



Choosing Quality Child Care

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Congratulations!

You have already taken the first step to begin your child care search by contacting Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R). CCR&Rs give a list of child care options that may meet your needs, requirements providers must meet, licensing laws, facts about child care, and other information to help you choose the provider that is best for you. Look through this booklet for steps to make a decision about child care.

Table of Contents

Starting the Process	1
Comparing the Different Types of Care	2
Center Regulations in Iowa	3
Home Regulations in Iowa	4-7
What to Look For in Finding Quality Child Care	
Health and Safety	7
Provider Education and Turnover	8
Program and Environment	8
Written Agreement	9
Family Involvement	9
Quality Indicators	
Accreditation	10
Iowa Quality Rating System	10
ChildNet Certification	10
Checking References	11
Parent's Responsibilities	12
Financial Information	13-15
Child Care Program Complaint Policy	16
Child Care Resource & Referral Complaint Policy	16
Confidentiality Policy	16
Disclaimer	17

Starting the Process

You are the expert when it comes to deciding what is best for you and your child. Remember that it is OK to be choosy. Trust your instincts to help you decide what is best for your child. When scheduling a visit with a provider, allow enough time to ask questions. Observe the children's activities, their interactions with the provider and with each other.

- Establish a list of questions you want the provider to answer. This booklet will assist you in preparing a list of questions.
- Screen providers by telephone. Ask questions to determine if the setting meets your basic needs.
- Schedule a visit. Give yourself at least an hour to tour the home or center and to talk with the provider.
- Comparison shop. Interview several different providers.
- Ask for names of other parents who have children enrolled there so that you can inquire about their experiences with the provider.

Review the information and call back if you have questions that weren't answered. If you are not comfortable with your choices, keep looking. If needed, call your Child Care Resource and Referral for an additional list of providers. If you find a provider you like whose program is full, ask if your name can be put on a waiting list. Even if you must use another program temporarily, you will have this as an option if things don't work out.

Prepare your children by talking positively about the new child care arrangement. Take your children to visit the provider beforehand. Ask your new provider if it would be OK for your child to bring a favorite toy, teddy bear or blanket to help ease the transition.



Comparing the Different Types of Care

There are three basic child care settings to choose from. In order to help you decide which setting is right for your child, you need to understand the differences.

Child Care Centers

- May be more structured
- If teacher is sick, a substitute will be available
- Children are grouped according to age
- Siblings are in different groups
- More children of the same age
- May have a larger number of children in the group
- More than one provider during the day

Preschools

- Part-time programs for children three to five years of age
- Serve children for up to three hours a day
- Typically only open during the school year

Child Care Homes

- Fees are usually less
- Hours may be more flexible with possible evening or weekend care
- If a provider needs a day off, parent may need to find alternative care
- Siblings are in the same group
- Ages of children vary
- Smaller group size
- Family setting
- One, maybe two, providers during the day
- Consistent provider throughout early childhood



Center Regulations in Iowa

Child care centers and preschools are licensed by the Iowa Department of Human Services and must be in compliance with minimum standards, including the requirements of the State Fire Marshal. They must comply with requirements for personnel, staff ratios, child records, health and safety policies, activity programs, discipline policies, building standards and food services. Programs must be designed to be appropriate for the ages of children cared for by the center. Child abuse registry and criminal record checks are completed on all staff.

Age of Children	Minimum Ratio of Staff to Children
2 weeks—23 months	1 adult to every 4 children
2 years	1 adult to every 6 children
3 years	1 adult to every 8 children
4 years	1 adult to every 12 children
5 –10 years	1 adult to every 15 children
10 years & over	1 adult to every 20 children

In child care centers, group size is determined by floor space, bathroom facilities and number of staff. Smaller group size and lower adult-child ratios allow for increased teacher-child interactions, greater child-initiated activity, increased language skills and more positive social interaction among children.

Department of Education Programs

Some child care centers and preschools are located in school buildings and are not regulated by the Iowa Department of Human Services. These programs operate under the guidelines of the Iowa Department of Education. Further information on these programs can be found at www.iowa.gov/educate.

Home Regulations in Iowa

A child care home that cares for six or more children at one time is required to be registered with the Iowa Department of Human Services. By registering, the provider has agreed to meet health and safety standards, to provide programs and equipment for the ages of children being cared for and to maintain records on each child. Everyone in the home 14 years or older must pass a child abuse registry and criminal record check. Registration & background checks are renewed every two years.

Under registration, a provider must self-certify that they:

- meet minimum health and safety standards.
- are keeping current with their CPR, First Aid, Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter Training.
- have at least 12 hours of training each year of registration.

Child Development Home A:

Number of Children in Care:

Providers can care for up to six children at any one time (no more than three under the age of 18 months and no more than four under the age of 24 months). In addition, not more than two children who attend school may be present for less than two hours at a time. The provider's own children not yet attending kindergarten are included in the total count. The provider's own children attending kindergarten or higher are not included in the total count, unless the children are home-schooled.

