

# A Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care



**#TogetherWeWill...**

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**Help parents make informed choices!**



[www.iowaccrr.org](http://www.iowaccrr.org)

## You're On Your Way....

Thank you for contacting your Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Parent Services Team. We offer parent resources including:

- 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
- Language and cultural support

**The referral services offered by CCR&R are free and all the information is confidential. The names of child care programs provided are referrals only. We cannot recommend or suggest any provider.**

If you would like additional information about the providers' registration/licensing records go to the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) website:

<http://ccmis.dhs.state.ia.us/ClientPortal/ProviderSearch.aspx>

### Disclaimer

The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) monitors most of the programs we refer. The programs self-report the majority of the information we collect. Examples of provider information we are able to verify include:

- Registration and Licensing status
- 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. Trust your instincts to help you decide what is best for your family by:

- Interviewing providers for comparison
- Using this booklet and the checklist provided to make a list of questions you want to ask
- Calling providers to determine if they meet your basic needs such as hours care is needed and openings for your child's age
- Scheduling a visit to tour and ask questions
- Observing the provider and their interaction with children
- Asking for names of other parents who have taken their child to the provider (now or in the past) and contact them to ask about their experiences



Review the information. 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 or have questions, call your CCR&R Parent Specialist.

### **Responsibilities for your child's safety include:**

Before the first day, these items are required by Department of Human Services (DHS) for your child's file:

- Records of physical exams, medical history and shots (if you are homeless, the provider will give you extra time to provide the physical and immunization records)
- 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 you can partner with your child care provider by:

- Calling if you are going to be late dropping off or picking up your child
- Giving notice if your child will not be attending
- Following your provider's contracts and policies
- Providing items your child needs (diapers, change of clothes, etc.)
- Paying on time

You can help your child get used to the new child care setting by:

- Talking positively with your child about the new child care program
- Taking your child to visit the provider before the first day
- Asking the provider if your child can bring a favorite toy or blanket

# Types of Care

## Center/Preschool

- Licensed with Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) every two years
- At least one unannounced visit a year from DHS licensing staff for inspection
- All staff that have contact with children have had an Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check
- Those over 18 years of age have been fingerprinted
- Can be a center, preschool, before and after school program or a combination
- May or may not have a signed Child Care Assistance (CCA) Provider Agreement with DHS
- Must follow [DHS Licensing Standards and Procedures, Comm 204](#) and [Iowa Administrative Rules 441.109](#)

## Child Development Home A, B, C1 and C

- Registered with DHS every two years (may be called a registered home provider)
- Anyone 14 or older living in the home has an Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check
- Those over 18 years of age have been fingerprinted
- Pre-service inspection before receiving registration and each year afterwards
- May or may not have a signed CCA Provider Agreement with DHS
- Must follow [DHS Child Development Home Registration Guidelines, Comm 143](#) and [Iowa Administrative Rules 441.110](#)

## Child Care Home approved for Child Care Assistance (CCA)

- Not registered with DHS (may be called a non-registered home provider)
- Anyone 14 or older living in the home has an Iowa Abuse Registry record check and a criminal history check
- Those over 18 years of age have been fingerprinted
- Annual monitoring visit
- Has a signed CCA Provider Agreement with Iowa DHS
- May not care for more than 5 children at any one time
- Must follow [DHS Guidelines for Child Care Homes with a Child Care Assistance Provider Agreement, Comm 95](#) and [Iowa Administrative Rules 441.120](#)

## Child Care Home

- Not registered with DHS (may be called an unregistered home provider)
- Not approved for payment for families on CCA
- May not care for more than 5 children at any one time
- Must follow [Iowa Code Section 237A.3](#)



# What to Look for in Finding Quality Child Care

It is helpful to interview programs for comparison. Ask if they work with CCR&R Child Care Consultants. CCR&R's free services are available to improve the quality of care. Below you will find some general information about Licensed Centers/Preschools, Registered Child Development Homes A, B, C, C1 and Child Care Homes approved for Child Care Assistance. Unregistered Child Care Homes are not regulated by DHS and have no additional requirements. You can find out more about specific requirements for each type of care by visiting [www.iowaccrr.org/providers](http://www.iowaccrr.org/providers).

## Health & Safety

All regulated child care programs should be safe, clean and free of smoke. Programs are required to follow basic health and safety requirements such as safe sleep practices for infants under one year of age, proper handwashing practices and storing medicines and cleaners out of reach of children. Each program must also have emergency plans in place specific to their program's operation.

## Interactions & Learning Activities

When you visit a program, observe the interactions between the provider and the children in care. There should be space for active and quiet play. The daily schedule should provide a balance of time for free play, activities and rest. Children should have access to a variety of materials such as books, blocks and art supplies during the entire day. Programs should take children outside on a regular basis.

## Provider Education & Turnover

It is better for the children if they have consistent care by the same providers. Iowa requires all regulated child care providers to attend required trainings of Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter, Essentials (a 12-hour series on basic health and safety topics) and to be certified in First Aid and CPR (Infant, Child & Adult).

Required Trainings	Child Care Centers and Preschools	Child Development Homes	Child Care Homes approved for CCA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Universal Precautions</li><li>• At least 6 hours annually</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 24 hours during 2 year registration period</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 hours annually</li></ul>

## Written Agreement

A written agreement helps with open communication. It should explain what to expect and what your responsibilities are. Review the contract and policies to make sure they cover all areas of concern and ask questions if something is confusing.

## Family Involvement

Once your child starts attending the program you should be able to visit at any time they are open. The provider should let you know about your child's day and you should tell the provider about any changes at home that might affect your child.

