

A Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care



#TogetherWeWill...

Help parents make informed choices!



Iowa
Child Care
Resource
& Referral

877-216-8481
www.iowaccrr.org

Congratulations!

You have already taken the first step to begin your child care search by contacting Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R). We offer parent resources 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 during the referral process is confidential. There is no cost for our referral service. The names provided are referrals only. We cannot guarantee the information is correct. We cannot suggest any provider. We cannot assure you that any provider gives quality care.

Disclaimer

CCR&R 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
- 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 children
- Ask for names of other parents who took their child there and contact them to ask about their experiences
- Interview several providers for comparison

Review the information and call CCR&R 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 Parent Specialist 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 (they will give you extra time if you are homeless), 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
- 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 two basic types of child care.

Licensed Center

- Typically in a commercial-type building
- 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

Family Child Care

- Must be in a residential setting
- 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



Types of Care

Center/Preschool

- Licensed with Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) every two years
- Can be a center, preschool, before and after school program or a combination
- Iowa Department of Education 4-year old preschools are exempt from licensing
- May or may not have a signed Child Care Assistance (CCA) Provider Agreement with Iowa DHS
- Must implement [DHS Licensing Standards and Procedures, Comm 204](#)

Child Development Home A, B, C1 and C

- Any person serving more than five children at one time must register with Iowa DHS
- May or may not have a signed CCA Provider Agreement with Iowa DHS
- Sometimes referred as a registered home provider
- This provider must implement Iowa [DHS Child Development Home Registration Guidelines, Comm 143](#)

Child Care Home approved for Child Care Assistance

- Not registered with Iowa DHS
- Has a signed CCA Provider Agreement with Iowa DHS
- Sometimes referred as non-registered home provider
- Has to follow Iowa [DHS Guidelines for Child Care Homes with a Child Care Assistance Provider Agreement, Comm 95](#)

Child Care Home

- Not registered with Iowa DHS
- Not approved for payment for families on CCA
- Sometimes referred as unregistered or non-registered
- Has to follow [Iowa Code Section 237A.3](#)

Department of Human Services Background Checks and Inspections

Type of Care	Background Checks ¹	Inspections ²
Licensed Center/Preschool	All licensed center that have contact with a child have had an Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check. Those over eighteen years have been fingerprinted.	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.
Child Development Home A B C1 C	An Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check on everyone fourteen years or older that lives in the house. Those over eighteen years have been fingerprinted.	Preservice inspection before receiving registration and each year afterward.
Child Care Home approved for Child Care Assistance	An Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check on everyone fourteen years or older that lives in the house. Those over eighteen years have had fingerprinting.	Annual monitoring visit.
Child Care Home	To be eligible for CCR&R referrals, must have an Iowa Abuse Registry record check.	

Iowa Department of Education programs follow Department of Education standards for background checks and inspections. Before and After School programs are required to be licensed by DHS unless they meet another exemption.

¹ 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 the crime was and when it occurred.

² You can review compliance reports of programs at secureapp.dhs.state.ia.us/dhs_titan_public/ChildCare/ComplianceReport

Legal Capacity

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 Homes and Child Development Homes					
Type of Care	Birth-Preschool Capacity	Elementary Capacity	Additional Part-time Capacity		
Child Development Home A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 years or older • Three reference letters 	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		
Child Development Home B* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 years or older • HS diploma/GED • 2 years of experience 	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.					
Child Development Home C1 (one provider) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 years or older • HS diploma/GED • 5 years of experience 	8 children: Maximum of 8 children at any one time. Of those 8, there is a maximum of 4 children under 24 months. Of those four, there can be no more than 3 children under 18 months.				
Child Development Home C (two providers)* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 years or older • HS diploma/GED • 5 years of experience 	12 children: No more than 4 children who are age 24 months or younger.	2 children: Care can only be for less than 2 hours at a time.	2 children		
* The second co-provider must meet the minimum requirements of a category B provider. The second co-provider must be present when there are more than 8 children and/or when there are 4 infants under 18 months in attendance. If the second co-provider needs to be left unattended with children in the absences of the primary provider, the second co-provider must meet the requirements of a category C provider too.					
Child Care Home	Can have 5 children at one time.			0 children	

Center/Preschool Training & Environmental Requirements

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

Type of Care	Training	Environment	Eligible to participate
Licensed Center/Preschool	All Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentials* • Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter Training • Universal Precautions • 10 hours of continuing education the first year and 6 hours per year after the first year • First Aid and Infant, Child & Adult CPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicines and cleaners are stored so they are inaccessible to children • Emergency plans • Heating stoves and elements are blocked • State Fire Marshal or an approved designee must inspect each child care center applying for a license and conduct an annual inspection • Quiet area for sick children • Ample spaces for active and quiet play • A place for children to store their own things • Bathroom and diapering areas are safe and clean • Staff inspects outdoor play areas monthly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Resource & Referral • Iowa DHS Child Care Assistance Program • Child and Adult Care Food Program • Iowa Quality Rating System • National Accreditation
Department of Education	Follows Department of Education standards	Follows Department of Education standards	

* Essentials is 12 hours of preservice training that covers ten basic health and safety topics.

You can find Iowa DSH licensing and registration requirements at www.iowaccrr.org and then select provider type.

Home Training & Environmental Requirements

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

Type of Care	Training	Environment	Eligible to participate
Child Care Home	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care Resource & Referral
Child Care Home approved to accept Child Care Assistance payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essentials* Infant, Child & Adult CPR and First Aid Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medicines and cleaners are secured from access by a child Emergency plans Materials that can catch on fire are kept at least 3 feet away from heat sources Heating stoves and elements are blocked Fire Extinguisher Smoke detector in each child occupied room Safety gates at stairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care Resource & Referral Iowa DHS Child Care Assistance Program
Child Development Home A B C1 C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essentials* Infant, Child & Adult CPR and First Aid Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter 24 hours of approved training per 2 year registration period 	Everything above plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiet area for sick children Ample spaces for active and quiet play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care Resource & Referral Iowa DHS Child Care Assistance Program Child and Adult Care Food Program ChildNet certification Iowa Quality Rating System National Accreditation

* Essentials is 12 hours of training that covers ten basic health & safety topics.

* Child Care Homes must complete Essentials before receiving CCA payments.

* Child Development Homes must complete Essentials before becoming registered.

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 CCR&R Child Care Consultants. CCR&R's 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.
- Iowa Department of Human Services must approve substitutes.
- 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/.
- Staff notifies parents if someone develops an infectious disease.
- At least 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 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.

ChildNet Certification

ChildNet is a series of twenty-five hours of training for Child Development Home providers. Providers learn how to operate a successful child care business in their home. To be [ChildNet certified](#), a home provider must:

- Complete all coursework
- Be registered with Iowa DHS
- 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/
- Centers - The National Association for the Education of Young Children www.naeyc.org.
- School-age - The National Afterschool Association 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. 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 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 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 humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply.

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 to apply, call your local DHS office or go to 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.

Call 800-257-8563 or go to www.hawk-i.org.



Head Start/Early Head Start

Provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Call 515-326-5389 or go to www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/early-childhood/head-start.



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, email: 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. 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.

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 idph.iowa.gov/wic.

Child Care Program Complaint Policies

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.

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.

CCR&R can provide ideas that may help reach a solution.

Non-Compliance Complaints

Contact Iowa Child Care Complaint Hotline at 844-786-1296 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

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 under staff or call 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 CCR&R for assistance in finding child care. If you have additional child care needs or questions, please call 1-877-216-8481.

Notes



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