy

Call the CCR&R Regional Director if you have concerns with the referral process or your child care options. Find contact information at [www.iowaccrr.org](http://www.iowaccrr.org) or call the statewide phone number 877-216-8481.

## Confidentiality Policy

CCR&R keeps all parent and child records confidential. CCR&R handles information in compliance with State and Federal law. Individuals must give CCR&R written permission to reveal their name or any identifying factors.

## Thank you!

Thank you for contacting Child Care Resource & Referral for assistance in finding child care. If you have additional child care needs or questions, please call 1-877-216-8481.







877-216-8481  
[www.iowaccrr.org](http://www.iowaccrr.org)

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