



Child Care Checklist

Choosing child care is one of the most important decisions that families make. High quality child care in the early years can make a positive difference for the future of your child. Making a thoughtful decision now will help your child develop the skills needed to be successful in school. Finding good child care requires an investment of your time. Compare your choices and ask plenty of questions.

Steps to Guide Your Search

1. Contact Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

Talk with Child Care Aware® staff who can create a personalized list of licensed child care providers that fit your needs or search online at www.ndchildcare.org.

2. Contact providers as soon as you receive a list from Child Care Aware®

Vacancies in good programs fill quickly, so your immediate action is important. Use the *Questions to Ask on the Phone* section to help you screen providers.

3. Arrange a tour and on-site interview with programs you're most interested in.

Use the *Questions to Ask During a Site Visit* section to help you cover the key topics that you need to consider. Make notes to remind yourself of their responses.

4. Check references.

Ask for personal and professional references. You should also contact your local county social services office to ask about any complaints that may be on file. Child Care Aware® can supply you with the phone number.

5. Make your decision.

Use the *Making Your Decision* section to help you review the information you've gathered. Remember, it's okay to be a choosey parent. Let the provider you've chosen know you would like to enroll your child and make a courtesy call to the other providers notifying them you will not be using their program.

Questions to Ask on the Phone

Phone Interview Questions:	Why ask these questions:
Is there an opening at the time I will need child care?	<p><i>Child care programs must stay within state rules for how many children they can care for at any one time, based on the child's age, adult:child ratios, and space available. Family and group providers must include their own children under age 12 in the total if they are present on site.</i></p> <p><i>Response will determine if this will be a stable option for you to consider.</i></p> <p><i>By asking these questions, you will get a sense if this program is a good match for your family.</i></p> <p><i>All licensed child care programs must be smoke-free 24 hours a day.</i></p> <p><i>Good child care can be costly. Yet the type of care a child receives when they are young influences their ability for learning throughout their lives.</i></p> <p><i>Schedule a time when you would have an opportunity for an uninterrupted conversation. Visit again when the children are present.</i></p>
Is there a waiting list for care in the future?	
How many children do you care for? What are their ages? Do the provider's own children attend?	
What experience do you have in providing child care?	
What hours/days are you open? Can you be flexible?	
Do you provide transportation? To which schools/activities? Is there an additional fee?	
Is your program smoke-free 24 hours a day?	
Are there any pets in the program?	
What meals and snacks are provided? Are they included in your fee?	
What are your rates? Is there a minimum charge?	
What is the payment policy for holidays, vacation and sick days?	
When is a good time to visit your program and arrange an interview?	

Questions to Ask During a Site Visit

Health & Safety	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Best Practices:
What are your emergency procedures? Are they posted? Do you have practice evacuation drills? How would I be notified in case of an emergency?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good child care providers make health and safety a priority. • Evacuation procedures should be posted and practiced on a monthly basis. • Babies need to sleep, be changed, and be fed according to their bodies' time clocks, not an imposed schedule. • Ways to decrease the spread of germs include routine handwashing using soap and water by the adults and the children (including babies!), regular sanitizing with a bleach/water solution for toys and surfaces, proper handling of food and bottles of formula or breast milk, and proper diapering. • All toys and equipment should be cleaned, sanitized and inspected for safety on a weekly basis (mouthed toys should be sanitized daily). • Diapers should be changed on a washable surface close to a sink for handwashing, but away from food and bottle preparation. • The caregiver should always see where children are and what they are doing, indoors and outdoors. • Parents should feel welcome at the child care program. You should feel comfortable with all of the adults who will be in contact with your child. • It is essential to do a thorough reference check, contacting current and past users of the child care program, as well as the licensing entity at county social services. • Drop in unannounced to compare what is actually happening at the child care program to your expectation for good care.
Are children taken off the premises? How and when would I be notified? How are children transported?				
What is your policy for administering medication?				
Are hands always washed before eating and after diapering? <i>Observe and take note if you see hands being washed.</i>				
Where will my baby's diaper be changed? How frequently do you do diaper changes?				
What precautions are taken to reduce the spread of illness? What do you use to sanitize?				
How are children supervised at all times?				
Can I drop in anytime unannounced?				
Who are all of the people who would be around my child? Are they screened? May I meet them?				
Is your license posted? Would I be informed if you were out of compliance with the child care rules?				
Can you provide me with contact information for references?				
Space & Materials				
<i>Observe and take note if the space looks clean, safe and comfortable.</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children need enough space to work on projects and participate in activities both indoors and outdoors. • Child-sized furniture encourages independence in children. • Babies should not be confined to carseats, swings, or bouncy seats, and should not be allowed to sleep in these objects. • Children should be checked on regularly during naps. • Year-round outdoor activities provide a change of pace, fresh air (which decreases the spread of illness), as well as exposure to nature and the larger community. • Children learn through using play materials that are of interest to them and that challenge their minds and bodies without frustrating them. • A variety of books should be available for all children to use on their own, in addition to being read to daily, individually and in groups.
Where will the children wash, sleep, play and eat? Are babies always put to sleep on their back on a firm, flat surface in a crib or playpen?				
How often do you take the children outdoors?				
Are there areas for quiet play, as well as active play?				
Are items displayed at the child's level so the child can easily choose toys and materials to play with? How do you decide which toys are appropriate?				

