



Parent Toolkit

A Guide to Finding the
Right Place for Your Child

A woman with glasses and a young girl are looking at a book together. The woman is on the right, wearing glasses and has her hand on the girl's shoulder. The girl is on the left, looking down at the book. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

You know your child. We know child care and early learning.

Your child needs quality experiences and care to grow and learn. Important brain development happens before your child's fifth birthday, so early experiences matter for a lifetime. The good news is that you are an expert on your child's needs. And you're not alone. Parent Aware helps families find the quality care and education their children need to succeed in school and life.

Parent Aware is your search partner. We work side-by-side with families, offering free tools and resources, like this toolkit, to help them make informed choices about high-quality care and education opportunities.

Use this toolkit to learn more and ask questions as you begin to contact and visit programs. Once you've found the right place for your child, use this toolkit for tips on staying involved and informed with your child's care to ensure it continues to be a good fit.

**If you have questions or want to do a new or updated search,
visit [ParentAware.org](https://www.parentaware.org) or call us at 888.291.9811.**

Table of Contents

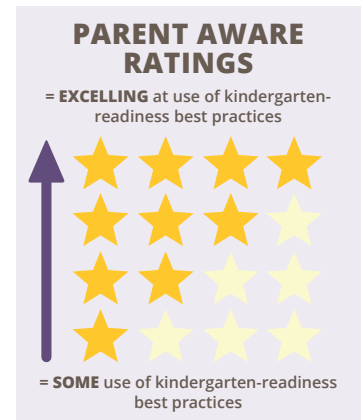
- About Parent Aware Ratings2
- Types of Care and Education Programs3
- Ratio and Group Sizes.....4
- Finding Care for Infants and Toddlers.....5
- Finding Care for a Child with Special Needs6
- Leaving Your Child at Home Alone8
- Paying for Care and Education 10
- Get Started: Steps to Choosing Care..... 11
- STEP 1: Reach Out** 12
- STEP 2: Visit Programs** 13
 - PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION** 13
 - RELATIONSHIPS WITH KIDS**..... 14
 - EDUCATION AND TRAINING**..... 15
 - PLANNED LEARNING ACTIVITIES** 16
 - HEALTH AND SAFETY** 18
 - WORKING WITH PARENTS**20
 - TRANSPORTATION IN CARE**22
- STEP 3: Check References and Records** 23
- STEP 4: Make Your Selection and Find Backup Care**25
- STEP 5: Introduce Your Child**27
- STEP 6: Stay Involved**28

About Parent Aware Ratings

PARENT AWARE STAR RATINGS allow families to easily identify child care and early education programs using research-based best practices to prepare children for kindergarten. Programs who volunteer to be Rated are going above and beyond health and safety requirements and have:

- Volunteered for extra, in-depth training
- Devoted themselves to strong, caring relationships with each child
- Adopted the latest approaches to keeping children’s learning on track
- Committed to daily activities and routines that help children learn

Participating programs receive a Rating of One, Two, Three or Four Stars. Each Rating builds on the previous, helping families easily identify how far a program has progressed in adopting these practices.



Learn more about what makes each Parent Aware Star Rating different by visiting ParentAware.org/learn/stars-defined/.

PARENT AWARE BEST PRACTICES FOR PREPARING CHILDREN FOR KINDERGARTEN

TEACHING AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

Curriculum. Program plans and implements developmentally appropriate learning experiences using a curriculum or bundle of curricula that cover all of the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIP) child development domains.

Play and interactions. Program implements learning experiences that provide purposeful play, peer and adult interaction, exploration, and skill development.

Learning and belonging. Program creates environment that supports a sense of belonging for each child and family.

Kindergarten transition support. Program supports children and families as children transition to kindergarten.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Respect and ongoing two-way communication. Program respects each families’ strengths, choices, and goals for their children. Information about children’s progress and curriculum is shared between the program and family.

Links families to services. Program provides families with links to services based on family’s strengths, resources, priorities and concerns.

ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD

Observation and assessment. Program learns more about each child through regular observation and formal assessment.

Assessment-based instruction. Program uses assessments to plan group and individualized instruction.

