“Who will take care of my children?”

A big question for anyone going back to work is, “Who will take care of my children?” Finding good child care takes time and thought. Parents need to think about the types of child care programs, what good child care is and which arrangement best meets their needs.

This guide provides information that can help parents and guardians find child care that meets their needs and is good for children’s learning and growth. The early years of life are very important for children’s future health and well-being. Finding good child care can help children to learn and grow and can also assist parents to have a clear mind at work because they know that their children are receiving safe and healthy care.

Licensing and types of child care

Some child care programs are licensed, others are not. What is child care licensing and why is licensing important? Any person planning to offer child care for more than four unrelated children needs to apply for licensure and meet the requirements before providing child care.

Why is licensing important?

Licensing guarantees that child care facilities meet health and safety standards. When a child care facility is licensed, families know that the Department of Health has agreed that the child care program is safe and healthy and that someone inspects the facility each year.
To learn more about licensing, call the Missouri Department of Health, Bureau of Child Care Licensing, at (573) 751-2450, and ask for the child care licensing information to be mailed to you.

Here are several types of child care programs that you may want to consider.

**Family child care homes**

A family child care home provides care in a home setting for 10 or fewer children. If more than four unrelated children are being cared for, the family child care must be licensed by the state and follow rules for safety and health, the number of children who are cared for by adults, and the training of caregivers. Family child care homes may have daytime and nighttime hours for when they take care of children.

**Group child care homes**

A group child care home provides care in a home setting, away from the provider’s own living space. Group homes are licensed to care for 11 but no more than 20 children and must follow rules for safety and health, the number of children who are cared for by adults, the number of children in a group, and the training of caregivers. Group child care homes may have daytime and nighttime hours for when they take care of children.

**Child care centers**

A center provides care for children in a building other than a home. Unless run by a church or operating as a part-time nursery school, centers are licensed; they must follow rules for safety and health, the number of children who are cared for by adults, the number of children in a group and the training of caregivers. Centers have set schedules for when they take care of children.

**Before- and after-school child care**

Children who are in school during the day often need child care before and after school. Before- and after-school care can be found at schools, at child care centers and at group or family child care homes.

**In your own home**

Some parents have their children cared for at home by a friend, a family member or a neighbor. These arrangements are not licensed. On page 5 of this guide, ideas are listed about how to make sure your children get safe, healthy and good care when they are taken care of at home.

**DFS-registered child care program**

If your family needs financial assistance from the Division of Family Services to pay for child care, you will need to find a DFS-registered child care program. If you select a child care program that is not licensed, the child care provider will first need to contact the local Division of Family Services and apply for DFS registration before caring for your children. This must be done first, so that the child care provider can receive direct payments from DFS for caring for your children. As with having a child care provider in your own home, use the ideas listed on page 5 of this guide to make sure your children get safe, healthy and good care when they are taken care of by an unlicensed, DFS-registered child care provider.

**What is good child care?**

Good child care programs provide a healthy and safe place for children to be social, to learn and to grow. Good child care depends on many things. The three most important are the number of caregivers who work with children, caregiver education and training, and the way that caregivers get along with children.

**Number of caregivers and children in the group**

**Family child care homes**

a. For one adult caregiver who is licensed to care for 10 children, a maximum of two children under 2 years of age.

b. For one adult caregiver who is licensed to care for six children, a maximum of three children under 2 years of age.

► If the family child care home is not licensed, Missouri law says that no more than four unrelated children can be in the child care program.

► If a DFS-registered family child care home is not licensed, Missouri law says that no more than four unrelated children can be in the child care program.

**Child care centers and group child care homes**

Children do best in small groups because it is easier to interact with each other and to get care and attention from caregivers. Missouri licensing rules regulate how many children can be with a caregiver and how big the group of children can be in a licensed child care program. The standards say:

a. For children birth through 2 years old: One adult with four children; groups no larger than two adults with eight children.

b. For children only 2 years old: One adult with eight children; groups no larger than two adults with 16 children.
c. For children 3 and 4 years old: One adult with 10 children.
d. For children 5 years and older: One adult with 16 children.
e. For groups of mixed-age children: For children 2 years and older, one adult with 10 children, and only four 2-year-olds present in the group. If there are more than four 2-year-olds, the group can have no more than eight children.

Caregiver education and behavior

Many people think that providing child care comes naturally, but teaching and caring for children in groups takes special skills. The best child care providers have education and training about children. Licensed caregivers in Missouri are required to have 12 hours of child care training every year.

Education and training are important because they teach caregivers how to help children learn and grow. Caregivers learn how to plan the day, provide nutritious foods and offer fun activities that children will like. Caregivers also learn how to get along with children and families in positive ways.

When you see a good caregiver interacting with children, you will see her/him:

• Smile at children a lot
• Talk in ways that children understand
• Show children a positive attitude
• Show children they care about them
• Take care of crying children
• Help children understand how they feel
• Answer children’s questions
• Encourage children to get along with each other
• Make the most of daily routines to help children learn
• Create moments for children to learn new things in a fun way
• Help children handle failure and learn ways to be successful
• The best caregivers know what children can do and understand what it is like to be a child.

Finding out about child care

To find out about child care programs in your area, call the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. They are located all over Missouri to help families find good child care programs. Use the worksheet below to write down some things about yourself and your children so that you are prepared when you call.

When you talk with the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, they will give you the name and phone number of at least three child care programs. Write the names and phone numbers on page 5 of this guide so that you have them when it is time to call.

Worksheet for finding and selecting good child care

Your name ________________________________________________________________________________________
Your address and county ________________________________________________________________________________
Your phone number(s) ________________________________________________________________________________
Your children’s names and ages ___________________________________________________________________________

Do you need a DFS-registered child care program? □ Yes □ No
Name and address of employer ________________________________________________________________

Hours of the day and/or night that you will need child care ____________________________________________________________________________________________

Do you need child care in a certain part of town? □ Yes □ No □ If Yes, what part of town? _____________________________

Which type(s) of child care interest you?
□ Family child care homes □ DFS-registered child care program
□ Group child care homes □ Care in your own home
□ Child care centers □ Interested in all types
□ Before- and after-school care
Contacting and visiting child care providers

When you call the child care providers, set up a time to go and visit.

The only way to know if a child care program is GOOD is to talk face-to-face with the person in charge, look carefully at the facility, and watch how the caregivers interact with the children.
### Contacting and visiting child care providers: A checklist

When you visit the child care programs, ask many questions and look for the items listed below. You can write notes on this guide to help you remember the different child care programs that you visit.

1. **Ask if the child care program is licensed.** The license should be in plain view near the front door. If not, ask why.

2. **Ask about the caregivers’ background, education, and training.** Do they attend training sessions throughout the year?

3. **Ask for a copy of the child care policy handbook.** This book will tell you what the program believes is important and how they do business.

4. **Look closely at the building. Do you see:**
   - Enough toys and learning materials to keep the children happy and busy?
   - Covered electrical outlets?
   - Smoke detectors and fire extinguishers?
   - Safety gates protecting stairs and unsafe rooms?
   - Fire escape plans?
   - Emergency phone numbers near the telephone?
   - Cleaning supplies and harmful substances securely stored?
   - Clean and fenced outdoor play area?
   - Soap and paper towels at the children's sink?
   - Caregivers washing hands after diapering and toileting children?
   - Patient and cheerful caregivers?
   - Healthy and happy children busy at play?
   - Children eating nutritious snacks and meals?

5. **Spend time watching the caregivers interact with the children. Do you see caregivers:**
   - Smiling at children?
   - Talking in ways that children understand?
   - Showing children a positive attitude?
   - Showing children that they care about them?
   - Taking care of crying children?
   - Helping children understand how they feel?
   - Answering children's questions?
   - Encouraging the children to get along with each other?
   - Helping children learn from daily routines?
   - Creating moments for children to learn new things in a fun way?
   - Helping children handle failure and learn ways to be successful?

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- **Yes**
- **No**
Child care in your own home, unlicensed child care programs, and unlicensed DFS-registered child care programs

If you have your children taken care of in your own home or in an unlicensed child care program, use the checklists on page 5 to make sure that they are in a safe and healthy environment and that the caregivers act in ways to help your children learn and grow.

If you do not know the caregiver well, ask other people who know the caregiver to tell you about her or him. Ask the neighbors questions such as, “How does she or he get along with children?” and “When the children are playing outside, who is with them and what are they doing?” Also ask any other questions that are important to you. The answers will help you decide if this child care provider can give your children safe, healthy and good care.

Child care in your own home and unlicensed child care programs may not be as dependable as other child care programs. To guarantee that you have child care when you need it, make backup arrangements for your children with friends and family members in case of an emergency.

Making a decision

Now that you have visited child care programs and collected information, you are ready to make a decision. The decision about who is going to care for your children is usually based on three things.

(1) First, do you think that the child care program is GOOD? Will your children be safe and have the opportunity to learn and grow? Is the facility clean and is nutritious food served? Are the caregivers trained and nice to the children in their care? Is the person in charge interested in your family’s needs?

(2) Second, can you AFFORD to pay for the child care program? When you call the Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, they will talk with you about different ways to pay for child care, depending on your income level.

(3) Third, does the LOCATION of the child care let you easily drop off and pick up your children without conflicting with your work schedule or the child care’s schedule?

After you think about these 3 things, making a decision about a child care program may be easier. If you visited more than one child care, you can compare them to decide which one best meets the needs of your family and your children.

Summary

Choosing the right child care program for your family is an important decision. This guide is intended to help you be a smart child care shopper and to confidently answer the question, “Who will take care of my children?” The first years of life are very important to children and to families. Finding good child care helps your children to learn and grow and helps you to have a clear mind when at work because you know that your children are receiving safe and healthy care.

References


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