

Finding and Using **Child Care** in North Dakota







ChildCare Aware® OF NORTH DAKOTA

www.ndchildcare.org



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Child Care Aware® of North Dakota has developed this guide to help you make an informed decision about your child care options.

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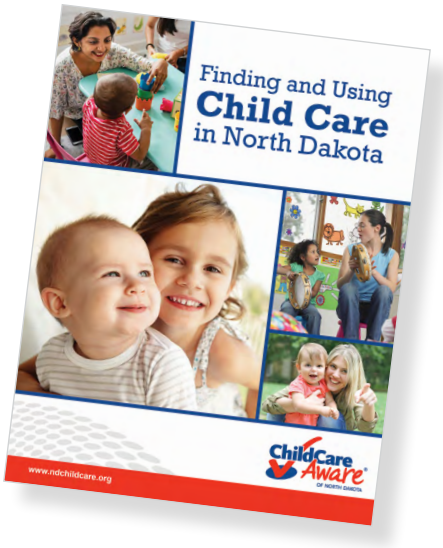
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Things to Consider Before You Start

Choosing child care is an important decision. Take some time to consider these questions before you begin your search for child care.

Licensed or unlicensed?
North Dakota requires all people who care for more than five children to be licensed. Licensing is a form of consumer protection that assesses the safety of a child care setting, but it is not a guarantee of quality.
(See Child Care Licensing in North Dakota on page 2.)

How much can I afford to pay for child care?
Consider how paying for child care will impact your family's budget. (See Paying for Child Care page 6.)

What care setting do I want for my child?
There are two basic types of licensed child care settings - in the caregiver's home or in a non-residential facility. Both settings can provide quality care for your child and must follow square footage and child-to-caregiver ratios.

What days/hours per week will I need care?
Keep in mind that a child care provider is operating a service business. They can set their hours of operation and implement opening/closing policies for holidays and vacation days.

Contact Child Care Aware® for help along the way

800-997-8515 (Option 1)

referral@ndchildcare.org

www.ndchildcare.org/parents

Child Care Licensing in North Dakota

A child care provider in North Dakota must be licensed if they care for six or more children or more than three infants. License types are determined by where the care will take place, the ages of the children and how many will be cared for at that location.

To become licensed, applicants submit paperwork followed by an inspection conducted by a Licensing Specialist. The application and inspection are then submitted to the North Dakota Department of Human Services, the agency that issues licenses and regulates child care.

Licensed providers have their program inspected two times per year at a minimum and must renew their license annually. Licensing is not a guarantee of quality, but it does reduce the risk of children being cared for in an unsafe environment.

A licensed child care provider must display their current license and allow parents to verify that their program is currently licensed and in compliance with state child care regulations.

Licensed Family Child Care

Family child care is provided in the **caregiver's home**. All children, infant through school age, can be cared for together.

Licensed family child care providers can **care for up to 7 children, plus 2 additional school-age children**. A provider's own children under age 12 must be included in the total.

There are additional guidelines that limit the number of infants/toddlers that can be cared for under Family Child Care License.

- A family provider can care for up to 3 children under the age of 24 months with additional children over 24 months OR
- A provider can care for up to 4 children under the age of 24 months when not caring for additional older children.
- Two school-age children can be added to either scenario.

Licensed Group Child Care

Providers with a group license may provide care in their **home or in a non-residential building**.

Up to 30 children can be cared for under a group license if they fulfill square-footage requirements, staffing ratios and local ordinances.

Providers with group licenses have additional care providers on staff to meet required adult-child ratios.

Licensed Center Child Care

Child care programs that care for **more than 30 children** must be licensed as a center. Centers provide care in a **non-residential building**.

Children are typically cared for in age-based groups. Centers employ a staff of child care providers that are managed by a center director.

Centers can be a privately-owned, for-profit business or a non-profit entity that is governed by a board of directors.

Licensed Preschool Programs

Licensed preschools provide part-time care for children who are 2 to 5 years old for the purpose of educational and social experiences. Hours are limited to three hours a day.

Licensed School-Age Care

Licensed school-age programs provide care exclusively for school-age children before and after school, during school holidays and summer vacations.

Unlicensed Care

Caring for five or fewer children, with no more than three under the age of 24 months, without a license falls into two categories.

- **Legal Unlicensed** providers caring for five or fewer children. They have no legal obligation to follow state childcare rules, they do not have to have their homes inspected or comply with county social services to investigate complaints.
- **Self-Declared Unlicensed** providers sign a document promising to follow limited rules and agree to background checks and complete pre-approved health and safety training. Self-declared providers can enroll children whose care is subsidized by federal financial assistance programs. Licensing Specialists inspect their programs prior to approval, once annually, and to investigate complaints as appropriate.

For more information

ND Dept. of Health Licensing Information and Regulations - http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childcare/info/

Licensing Specialists - https://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childcare/docs/nd-ecs-map.pdf

Characteristics of Quality Care

Quality care goes beyond the basic health and safety requirements of licensing. When searching for child care look for programs that excel in the following areas.

Space & Materials

Quality programs offer environments that allow children to explore, take things apart, create, draw and develop their natural curiosity. The more children can touch materials and play with others, the more they remember and learn. Children should have room to move both inside and outside. At least some of the furnishings should be child size. Toys and equipment should be at a child's level so they can access them by themselves.

Activities & Experiences

Look for a program that incorporates engaging, hands-on activities. Ask providers how they vary activities for infants, toddlers and preschoolers at different stages. Look for experiences that go beyond just memorizing numbers, colors and letters such as sorting shapes, organizing by size and understanding what comes next. Activities should be challenging, yet not frustrating.

Relationships & Interactions

Quality caregivers nurture close, positive relationships with children and attend to your child's unique needs. They consider their child care business as an extension of your family, supporting your goals and supplementing care when you cannot be with your child. Care provided in smaller groups allows children the adult attention they need. When caregivers develop warm and caring relationships with children, it promotes and models positive social and emotional interactions.

Professional Development

Look for a provider who loves to learn and actively tries to increase their understanding and skill in caring for children. Research indicates that caregivers who consider themselves professionals and who regularly attend trainings provide a higher level of care than untrained providers. Ask providers what kinds of training they have attended and how that training impacts their caregiving practices.

There are about

1,825 DAYS

from birth until school starts



Bright & Early Programs Know Every Day Matters

Shop for Child Care with Confidence

Bright & Early North Dakota takes the guesswork out of identifying high quality child care and early education programs. Use our research-based quality ratings to spot the programs that demonstrate they go above and beyond to prepare children for school and life.

It's Easy to Get Started

Visit www.ndchildcare.org and click on the FIND CHILD CARE link to begin. Look for the Bright & Early quality icons to identify participating programs.



Five Steps to Finding & Choosing Child Care

Finding the right care for your child requires an investment of time. Follow these five steps to help you make an informed decision about your child's care.

1. Contact Child Care Aware®

Child Care Aware® maintains a database of regulated child care providers in North Dakota. You can access this list online 24/7 or talk one-on-one with a Child Care Aware® referral specialist at no cost. Child Care Aware® also provides other helpful resources to guide your child care search.

- **Do an Online Search**
  Click on the "Find Child Care" link at www.ndchildcare.org. Enter information about your family's child care needs to generate a customized referral list of child care programs that match your criteria. You can then view details about programs listed on your referral list.
- **Talk with a Referral Specialist**
  Child Care Aware® referral specialists offer personalized assistance to answer your questions and address your specific needs. They can provide you with a customized referral list of child care programs and offer alternative solutions if you are having problems finding care.

2. Conduct phone interviews

Call the child care providers from your customized referral list to determine if you want to schedule an on-site interview and tour. You will want to make calls immediately after receiving the referral list because vacancies in quality programs fill quickly. Review the Child Care Checklist* for questions you may want to ask during the interview.

3. Visit child care programs

Visit and visit again. You may want to do several visits at different times of day (nap time, meals, or activity time) to get a more complete picture of the program's daily routine. As the consumer, you have the right to gather as much information as you need to make an informed decision.

The Child Care Aware® Child Care Checklist* provides a list of questions to ask and tips on what to look for when visiting a child care program.

Don't be afraid to ask for details and specifics. Qualified providers will be happy to respond to your questions openly, and honestly. In general, look for a loving child care provider who enjoys talking and interacting with the children.

Ask about their qualifications, special training, and past child care experience. Also ask about the qualifications of other adults who will interact with your child.

Look at the space through the eyes of your child. "Is there space to put my things? Do they have toys that I will like? Is there space for me to get away, play quietly and be by myself? Can I go outside every day?"

Use the "more is less" approach when observing the ratio of children to adults. A low child-to-adult ratio is particularly important for infants and toddlers.

4. Check references

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.

The Child Care Checklist* provides a list of questions to ask when interviewing references.

5. Make your decision

After you have researched your child care options, ask yourself:

- *How do I feel about the program?*
- *Is this a pleasant place?*
- *Do the people seem to care about my child and me as individuals?*
- *Am I going to feel comfortable leaving my child each day?*
- *Will I feel that I can trust the caregiver to provide for my child while I am absent?*

Finally, when you decide to enroll your child in a home or facility, request a two-to-four week trial period to ensure that the situation is working well for all concerned: for you, for the caregiver, and most importantly, for your child.

* Child Care Checklist is available at www.ndchildcare.org/parents/choose.html

Paying for Child Care

Child care is often one of a family's biggest expenses.

Juggling child care costs and a parent's earnings can be especially challenging for low income families who need child care in order to go to work, while at the same time need to use some of the money they earn to pay for care.



Child Care Assistance Program

This program helps working families and those attending school pay for child care. The level of assistance is based on a family's income. Many families qualify, but don't realize it. To be eligible, providers must be at least 18 years old, and be licensed, registered, self-declared or an approved relative.

Learn more about the Child Care Assistance Program at http://www.ndchildcare.org/parents/cost/ccap.html

Earned Income Tax Credit

This is a refundable federal tax credit for low to moderate income working individuals and families - especially those who are raising children. Those who qualify, receive a larger tax refund or pay less in federal taxes. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is administered by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

Learn more about the Earned Income Tax Credit http://www.irs.gov/Credits-&-Deductions/Individuals/Earned-Income-Tax-Credit

Children With Disabilities

Contact a Child Care Aware® Inclusion Specialist if you have questions or need help.

If you have a child with disabilities, tour the child care program while it is in operation. During your visit, share information about your child and discuss any special services, modifications or adaptations that may be needed. Assure the potential provider that you and/or professionals can help prepare them to care for your child. Look for programs that are willing to learn.

If care cannot be implemented by making reasonable accommodations, contact Child Care Aware® Inclusion Support Services to discuss possible strategies and explore other community resources.

Learn more about Inclusion Services https://ndchildcare.org/providers/inclusion.html



Concerns and Complaints

If a disagreement or a concern arises, meet with the provider to talk about it.

Schedule a time to talk with your child care provider when children are not present. Contact Child Care Aware® if you need assistance in addressing family-provider challenges. Our staff is trained to offer consultation to families and help you address challenges. If complaints cannot be resolved, Child Care Aware® will assist you in finding a new child care program.

Contact the Licensing Specialist in your area if you suspect a child care program is violating licensing regulations or if children are in danger.

County social service offices will respect your privacy. They appreciate the opportunity to address parent concerns and corrective action will be taken if a violation is found.



Preparing for That First Day

New experiences can be overwhelming. These tips will help you prepare for that first day and establish a good working relationship with your child care provider.