PROFESSIONALISM

Program leadership. Program leaders have specialized knowledge and skills to effectively lead an early care and education program.

Qualifications and development. Lead providers and lead teachers pursue and document educational achievements.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health and safety. Program establishes and maintains environment that ensures each child’s health and safety.

Nutrition and play. Program provides healthy meals and snacks that encourage healthy eating behaviors, and offers daily opportunities for active play.

Types of Care and Education Programs

Families have a list of program options to choose from when searching for child care and education. Our Parent Services team is ready to provide the additional information you may need to help you find the program type that best fits your needs.

Child Care Centers and Private Preschools

These programs are licensed through the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) or tribal human services agency and provide care and education for children in age-based groups, either for full days or part days. These programs are often in free-standing buildings, businesses, community centers, or places of worship.

Public School Pre-Kindergarten Programs

In-school or School Readiness programs are administered by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). They are “license exempt,” meaning they are legally unlicensed programs able to provide care without having a license from DHS. Public schools, including charter schools, may offer many of these program options for children with families, including early childhood education and extended day, Family Literacy, and School Readiness programs.

Family Child Care Homes

Family Child Care (FCC) Homes are licensed through the county or tribal human services agency. These professionals may care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in their homes. Some family child care programs are also provided in businesses, places of worship, and schools. Many family child care professionals offer planned play and scheduled activities that help children learn.

School-Age Care Programs

School-Age Care Programs care for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. They can be offered in a provider’s home or in a center, like a school, community center, YMCA/YWCA, or park and recreation program. These programs may be licensed or license-exempt, depending on the facility. School-age care is not eligible for a Parent Aware Star Rating.

Early Head Start (prenatal to age 3) and Head Start (3–5-year-olds)

Early Head Start and Head Start and their child care partners serve young children from low-income eligible families. Programs may be based in centers, schools, or family child care homes. These programs have comprehensive services that support the mental, social, and emotional development of children from prenatal to age 5. In addition, programs provide health, nutrition, social, and other services. Program services are responsive to each child and family ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage. Early Head Start and Head Start encourages the role of parents as their child’s first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community.

Ratio and Group Sizes

Many parents have heard about the benefits of small class sizes for school-age children, but do you know about the importance of “ratios” in child care? Ratios refer to the number of children cared for by one adult in child care. This matters because young children need and deserve a lot of one-on-one attention from caring adults. Programs caring for too many children are unsafe and put your child at risk.

Recommended ratios vary depending on the number of adults working in a care setting and the type of license they have. Many child care programs opt to care for fewer children than they're legally allowed to enroll because it allows them to deliver better care. To learn exactly how many children should be cared for in your child care program, visit childcareawaremn.org or call 888.291.9811 to speak to a trained Parent Service Specialist.



Finding Care for Infants & Toddlers

You may be feeling anxious as you consider child care for your young child. You understand that the right child care professional will be an important partner in nurturing your child and introducing him or her to the world. Consider the information and questions below as you choose and use care for your children.

Relationships matter! Children need to create a close connection with their child care professionals. They need to know that this new person will give them what they need. This is especially true for babies and toddlers as their early relationships teach them to trust the world.

- Does the child care professional talk to children throughout the day?
- Does the child care professional respond when children are crying or asking for her attention?
- Does your child care professional offer written reports on your child's day and is he open to regularly discussing how your child is doing at home and child care?

5

Caring for young children is demanding work that requires special knowledge and skills.

- Does the child care professional have special training in caring for infants and toddlers?
- Is the child care professional experienced in caring for young children?

Every baby and toddler has individual needs when it comes to napping and eating.

- What is the routine for infants and toddlers?
- How flexible can your child care professional be in order meet each child's needs?
- Are you welcome anytime your child is in care? If you are breastfeeding, is the child care professional willing to store breast milk and/or allow you to visit the program during feeding times?

Children, like all of us, have good days and difficult days.

- What is the caregiver's approach to managing difficult days?
- What will the caregiver do when a child becomes upset or sad?
- What is the approach used when a child has a difficult time settling in during naptime?
- Are you comfortable with the child care professional's approach to your child's challenging days?



TIP

The majority of brain development takes place before age 5, so the quality of care your child receives makes a big difference!