## Child to Provider Ratios

Licensed Centers and Preschools					
Age of child	# of adults	# of children	Age of child	# of adults	# of children
0-24 mos.	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		
<b>Child Development Home A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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>Child Development Home 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		
* Whenever more than 8 children are present at any one time for more than 2 hours, the provider must be assisted by a DHS-approved assistant aged 14 or older.					
<b>Child Development Home C1 (one provider)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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. Of those four, there can be no more than 3 children under 18 months.				
<b>Child Development Home C (two providers)*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 years or older</li> <li>• HS diploma/GED</li> <li>• 5 years of experience</li> </ul>	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 also.					
<b>Child Care Home</b>	Can have 5 children at one time.			0 children	

# Quality Indicators

## Iowa's Quality and Rating System (QRS)

The Quality Rating System guides programs to improve the quality of the child care they provide. Participating in QRS is optional for programs. 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 <https://dhs.iowa.gov/iqrs>.

## ChildNet Certification

ChildNet is a series of 25 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 Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Have the CCR&R Child Care Consultant complete an in-home checklist
- Maintain certification by completing an in-home checklist every two years
- Attend four hours of training each year in addition to 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 eligible 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/early-access-iowa/what-is-ea](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org/early-access-iowa/what-is-ea) or call 1-888-425-4371.

## **Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)**

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program helps people with lower incomes pay their heating bills. To find your county agency, call 515-281-3861 or go to [humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply](https://humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply).

## **Family Investment Program (FIP) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families**

FIP is Iowa's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) 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](https://dhs.iowa.gov/cash-assistance).

## **Food Assistance (also known as SNAP)**

The Food Assistance Program helps families purchase healthy food. Call your local DHS office for information at 877-937-3663 or go to [dhs.iowa.gov/food-assistance](https://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 [dhs.iowa.gov/hawki](https://dhs.iowa.gov/hawki).

## **Head Start and Early Head Start**

This program 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](http://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/early-childhood/head-start).

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

For more information go to [www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org).

## Milestone Tracker Mobile App

Track your child's milestones from age 2 months to 5 years with easy-to-use checklists and get tips about encouraging your child's development. Download the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mobile app on your mobile device through your app store or learn more at [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html).

## 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.

## 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 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 may help 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 more 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 families with pregnant and postpartum women or with children under the age of five. WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition education and referrals to other health care agencies. Call 800-532-1579 or go to [idph.iowa.gov/wic](http://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

## Child Care 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
- Providers' interactions with children seem threatening or harmful

You can review compliance reports for any program at

[secureapp.dhs.state.ia.us/dhs\\_titan\\_public/ChildCare/ComplianceReport](https://secureapp.dhs.state.ia.us/dhs_titan_public/ChildCare/ComplianceReport)

## Child Care Resource & Referral Complaint Policy

Contact the CCR&R Regional Director, if you have concerns with the referral process or your child care options by phone, 1-866-324-3236 ext. 1402, or by email at

[childcare@caeiowa.org](mailto:childcare@caeiowa.org)

## 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 child care questions, please call 1-855-CHILD-01 (1-855-244-5301).

# Thank You

(Pages 11 and 12 can be removed for use during your visits.)

Funding provided by the Iowa Department of Human Services through the Child Care Development Fund



## A Parent's Child Care Checklist



You are the expert when it comes to deciding what is best for you and your child. Trust your instincts to help you decide what is best for your family by interviewing providers for comparison. Highlight the items below that you want to discuss with the providers, then choose the program that best fits your needs

	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3
Program 1: _____			
Program 2: _____			
Program 3: _____			
An adult is watching the children at all times.			
The children have play time, story time, activity time and nap time every day.			
Screen time is limited.			
Children can use a variety of materials that are right for their age.			
The adults are loving, caring and talk with the children at their level.			
Infants are placed alone on their backs with no pillows, stuffed animals, blankets or bumper pads in the crib.			
When awake, infants don't spend much time in a swing, bouncy seat or car seat.			
The diaper changing area is disinfected and sanitized after each changing.			
Adults and children wash their hands before eating, after using the bathroom, after changing diapers and after outside play.			
School-aged children have a quiet space to do homework.			
Information about your child's day will be shared with you daily.			
Balanced meals including fruits and vegetables are served every day.			
Iowa DHS regulates and inspects the program annually.			
All adults in licensed and/or registered programs have been fingerprinted and have passed a criminal background check and a child abuse check.			
There is a DHS required number of adults for the number of children in care.			
An adult with a current CPR/First Aid certificate is always present.			
Children feel safe and comfortable and the program is smoke free.			
Parents sign a contract before bringing their children to be cared for.			
Parents are given a copy of the contracts and policies.			
The program has a QRS rating of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5.			
Every month the program practices their emergency plan with the children.			

## Checking References

You can ask the child care provider for the names of parents you can talk to who have children in that provider's care. Those parents can tell you more about the program and their child care experiences with the provider.

## Iowa's Quality Rating System (QRS)

- QRS is a voluntary 5-level rating system
- 5 is the highest level a program can achieve
- Achieving a QRS rating shows a commitment to quality child care
- The program must meet certain standards to advance to the higher levels
- QRS is available to Child Care Centers and registered Child Development Homes

If a program doesn't have a QRS rating, ask them if they have plans to work toward a Quality Rating.



**Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral**  
**Parent Services 855-CHILD-01 (244-5301)**

Funding provided by the Iowa Department of Human Services  
through the Child Care Development Fund

Thank you for contacting Child Care Resource & Referral. We hope your child care search is successful.