

How to Choose a Child Care Provider

As a parent, what to do about child care is one of the most important decisions you will make. Many parents are concerned about leaving their child in the care of someone they don't know. These concerns are perfectly natural. The best way to feel more comfortable is to be well informed and select a child care provider you trust and that meets your needs.

Does Child Care Services select a provider for my children?

No. You choose the child care provider that will meet your needs. HCJFS has certified more than 1,000 child care homes and has contracts with more than 300 child care centers. You must select your provider from this large group to get help with your child care costs.

If you want to use a child care provider who does not have a contract or was not certified by HCJFS, let us know. Child Care Services will try to certify or contract with any provider you choose. Remember, not all providers can meet the requirements for certification or licensure and these requirements exist to help keep your children safe.

Are there different types of child care providers?

There are two types of providers, licensed child care centers and certified child care homes:

- A child care center is any facility that cares for more than six children at a time. Child care centers are licensed to operate by the State. If a licensed center is interested in a contract with HCJFS, they should call 946-1800.
- A child care home is a private residence certified to care for up to six children. Childcare homes are certified for health and safety by HCJFS. If any person is interested in being certified, she or he should call 946-1800.

What should I consider when deciding between a center and home?

There are several things to think about when choosing who will care for your children, such as:

Child Safety

Licensed centers and certified homes are required to meet health, fire and safety standards. All child care providers are inspected at least twice a year to make sure these standards are maintained.

The time of day and hours you will need care

Most child care centers are open Monday through Friday, from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Only a few child care centers are open evenings and weekends. More child care homes operate evenings and weekends.

Your child's age

Child care centers typically care for children between the ages of two and five. Very few centers care for infants. Many child care homes care for infants and children of all ages. Child care centers typically group children of the same age together. Childcare homes have children of all ages grouped together.

Illness

How flexible is your work schedule when your child is ill? Most child care centers cannot care for a child when they are ill. Most child care homes will continue to care for a mildly ill child.

Location

Your child care provider should be in a location that is convenient to you.

Education

A good child care provider or program can help your child's development. Both centers and homes can have excellent educational and enrichment programs.

What is a "Step Up to Quality" or star rating?

Step Up to Quality is a voluntary, three-star quality rating system created by the State (ODJFS). The ratings aim to improve the quality of early care and education programs in Ohio and better prepare children to be successful in school and in life. ODJFS awards step up to quality star ratings to child care centers that meet certain standards for teacher/child ratios and for education and training for teachers and administrators and a commitment to provide employee benefits to staff members.

What should I do to select a good child care provider?

Quality child care can be found in both homes and centers. Below are five steps we recommend parents take to select a good child care providers.

1. Look

Visit a number of child care centers and homes. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the home or center clean and comfortable?
- Does it appear safe? Look at the condition of the toys, play area, bathrooms, etc.
- Are there educational materials and activities for children your child's age?
- Are there toys that would interest your child?
- Ask to see where your child will eat, sleep and play

2. Listen

- Do the children and the provider or center staff sound happy?
- Is the conversation between children and staff respectful and calm?

3. Count

- Are there enough adults present to care for the children?

- How many children are with each adult? The fewer children for each adult, the better.

4. Ask

- How much training has the provider or staff had?
- What are the provider/center's discipline policies?
- Does the provider have references? A provider should be able to provide a list.

5. Be Informed

- Send for Inspection Reports and Complaint Investigation Dispositions. You can obtain copies of Inspection Reports and Complaint Dispositions for any licensed child care center or certified child care home by sending a written request.

○ **For Child Care Centers write to:**

Child Care Licensing
Ohio Dept of Job & Family Services
225 Pictoria Dr.
Cincinnati, OH 45246

○ **For Child Care Homes write to:**

Hamilton County Dept. of Job and Family Services
Child Care Provider Program
222 E. Central Pkwy.
Cincinnati, OH 45202

How do I locate potential providers?

A list of child care home providers certified by the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services is available at **HCJFS.ORG**. Click on the "**Services**" tab, then select **Child Care**. The **Home Provider Search** link will take you to the [HCJFS Home Care Provider List](#).

HCJFS.ORG also provides a link to a child care center search. Click on the "**Services**" tab, then select **Child Care**. The **Center Search** link will take you to the [ODJFS link for licensed child care centers](#).