Finding Care for a Child with Special Needs

As you search for care for your child with special needs, it's important to remember the unique gifts your child will bring to the program you choose. Use the following information and questions as you consider your care options.

Relationships matter.

Both you and your child need to create a connection with your new child care professional. Your child's comfort will help him or her develop social skills and make friends.

6

- Are you comfortable discussing your child's special needs and individual likes and dislikes with the child care professional? *It's okay to wait to have this discussion until you feel comfortable with a child care professional and think their program would be a good one for your child. When you do open up, remember, they are better able to do their job with a complete understanding of your child.*
- Is the child care professional warm and welcoming to each child?
- Does the child care professional listen to each child when they have an idea to share or need help?
- Are the children encouraged to help each other?
- Are all children included in group activities?
- Will the child care professionals communicate with you and work closely with you to ensure your child is doing well each day?

Child care can work for each child.

Children are successful when a child care program is tailored to meet their developmental needs.

- Does the program offer predictable routines, group activities and free time?
- Has the program partnered with other agencies to meet a child's individual needs? Has this worked well?
- Are all areas of the program accessible to your child?
- Is the child care professional willing to be flexible with his expectations and routine in ways that will help your child?
- Will the group size work for your child? *Your child's needs may be more easily met in a smaller group size for part or all of the day.*

Child care professionals need training and understanding

Caring for children is demanding work that requires special knowledge and skills.

- Does the child care professional have experience working with children with special needs?
- Has the child care professional taken training in the area of special needs?

Transitions are temporary.

Your child may take a few weeks or months to settle into his new care setting. This is perfectly natural, though it can be stressful to manage. Don't give up!

- Does your child care professional understand your child's feelings about change and transition?
- Does your child care professional have a plan in place to manage any challenging behavior during this time and to help your child become more comfortable?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC) provides information and consultations to families who have children with special needs or challenging behaviors.

651.603.6265 • inclusivechildcare.org

Help Me Grow helps families identify their child's developmental stage and address any concerns with additional resources and support.

866.693.4769 • helpmegrowmn.org





Leaving Your Child at Home Alone

You know your children and young adults better than anyone. It can still be difficult to know when they are ready to take on an important new responsibility like staying home alone. As you consider this decision, remember to use the information and our checklist as a guide only. It is important to consider these alongside what you know about your child and what your child tells you about his or her comfort level with staying home alone.

County social service agencies generally recommend that children under 12 years of age not be left home alone. Before leaving children under 12 at home, parents should carefully consider their options and their child's abilities. Parents should also think carefully about leaving children in their early teens at home alone. A close look at children's readiness to be on their own can be followed by open conversations with children about the responsibilities involved in staying home alone.

Please note, school-age child care programs may be available in your community. Parent Aware can share information on these programs. Please also check your local community education calendars to find home alone classes, additional services, and activities for school-age children and youth.

HOME ALONE CHECKLIST

Please use the checklist below as you consider whether your child is ready to stay home alone. Questions that you are unsure how to answer or that you answer with “no” can highlight areas for discussion or planning within your family.

Yes No

- Does your child know when and how to call 9-1-1? Can your child say and dial your home phone number and does she or he know your home address?
- Does your child know basic first aid and where first aid supplies are kept in the home?
- Can your child show you how he or she would carefully identify someone coming to the door when home alone?
- Does your child know how to reach you or other responsible adults by phone? Do you have a list of important and emergency phone numbers near the phone and within your child’s reach?
- Can your child name five household safety rules for your home? (ex. Use of stove or microwave, handling a delivery, or a gas smell in the house.)
- Has your child shown an interest in staying home alone? Would your child feel safe? Test this out by “practicing” with the children while you are still at home. Act out or talk through a few challenging situations that may arise while children are on their own.
- Will your child tell you if something happened while he or she was at home alone that made him or her feel uncomfortable in any way?
- Have you created a plan for your child’s day or time at home? For example, does your child have a few chores or homework tasks to tackle while at home? Could your child set out a goal of reading a few chapters in a favorite book or working on finishing a creative project? As you create a plan for the day, remember to make time for fun.

Paying for Care and Education

The cost of care can be a significant barrier for families searching for quality programs for their child. Fortunately, there are several financial aid programs and tax relief plans that can help make high-quality care more affordable.

By planning ahead, you can improve your chances of finding a quality program at a cost you can afford. Families may use the list below as a financial aid guide. Remember, you can call Parent Aware at 888.291.9811 or visit ParentAware.org/learn/paying-for-care-and-education/.

1. Plan ahead.

Finding resources to help pay for quality child care can take some time. Some financial aid programs have waiting lists.

2. Use a screening tool.

Use the Financial Aid Screening Tool from Bridge to Benefits (mn.bridgetobenefits.org) to find out if your family is eligible for financial help. Some counties have waiting lists for this program. Find and contact your county or tribal human services agency at edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-0005-ENG.

3. Early Learning Scholarships.

Available statewide, Early Learning Scholarships help families afford high-quality child care and early education programs. Families must meet low-income eligibility requirements and have a child between the ages of 3 and 4 in a program with a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rating. For more information, call Parent Aware at 888.291.9811 or visit the Early Learning Scholarships page on the Minnesota Department of Education website at education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/early/sch/.

4. Military benefits.

To learn more about the available benefits, parents and guardians in the military can visit childcareaware.org/military-child-care-assistance-programs/ or call Child Care Aware® of America at 800.424.2246, option 6. Child Care Aware® of America's military programs are open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. EST.

5. Student options.

Income eligible students with young children needing child care while they attend postsecondary classes can contact their college's financial aid office for information about on-campus child care options and the Minnesota Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program. Learn more about the Minnesota Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program at ohe.state.mn.us/mPg.cfm?pageID=348.

6. Local community support.

Ask child care and early education programs you are considering and local community service organizations (like the United Way) if they offer any financial aid.

7. Employer assistance.

Ask your employer if they offer Dependent Care Assistance Accounts or on-site care.

8. Tax credits.

Once you find child care, file for tax credits on your annual Minnesota and Federal tax returns, whether or not you expect to owe taxes.

Get Started: Steps to Choosing Care

This basic step-by-step guide outlines a path to successfully find the right program for your child. You'll find additional details about each step throughout this toolkit, including tips and questions to ask each program. We've also provided a place for you to write notes and check boxes to record responses.

1. Reach out:

Contact child care and early education programs to check for openings. It's a great opportunity to introduce yourself and ask questions. [Page 12.](#)

2. Visit programs:

Use the checklist to make the most of your visits. Additional resources in this toolkit will help you develop a list of questions for each program. [Pages 13-22.](#)

3. Check references and records:

Request references from families who are currently using the program you are considering and several who have used the program in the past. A clean health and safety record is also important, so take time to review the program's licensing information. [Page 23.](#)

4. Make your selection:

Be sure to confirm your start date with your chosen program. Call programs you are not selecting, but still trust, to ask them if they are available to provide back-up care. [Page 25.](#)

5. Introduce your child:

A little planning will go a long way in helping your child transition to a new program. Ask the program about steps they would recommend. [Page 27.](#)

6. Stay involved:

It's important to regularly evaluate your choice of care. [Page 28.](#)

STEP 1: Reach Out

Use telephone interviews to check for openings and begin conversations with child care and early education programs. Introduce yourself and use the sample questions. Think through any other questions to add. For example, if your child is allergic to animals, ask about pets in the home.

Questions to Ask:

- Does your program have a Parent Aware Rating?
- Is there an opening in your program for a __ year-old child?
- How soon is the space available?
- How many children do you care for?
- How long have you cared for children?
- What hours/days are you open?
- Do you provide transportation?
 - To which schools/activities?
 - Is there an additional fee?
- Is your program smoke-free 24-hours-a-day?
- What are your rates?
- Do you charge other fees such as a deposit, registration, or field trip fee?

NOTES:

TIP

Licensed programs must stay within state rules for the number of children in their care at any one time, based on the child's age, adult/child ratios, and space available. See page 4 for more details.

STEP 2: Visit Programs

PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

Once you've narrowed down your search to a few programs that could be a good fit for your child, set up a time to visit each program and arrange an interview.

Program 1

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Visit Date: _____ Time: _____

Program 2

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Visit Date: _____ Time: _____

Program 3

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Visit Date: _____ Time: _____

You may want to schedule two visits or conversations with programs you are considering. You can begin by talking one-on-one with each child care professional. A second visit gives you a chance to see the staff in action with the children and introduce your child to the care professional. It's important to meet with all professionals who will be providing direct care to your child.

TIP



RELATIONSHIPS WITH KIDS

Questions to Ask:

How do you deal with difficult behavior? *Adults should focus on the positive and redirect behavior rather than yelling or using other negative punishments.*

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

How does your program celebrate children's unique backgrounds and individuality?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Are children watched at all times, including when they are sleeping?

1 2 3

14



TIP

Changes in staff can be challenging for children as they depend upon the relationships they create at child care. For center-based programs, ask: How often does your staff change? How often has your staff changed in the last year?

Are simple safety rules made clear to the children?

1 2 3

Are there enough staff members to supervise all children (read more about adult-to-child ratios on page 4)?

1 2 3

Things to Look for:

Adults are warm and welcoming.

1 2 3

Adults pay individual attention to each child.

1 2 3

Adults know each child's likes and dislikes.

1 2 3

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The following are good questions to ask the teacher or provider who will be caring for your child:

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What are you doing to keep your learning current?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What training have you taken recently that will help you care for my child?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What classes will you take next?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Are you a Parent Aware Star-Rated Program? If not, do you plan to get involved with Parent Aware?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Is your program accredited? *Accreditation means that this program has been recognized by a leading national organization as a provider of excellent care.*

1 2 3

PLANNED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Questions to Ask:

Are there daily or weekly lesson plans available? May I see a sample of the plan?

1 2 3

Do you use a curriculum to plan learning activities? If so, what is it and what is unique about it?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

16

How often do children play outside? For how long?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What do infants do while older children are outside?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Do you go outside year-round?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

How will younger and older children be included in these activities?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Please describe what a typical day looks like in your program.

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

How do you tailor your activities with the needs and progress of each child in mind?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

When will my child be read to?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Things to Look for:

Look for specific areas for different kinds of play (blocks, puzzles, art, dress-up, etc.).

1 2 3

Be sure your children can reach toys that are right for their age.

1 2 3

Children should be read to at least twice a day and should be encouraged to read or explore books on their own.

TIP



HEALTH AND SAFETY

Questions to Ask:

Is there always someone present who has current CPR and first aid training?

1 2 3



TIP

All licensed child care programs in Minnesota must meet specific licensing and training requirements in the areas of CPR and First Aid. It's important to ask programs about their licensing and training requirements in these critical areas and explain how staff meets these requirements.

18

What meals and snacks are provided? Are they included in your fees? May I look at a weekly menu?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Do adults and children wash their hands regularly (after using the bathroom, changing diapers, eating, etc.)?

1 2 3

Are diaper changing surfaces cleaned and disinfected after each use?

1 2 3

Is there a plan to follow if a child is injured, sick or lost?

1 2 3

Are first aid kits on hand?

1 2 3

Will you tell me about your policy and practices around immunizations? Are all children immunized?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____



TIP

Parents should know their child care professionals well. They should also get to know anyone else in the program who comes in contact with their children, whether or not they are directly providing care.

How do you ensure that children are given the correct medications?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Will everyone who comes in contact with my child receive a background check, including those who may be living in a family child care professional's home?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What is your plan for responding to an emergency (fire, flood, etc.)?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Safe Sleep Questions About Infants:

Are babies always placed on their backs to sleep?

1 2 3

Do you always use a firm crib mattress covered in a fitted sheet for infant's nap times?

1 2 3

Do you keep cribs clear of blankets, toys, pillows, and any other soft objects?

1 2 3

May I see the nap space?

1 2 3

To reduce the risk of sleep-related causes of infant death, like Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), the programs you're considering should be using Safe Sleep best practices.



Things to Look for:

The outdoor play space looks safe and the swings and slides are the correct size for your child's age.

1 2 3

The play equipment is in good condition and is placed on a soft surface such as sand, mulch or rubber matting.

1 2 3

WORKING WITH PARENTS

Questions to Ask:

Will I be welcome any time my child is in care?