Activities & Experiences	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Best Practices:
Describe a typical day in your program. What activities are children involved in?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children develop independence and responsibility when allowed to make choices about what they want to do. They need activities that develop thinking skills, large motor (running, jumping, riding trikes), and fine motor skills (drawing, writing, putting toys or puzzles together). • American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV viewing for children under two years old, and for older children, no more than 1-2 hours per day of educational, non-violent programs. Frequent use of video games and computer time replaces activities that contribute to healthy development and increases the risk for obesity.
Tell me how you plan activities to promote my child's development.				
How much screen time (TV, computer, video games) is typical?				
Relationships & Interactions				Best Practices:
<i>Observe how the caregiver responds to the children.</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm, loving care is needed for all children. • A skilled provider is patient and gives children time to adjust from one activity to the next. • Child care provider involves the children in setting fair rules and limits, and is clear and consistent. • A variety of guidance techniques are used, such as sticking to a daily routine or schedule, redirection, and positive reinforcement, which helps children feel ready to take on new challenges and learn new skills. • Physical punishment, belittling or shaming are never allowed. • A skilled provider asks open-ended questions, encouraging a lot of language and extended learning. • Good communication between parents and providers is essential so that the caregiver can give individualized care to your child. • Talking at the beginning and end of the day is very helpful. • Many providers use daily communication forms to inform parents of their child's routines, mood and activities.
What is your policy on guidance and discipline?				
What are the rules and how do the children know what the rules are?				
How do you settle disputes between children?				
What are your feelings on wetting, thumb-sucking, pacifiers, finishing meals, biting, etc.?				
Ask "what if?" questions. (What if my child hits you? What if my child bites another child? What if my child won't take his nap?...)				
Tell me about your experiences caring for children. Do you have a philosophy on child rearing?				
Can children bring a special item from home, such as a toy or blanket?				
Please explain your written policies and contract.				
How will we build effective communication?				
How would any dispute between us be settled?				
Are parents encouraged to become involved with the program? How?				
Professional Development				Best Practices:
How many hours of training are you required to have? How many hours did you attend in the past year? <i>Get specific information on the caregivers who will be with your child.</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good caregivers are eager to learn about child development through books, professional journals, and training. • Research shows that the more child development training a caregiver has, the better care your child is likely to receive. • Training should include a variety of topic areas – how children grow, learn, and form relationships. • Training certificates are often displayed for parents to view in a prominent area.
Tell me what you've learned in recent workshops. How will you keep me updated on your training?				
How long do you anticipate providing child care?				
If you are considering enrolling your child in a program, ask for references. (See sample questions on page 4)				

After the interview, contact county social services to find out if the provider has been in compliance with the rules. Child Care Aware® can supply you with the phone number.

Reference Checks

It is important to talk to the families who have used the child care program in the past. Ask your potential provider for names of families who have or are using their services. When you call the provider's references, give your name and explain that you received their name as a reference from the caregiver. Ask if they have a few minutes to answer some questions and if they can comment on their satisfaction with the care their children received.

Some possible questions for references:

- How did you feel about the caregiver's relationship with your child?
- What are some strengths of the program?
- What are some weaknesses?
- Were you satisfied with the quality of care provided for your children?
- Were you satisfied with the group size and adult-to-child ratio?
- How long did you use this caregiver or program?
- Would you use this caregiver again or recommend him/her to a friend?

Making Your Decision

Look at all of the information that you have gathered and call the providers back if you have any unanswered questions. It is OK to be a choosy parent.

- What is my overall impression of each program?
- Will my child be happy here?
- Do I feel comfortable when I'm here? Do my children feel comfortable?
- How would my child fit in with the routine and with the other children?
- Do the people seem to care about my child as an individual?
- Do I feel welcome and valued?
- Am I going to feel comfortable leaving my child each day?
- Do I have any doubts?
- What did the references tell me?

Trust Your Instincts

If you are not comfortable with what you have found – keep looking. Call Child Care Aware® of North Dakota for a list of additional names. If a program that you like is full, ask to put your name on a waiting list. This may be an option for you if things don't work out with your current program.


Back Up Child Care

All child care providers have emergencies and may also take vacation days. It is wise to have an alternate child care arrangement ready when these situations arise.

- Would one of the providers you interviewed be a good back-up provider?
- Do you have a relative or friend available for emergency situations?
- Do you need to contact Child Care Aware® of North Dakota for a list of providers who may care for your child as a back-up arrangement?

Need More Information?

Visit Child Care Aware® of North Dakota online or call our office to request a Parent Handbook or get more information to help you with your child care search.

 800-997-8515

 referral@ndchildcare.org

 www.ndchildcare.org

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Child Care Aware® of North Dakota is a program of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota.