

KNOWING ABOUT CHILD CARE CHOICES

Parents often have several choices to consider when they are looking for child care. The type of care you choose depends on a number of factors:

- the number of children and their ages
- the days of the week and the hours of the day that care is needed
- your family's lifestyle, culture, schedule, religion or language
- the kind of child care that exists in the community
- what your family can afford to pay
- what you know about the range of child care choices

The more you know about the various child care choices that may be available, the better able you will be to find a child care arrangement that meets your family's needs.

Child care may be provided in your own home, in a caregiver's home or in a child care centre. Many types of child care are licensed, some are monitored by an agency or support network, and a few are supervised entirely by the parents themselves. In all cases, parents are responsible for selecting a safe, healthy, nurturing child care arrangement that best suits their family situation and their children's needs.

THE CHOICES

It is often confusing for parents when they first hear about the various kinds of child care. These brief descriptions of some of the child care choices may make it easier for you to decide what is best for your child and your family. A Provincial Child Care Subsidy is available to eligible families to help with the cost of child care.

In-Home Child Care

Some parents prefer to have a caregiver come into the family home to look after their children. An in-home caregiver might live with the family or she might come to the family home only when care is needed.

An in-home caregiver may be called a nanny, au pair or a babysitter. Supervision of the in-home caregiver's work is the full responsibility of the parent. The caregiver may or may not have had some formal child care training or previous child care experience. It is essential that you take some time to learn about the caregiver's background and approach to caring for children. References and a criminal record check are a good idea. You will need to feel confident that the caregiver will take good care of your children while you are away.

A written agreement between you and the caregiver is recommended. This agreement describes the days and hours of work, the caregiver's specific terms of employment and the parent's responsibilities

as an employer. For more information about writing an agreement, ask for the pamphlet *Writing a Parent-Caregiver Agreement for In-home Child Care*.

Licensed Family Child Care

Family Child Care is care provided in the caregiver's own home. A license from Community Care Facilities Licensing is required when a caregiver looks after three or more children unrelated to her. Provincial regulations allow the caregiver to care for a maximum of 7 children including her own who are under 13 years of age. Children in a Licensed Family Child Care home may be of various ages from birth to 12 years. Regulations specify the number of children that may be cared for in each of the various age groups (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, etc.)

In order to become licensed, the caregiver must meet all the provincial regulations for Licensed Family Child Care. A Licensing Officer interviews the caregiver, checks references from a physician and others, ensures that the caregiver and others in the home have a clear criminal record, and approves the space where the child care will take place. The caregiver is required to complete 20 hours of training, preferably an introductory family child care training course, and hold a valid first aid certificate.

You are responsible for learning about the caregiver's background, experience and policies in order to choose the person who you think will provide the best care for your child. Open communication helps parents and caregivers understand and trust each other. Visits by Licensing Officers to licensed family child care providers may help parents feel supported in monitoring the care provided.

Registered License-Not-Required Family Child Care

In B.C., no license is required if the caregiver looks after only one or two children who are unrelated to her. This is called license-not-required child care. License-not-required caregivers often care for one or two children aged 0 - 12 years along with their own children.

Registered License-Not-Required (RLNR) caregivers have met registry requirements of the local Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR). These usually include:

- A criminal record check
- References
- A home health and safety assessment
- A physician's report
- First aid training
- Completion of an introductory family child care course of at least 20 hours
- On-going participation in professional development workshops

Although CCRR's provide support to Registered LNR's, parents monitor their child's care. It is important for you to meet with several registered caregivers to learn about their approach to child care before making your selection. You can ask caregivers to provide proof that they are registered with the local Child Care Resource and Referral Program.

License-Not-Required Family Child Care

License-Not-Required caregivers may not be registered with a Child Care Resource and Referral Program. They are also referred to as unlicensed or informal caregivers. They may or may not have had formal child care experience. Monitoring of the care provided in these informal child care settings is the full responsibility of the parent. You need to know as much as possible about the caregiver's background and her approach to caring for children. Ask if the caregiver has had some child care training or previous child care experience and check references. This will help you feel sure that your child will be well cared for.

Licensed Group Child Care

Group Child Care is provided in licensed child care centres where children are grouped according to age. Some centres provide care for infants (up to 18 months of age), some for toddlers (19 – 36 months of age), some for children aged 30 months to school age, and others for school aged children to age 12. Group care facilities, equipment, and staffing meet the standards set by the Provincial Child Care Regulation. They are also visited by Child Care Licensing Officers. Most children in group care programs attend for several hours every day from Monday through Friday.

While there are similarities amongst licensed group child care programs, each centre has its own approach to caring for children and its own policies. When you visit several group care programs, you may see differences in the way centres provide care for children and organize their programs. You are responsible for choosing the licensed group care program that best suits your child and your family situation. As with other types of child care, you will need to continue to monitor the care your child receives at the centre you choose.

Licensed Preschool

Preschools are licensed part-time programs that children aged 30 months to school age may attend two to five times a week, mornings or afternoons for two to four hours. Some preschools offer separate programs for 3 and 4 year olds, while others have mixed age groupings. Preschool facilities, equipment and staffing meet standards set by the Provincial Child Care Regulation. They are also visited by Child Care Licensing Officers. Some preschools require that parents participate in the program some of the time.

It's a good idea to visit several different preschools before deciding which one offers the programs best suited to your child. Observe how your child adjusts to the preschool and talk openly with staff about any concerns you have.

Licensed School Age Child Care

Licensed School Age Child Care Programs offer care to school-aged children outside of regular school hours. Some programs offer care before and after school while others provide care only after school. Full-day care is offered during school holidays and on other days that school is not in session.

School age programs are staffed by responsible adults at least 19 years of age and have completed 20 hours of formal child care training. Some staff may hold a School Age Child Care certificate or ECE certificate or have other related education and experience working with children and families. School Age facilities, equipment and staffing meet the standards set by the Provincial Child Care Regulation. They are also visited by Child Care Licensing Officers.

You will want to meet the staff of the school age program so that you can feel confident about the care provided to your child. You are responsible for open communication with program staff about your child's care.

Need More Information?

For more information about choosing quality child care, please ask for the following pamphlets:

- Choosing Child Care
- Selecting an In-Home Caregiver
- Parent's Guide to Selecting Child Care

Or call Enquiry BC to find your local Child Care Resource & Referral
1-800-663-7867 or 604-660-2421

Or visit the Ministry of Child and Family Development online:

<http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/index.htm>