1 2 3

Do you offer backup care options when you're sick or on vacation, or should I make other arrangements?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

20

How do you use parent feedback in planning or when you're considering a change?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

How will you track my child's learning and development?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What type of information will you collect about my child's progress?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Will I receive samples of or hear stories about my child's play and learning? When will you share these with me?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____



TIP

It's important to talk with care professionals about your child's routines, your family's background and interests, and how you prefer information be shared with you.

How can families take part in your program? What types of activities or events do you offer families?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Will I be given a copy of the program's policies? Will these policies include information on holidays, family, and child care professional vacations?

1 2 3

Will I be given a contract signed by the care professional?

1 2 3

Are daily check-ins with parents encouraged?

1 2 3

Will I receive a daily log of my child's day (for infants)?

1 2 3

TRANSPORTATION IN CARE



TIP

If your child care professional will be regularly driving your children home, to appointments, or to fun outings, there are a few extra considerations to make. You want to be sure your child is safe and supervised whether they're napping, playing, or riding in their caregiver's vehicle. All licensed child care programs in Minnesota must meet specific licensing and training requirements in the area of transporting children. It's important to ask programs about their licensing and training requirements in this critical area and explain how staff meets these requirements.

22

Ask your child care professional:

Do you have a valid driver's license? May I see it?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Do you have current auto and liability insurance?

1 2 3

Have you received safety seat training? How recently?

This is training to ensure children's safety seats are installed and used properly. All children should be secured in an appropriate car seat or have their own seat belt. Training is required every five years.

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Will you carry a cell phone with you when transporting my child?

This is a good idea in case of emergency.

1 2 3

How will you manage the children while driving?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

How many children will be in the car at one time?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Will anyone driving my child have a valid driver's license and a background check?

1 2 3

I want to be sure my child is not left alone in the car. How do you arrange your travel plans to be sure this is the case?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____



STEP 3: Check References and Records

It's a good idea to request references from families who are currently using the care program and several who have used the program in the past. It's also important to speak to parents with children in the age range of your children. This is because some care professionals are especially skilled at caring for and connecting with infants, for example, and this would be important to know if you're searching for infant care.

Introduce yourself: "My name is _____. I am considering ___ (Professional's name) for my child care. ___ (Professional's name) gave me your name as a reference. Would you be willing to answer a few questions?"

Questions to Ask:

How long have you been using/did you use this child care program?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

What do you/did you like about the program?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Does your child/did your child enjoy attending?

1 2 3

What concerns, if any, do you/did you have about the care professional?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Did the child care professional listen to your concerns?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Would you recommend this child care program and why?

Program 1: _____

Program 2: _____

Program 3: _____

Check program safety records by finding and contacting your county's Minnesota Child Care Licensing office or by visiting ParentAware.org. Each Parent Aware program profile page has a direct link to its licensing record. For family child care programs, families may also contact the county social service office at edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfservlet/Public/DHS-0005-ENG for more licensing information.





STEP 4: Make Your Selection and Find Backup Care

Confirm your start date with your chosen child care program. Call programs you trust but are not choosing and ask if they are available to provide backup care.

EVERY FAMILY SHOULD HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

Child care arrangements can fall through unexpectedly because of emergencies or illness. Programs may also plan to close a few times a year for holidays or vacations. Many parents find that if they plan ahead, they can keep life moving during these gaps in care.

1. Choose your care.

Some families receive help from a friend, neighbor, or relative who is willing to provide occasional backup care. Others choose to make arrangements with child care programs that can offer backup care when they have space available. You can get the names of these programs when you call Parent Aware and connect with a Parent Service Specialist.

2. Share and gather important information.

Whatever your choice for backup care, be sure to keep your backup care professionals information handy (you may need it on short notice) and provide them with important contact, emergency, and scheduling information as well as your child’s vaccination records if you have them.

Backup Care Professional 1:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Availability: _____

Payment arrangements: _____

Backup Care Professional 2:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____ Availability: _____

Payment arrangements: _____



If you are receiving child care assistance through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), let your caseworker know about your backup plans. You may be eligible for payment assistance when using a backup provider. Also let your caseworker know when your backup care professional is used.

3. Check with your backup care professionals occasionally.

Make sure that they are still willing to provide care for your children. Give this person as much notice as possible when calling on them for help.

4. Here are some important pieces of information to share with anyone who is caring for your child:

- Your phone number
- Emergency phone numbers
- Medical Information
- Normal routines
- Your schedule and plans for picking up your child

5. Additional tips:

- Stay in touch with your Parent Services team. Ask them to keep thinking about what might work for you. Haven't contacted our Parent Services Specialists? Call 888.291.9811.
- Consider Drop-In Programs that provide short-term care for a few hours at a time. It is usually offered in shopping malls or community centers.
- Look in a different location: on your way to work, near work, or near a public transportation stop on your route to work. You may also want to try a different route to work and search for options along that commute.
- Talk to friends, neighbors, people at your library, church, or community center. Has anyone faced the same problems? How did they solve them?
- Making arrangements to have a babysitter or nanny come to your home to provide care is another option you may wish to consider.
- Discuss your child care need with your employer and with co-workers. If many of you are having the same difficulties, your employer needs to know.
- Participating in a playgroup or an exchange is another option. These approaches to early care and education are provided at no-cost and are informal groups organized by parents. Playgroups give children time to play together under their parents' supervision and in exchanges, parents take turns caring for the children.
- Get on the waiting list at every program that would work for you. Sometimes openings come up unexpectedly. Wait lists may be shorter than anticipated, so don't let a long projected wait keep you from getting on a list.
- Make a short-term plan for child care, but keep working with our Parent Services team or use our search tool on ParentAware.org until you find the kind of care you want.



STEP 5: Introduce Your Child

A little planning will go a long way in helping your child successfully transition to a new program. Ask the program about steps they would recommend for your child, using the ideas below as a guide.

Talk with your child.

Talk with your child about the new program. Tell them about activities and toys you saw, or the child care professionals and kids you met during a visit. For some children, engaging in playacting about going to the new program can help relieve anxiety and add excitement.

Show comfort.

Even young children can sense when a parent is anxious. Being positive and confident about your program choice can positively impact your child's feelings.

Start gradually.

If possible, visit the program several times with your child ahead of their official start date. Having your child stay with a child care professional without you for a short amount of time can ease the transition.

Think about routines.

Learn the new program's nap and meal routines in advance and adjust your child's routines if possible.

Take a favorite item.

A blanket, favorite photo, or treasured stuffed animal can comfort your child during time away from you. It's a good idea to check with the program before bringing an item.

Make drop-off and pick-up a happy time.

By building a familiar routine, your child knows what to expect when you leave and return. Allow enough time in the morning so no one feels rushed. A special goodbye ritual can be reassuring to both of you. Try to pick your child up at the same time every day.

Take care of yourself.

Sometimes, a new arrangement is more difficult for parents than for children. Some parents find it reassuring to check in with the program to see how things are going.



STEP 6: Stay Involved

You are the best judge of whether a program is working for your child and your family. As children grow, their needs change. Programs may also change over time. This is why it's important to evaluate your choice of care regularly. A child's needs are best served when the parents and child care professional have an open relationship where exchanging information about the child is encouraged and occurs on a regular basis.

Here are some ways to stay involved and informed:

Make unexpected visits.

Programs should welcome parent visits at any time, but keep in mind that certain times of the day are very busy and child care professionals may have little time to spend with you.

Take your time.

When dropping off or picking up your child, make time to occasionally stay a little longer.

Change times.

Picking up your child at the same time every day is a great way to build a routine and confidence with your child, but changing pick-up times occasionally allows you to see different aspects of your child's day.

Volunteer.

Helping with special events or field trips is a fun way to bond with your child and is also a chance to interact with the program's staff.

Arrange a conference.

Setting up a meeting or phone conversation with your program is a chance to talk about your child, ask questions, or express concerns.

Meet new people.

Get to know child care professionals, parents, staff, or volunteers who may be spending time with your child.

**You know your child.
We know child care and early learning.**

LET'S CONNECT.

If you have questions or want to do a new or updated search,
visit [ParentAware.org](https://www.ParentAware.org) or call us at 888.291.9811.



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