Ease the Anxiety

Some children adjust to a new child care situation almost immediately, others might take several months. Follow your child's lead. Give them the time they need to adjust. Here are some tips to ease their anxiety.

- Act positively about this new experience. Your child will pick up on your feelings.
- Plan a few short visits before you begin full-time to help your child ease into this new experience.
- Talk about and practice your new routine. Allow plenty of time for drop-off and be as consistent as possible on your pick-up time.
- Say good-bye the same way each day. Sneaking out is not advised. Explain that you are leaving and when you will return. It is common for a child to cry or fuss when you leave. To feel more at ease, call for a status report when you get to work.
- Take time each day to talk with your provider about your child's daily schedule, sleeping routines, eating habits, etc.
- Ask your child to describe the events of their day. Note things they enjoyed and things that were stressful for them.
- Make sure your child gets proper rest and nutrition. New experiences can be exhausting.
- Read stories to your child that deal with feelings and new surroundings.
  - *A Kissing Hand for Chester Raccoon*
  - *Maisy Goes to Preschool*
  - *Bye Bye Time*
  - *Llama Llama Misses Momma*
  - *Pete the Cat: Rocking in My School Shoes*
- Ask if your child can bring a favorite toy, blanket, or family photo with them. Knowing that item is in their cubby or close by can help a child feel more secure.

Working With Your Child Care Provider

A child's care is enhanced when families and child care providers work to build a strong working relationship.

Here are some ways you can build a positive partnership with your child care provider.

Follow Policies and Procedures

When you enroll, your child care provider will ask you to review their program's policies and procedures. These written agreements, many of which are required by state licensing, will include

- Polices regarding hours of operation, care fees, payment due dates, overtime fees, and vacation/ holiday payments
- Permission forms for transportation, medication administration and infant sleep positioning
- Procedures for terminating care
- Exclusion guidelines for sick children

Read these documents carefully and ask questions if there is something that you don't understand. Be prepared to follow the policies and procedures.

Communicate Regularly

Two-way communication and mutual respect are important components of a positive child care experience.

- Set aside a few minutes at the beginning or end of each day to talk with the caregiver about your child's day.
- Discuss concerns as they arise and negotiate solutions as soon as possible.
- Share information about family events that may impact your child's behavior such as a move, changes in sleeping or eating habits, exposure to a contagious disease, or the death of a family member or pet.
- Give advance notice of changes in your child's schedule. Call if you are running late and make arrangements in advance if you need to arrive early.
- Show appreciation and respect for your child care provider's profession and the service they provide to your child, family and community.

Provide Requested Items

- Dress your child appropriately for their day, including warm and cold weather clothing items they will need for outdoor play.
- Provide and restock changes of clothing, diapers, formula etc. as requested.
- Return signed permission forms promptly.

Strive to Keep Everyone Healthy

Children who are in close and constant contact with each other in a child care setting are bound to get sick. Young children are especially vulnerable because of their immature immune systems.

Families and child care providers need to work together to reduce the spread of colds, flu and other illnesses.

What child care providers need to do:

- Follow healthy practices when diapering and preparing food to prevent the spread of germs and infections.
- Disinfect/sanitize toys and equipment on a regular basis and do routine cleaning to maintain a safe and healthy environment.
- Wash their hands before food preparation, before and after diapering or toileting a child, after wiping a runny nose, and after handling pets, etc.
- Oversee children's hand washing as they start their day in the child care setting, after toileting, and before meals.
- Distribute illness policies to all families upon enrollment and enforce illness exclusion policies.
- Alert other parents if a child in the program has been diagnosed with a contagious disease.

What families need to do:

- Assess your child for signs of illness before they arrive at child care and arrange for alternate care if the child is ill.
- Be available to pick up your child if they become ill during the day and cannot stay at child care.
- Keep your child's immunizations current and provide updated documents to your provider.
- Report contagious diseases to your child care provider within 24 hours of diagnosis.
- Work with your child's doctor and child care providers to develop a care plan for children with special health needs.



My Notes

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