Provider Requirements for Child Development Home A:

- Is at least 18 years old
- Have three written references that attest to character and ability to provide child care

Facility Requirements for Child Development Home A:

- Have a readily accessible fire extinguisher on each child-occupied floor
- Have a minimum of one smoke detector in each child-occupied room and at the top of every stairway

Child Development Home B:*Number of Children in Care:*

Providers can care for up to six children at any one time (no more than three under the age of 18 months and no more than four under the age of 24 months). In addition, not more than four children who attend school may be present. The provider's own children not yet attending kindergarten are included in the total count. The provider's own children attending kindergarten or higher are not included in the total count, unless the children are home-schooled. (Two additional preschool or school-age children can be in care for a total of no more than 180 hours per month.) Whenever more than eight children are present at any one time for more than two hours, the provider must be assisted by a DHS approved assistant age fourteen or older.

Provider Requirements for Child Development Home B:

- Is at least 20 years old
- Have a high school diploma or GED
- Have two years experience as a child care home provider

OR

Have a two or four year college degree in a child related field or have a Child Development Associate Credential AND one year of experience as a child care home provider

Facility Requirements for Child Development Home B:

- Have a readily accessible fire extinguisher on each child-occupied floor
- Have a minimum of one smoke detector in each child-occupied room and at the top of every stairway
- Have a minimum of two direct exits to the outside
- Have 35 square feet of child-use indoor floor space and 50 square feet per child of outdoor space
- Have a separate quiet area for sick children

Child Development Home C:

Number of Children in Care:

Providers can care for up to 12 children at any one time, with no more than four children under the age of 24 months. If four children are under 18 months, both providers must be present. Whenever more than eight children are present, two providers that meet regulation requirements must be present. The provider's own children attending kindergarten or higher are not included in the total count, unless the children are home-schooled. In addition, not more than two children who attend school may be present for less than two hours at a time. (Two additional children can be in care for a total of no more than 180 hours per month.)

Provider Requirements for Child Development Home C:

- Is at least 21 years old
- Have a high school diploma or GED
- Have 5 years experience as a child care home provider

OR

Have a two or four year college degree in a child related field or have a Child Development Associate Credential AND 4 years of experience as a child care home provider

Facility Requirements for Child Development Home C:

- Have a readily accessible fire extinguisher on each child-occupied floor
- Have a minimum of one smoke detector in each child-occupied room and at the top of every stairway
- Have a minimum of two direct exits to the outside
- Have 35 square feet of child-use indoor floor space and 50 square feet per child of outdoor space
- Have a separate quiet area for sick children



Non-Registered Providers

Providers who care for five or fewer children (including their own children not yet attending kindergarten) are not required to be registered but may be listed with the CCR&R. Providers listed with CCR&R have child abuse checks completed every two years but are not required to meet other regulations. The only exception is if the provider is caring for children who are paid under the state's child care assistance ("subsidy") program – those providers have both a child abuse and a criminal history check completed on everyone living in the home who is fourteen years of age or older and they agree to meet minimal health and safety standards.

What to Look For in Finding Quality Child Care

There are many indicators of quality care to guide you in your selection. You should visit several programs for a basis of comparison. You can download a copy of the 2-page checklist from the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies at www.naccrra.org.

Health & Safety

Observe or ask to review policies or records to assess whether or not:

- Children are supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping.
- All providers and children wash their hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- The child care program has records proving that the children in care are up-to-date on all their required immunizations.
- Parents are notified if other children in care develop communicable diseases.
- Toxic substances like cleaning supplies and pest killers are kept away from the children.
- All providers have gone through a background check.
- One person on duty is certified in infant and child First Aid that includes management of a blocked airway and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or is also certified in CPR.
- The playground is inspected for safety on a regular basis.
- The program has liability insurance that covers children in care.

Provider Education & Turnover

Ask the provider:

- About their long-term plans in regard to their child care business.
- About staff turnover. A quality program will have little staff turnover which allows for consistency in care for the children.
- What background or training in child care the provider and assistants have. They should have up-to-date pediatric CPR and first aid training as well as yearly training on other child care issues.
- How often a substitute provider will be used and under what circumstances one would be needed. The substitute should be approved by the state with infant and child CPR and First Aid training as well as have child care experience.

Program & Environment

Ask what a typical day would be like. There should be a balance of play time, story time, activity time and nap time.

- Activities should include experiences that will:
 - Encourage use and development of language
 - Develop large and small muscle skills
 - Encourage creativity, cultural awareness and imaginative play
 - Provide indoor and outdoor play
 - Provide active and quiet activities
- A minimal amount of time should be spent watching TV and videos.
- There should be planned activities as well as plenty of free play.
- Materials such as books, toys, blocks and art supplies should be available all day long.
- Each child should have a place to store personal belongings.

The guidance or discipline policy should be consistent as well as clear and easy for children to understand. Physical and emotional punishment should NEVER be used. "Time-out" periods should be no more than one minute per year of each child's life, (i.e. a two-year old = two minutes). Children's behavior should be guided to promote cooperation among children, develop self-control and prevent injury to themselves and others.

Written Agreement

Ask the provider if they have a written agreement. A written agreement between you and your provider will help set the stage for open communication. It should explain what can be expected of the provider as well as your responsibilities. Many providers have established written agreements. Review contract/policies to make sure they cover all areas of concern. A written agreement may include:

- Hours of care that will be provided and the location the care will take place
- Fee schedule, what is included in those fees, and when they're due
- Policies on caring for sick children. Many providers have a policy that if a child has a high fever, are vomiting or have diarrhea, they must be picked up. They then need to be symptom-free or on an antibiotic for 24 hours before returning.
- Responsibility for locating substitute care
- Supplies to be provided by parents
- Provisions for nutritious meals
- Emergency procedures
- Days the provider will be closed for holidays and vacations
- Procedure for notification of fee changes
- Policies for termination

Family Involvement

Ask the providers to give details about:

- Methods to provide for regular communication with you. Sometimes a notebook is placed near the door, notes are put with the child's belongings or there may be regularly scheduled conferences.
- Their open-door policy where you can visit any time during operating hours. (Note: an open-door policy does not mean that the doors have to be unlocked.)
- How they will cooperate with you on efforts such as toilet learning.
- They involve their family members in their child care business.
- How you can be involved in the child care program.

Quality Indicators

Accreditation

Child Care Centers and Child Development Homes can choose to become nationally accredited. Centers commonly receive accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Afterschool Association. Child Development Homes receive accreditation through the National Association of Family Child Care. For more information, go to www.naeyc.org.

Iowa's Quality Rating System (QRS)

The Quality Rating System is a voluntary program that offers providers a guided way to improve the quality of child care they provide. A provider who achieves Level 1 has met Iowa's registration or licensing standards. Level 5 is the highest level that a program can achieve. Levels are determined based on provider's training and experience as well as improvements they have made to the child care setting. For further information, go to www.dhs.state.ia.us/iqrs.

ChildNet Certification

ChildNet is a series of ten classes, designed specifically for home providers. After completing the series, a provider can apply for ChildNet certification. To receive certification or recertification, a home provider must be registered with the State of Iowa, participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (a federally funded program that reimburses providers for providing nutritious meals and snacks) and have successfully completed an in-home evaluation. To maintain this certification, a provider must attend four hours more than what is required to be registered.

Checking References

Don't be shy about checking references. Selecting a provider for your child is one of the most important things you will ever do. Ask each provider for at least two parent references and their phone numbers. Most parents are happy to share information with other parents, and they can be a wonderful resource. Parents who check references say they often get information they couldn't have gathered 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 his or her methods? Is there anything you don't like about their methods?
- Is it easy to talk to the provider?
- Is the provider open to your child's individual needs?
- What kind of guidance or discipline does the provider use?
- How does the provider deal with problems or concerns?

You can also contact your county Department of Human Services to review a provider's registration or licensing file. You can find a listing of the county offices on the DHS website. The DHS office in your area is also listed in the State or County Government section of your local phone book under "Department of Human Services" or "Human Services." Information about the provider may be found on the DHS website at www.dhs.iowa.gov.



Parent's Responsibilities

Prior to taking your child on the first day bring:

- Records of physical examinations, medical history including allergies and medical needs, and proof of immunizations which are required to be on file in registered/licensed child care programs.
- Telephone numbers of the child's doctor, dentist, and any insurance information a provider might need in case of a medical emergency.
- Emergency numbers where you can be reached.
- A list of individuals authorized to pick up the children.

After enrolling your child:

- Call if you are going to be late.
- Be willing to give two weeks advance notice if your child will not be attending for a period of time.
- Follow your provider's policies for ill children.
- Provide any personal items your child needs (such as diapers or a spare change of clothes).
- Pay on time.



Financial Information

W-10 Form

When enrolling your child, be sure to ask for your provider's FEIN (Federal Employer Identification Number) or Social Security number for tax purposes.

Tax Credits

- The Earned Income Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit. You must meet certain requirements to be eligible for a reduction in your taxes or to get a refund. For more information, call 800-829-1040 or go to www.irs.gov.
- The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit is designed to offset some of the child and dependent care costs that families pay in order to work. If you paid someone to care for your child so you could work, you may be able to reduce your federal income tax by claiming the credit on your tax return.
- The Child Tax Credit is designed to help families offset some of the costs of raising children. Even families who owe little or no income tax can receive at least some of this credit.

The above information is just a guide. 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.

Child Care Assistance

This program provides help with the cost of child care to families with children. The goal of child care is to support families while they work or attend school. For more information, contact the DHS office in your county. You can find a listing of the county offices on the DHS website www.dhs.state.ia.us. The DHS office in your area is also listed in the State or County Government section of your local phone book under "Department of Human Services" or "Human Services."

You may also want to ask your provider if they are aware of additional resources, as some local communities have additional financial assistance in the form of scholarships or discounts.

Energy Assistance

LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) is designed to assist low-income families meet the cost of home heating. Applicants are accepted on a first come/first served basis. To find the agency that serves your county call 515-281-0859 or go to the following website: www.weatherization.iowa.gov.

FIP (Family Investment Program)

This program provides temporary cash assistance to families with children. The goal of FIP is to help families leave poverty and become self-supporting. The FIP program requires families to work with PROMISE JOBS, a work and training program, to make a plan on how the family will become self-supporting. For more information, contact the DHS office in your county. You can find a listing of the DHS offices at www.dhs.state.ia.us. The DHS office in your area is also listed in the State or County Government section of your local phone book under “Department of Human Services” or “Human Services.”

Food Assistance

The Food Assistance Program is intended to promote the general welfare of low income families by raising their levels of nutrition to avoid hunger and malnutrition. Call your local DHS office for information. You can also call 877-YES-FOOD or go to www.dhs.iowa.gov.

hawk-i (Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa)

The hawk-i program offers free or low-cost health care coverage for uninsured children under 19 years of age. For more information call 800-257-8563 or go to www.hawk-i.org.



Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start provides services at no cost to income-eligible families. The program provides child development and preschool services to children birth to age 5, including children with special needs. Services include family support and assistance with meeting the social, nutritional, and health needs of young children. To see if your family is eligible or to find out where programs are located, call the Head Start State Collaboration Office at 515-242-6024 or go to www.iowaheadstart.org.

WIC (Women, Infants & Children)

WIC is a health program that serves pregnant and postpartum women and children under the age of 5. WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition education and referrals to other health care agencies. Call 800-532-1579 or go to www.idph.state.is.us/wic.



Child Care Program Complaint Policies

Personality-Related Complaints

If you have a complaint regarding a provider's style of interaction, business practice, or any other personality-related matter, as well as complaints regarding their business practices, this should be resolved between you and the provider.

If necessary, Child Care Resource & Referral can provide confidential technical assistance that may be helpful in reaching a solution to the problem.

Non-Compliance Complaints

If you have a complaint regarding a provider's non-compliance with the regulations for homes or centers such as caring for too many children or unsafe conditions, report these to the local Iowa Department of Human Services office (for homes) or to the DHS licensing consultant (for centers). The name and contact information for the licensing consultant is required to be posted in the center where parents can read it.

Child Abuse Complaints

Suspected child abuse calls should be made by the parent directly to 800-362-2178. Information regarding an investigation of child abuse and neglect is confidential.

Child Care Resource & Referral Complaint Policy

Parents with concerns regarding the quality of the child care referral process or referral listing should contact the CCR&R Regional Director by phone. The contact information is listed at the back of this booklet.

Confidentiality Policy

All parent, child, and provider records shall be kept confidential and shall be handled in compliance with State and Federal law. Child Care Resource and Referral will not reveal the name or any identifying factors of any individual who seeks services through CCR&R unless written permission is given by the individual.

Disclaimer:

Child Care Resource and Referral provides **referrals and not recommendations**; we cannot ensure the quality of any program on our database. We do not monitor the programs, and the programs self-report the information we collect.

Thank you!

Thank you for contacting Child Care Resource and Referral for assistance in finding child care. Please contact a parent counselor if you have additional child care needs or questions.



1-855-299-0499

(Parent Referral Line)

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) of Northeast Iowa

Allamakee . Black Hawk . Bremer . Buchanan . Butler .
Cerro Gordo . Chickasaw . Clayton . Delaware . Dubuque .
Fayette . Floyd . Franklin . Grundy . Hancock . Howard .
Mitchell . Winneshiek . Worth

Regional CCR&R Office:

Waterloo Office

319-233-0804 or 1-800-475-0804

childcare@episervice.org

Community CCR&R Offices:

Allison Office

319-267-2644 or 1-877-635-9455

Decorah Office

563-382-4447

Dubuque Office

563-557-1628 or 1-866-296-5331

Independence Office

319-334-5900 or 1-866-655-7420

Mason City Office

641-424-9559 or 1-866-424-9559

New Hampton Office

641-394-4854 or 1-866-394-4854

Child Care Resource & Referral of Northeast Iowa provides
services for parents, providers and the community.

www.iowaccrr.org (Select Region 2)

