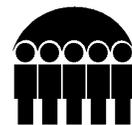


Choosing Child Care

Making An Informed Decision



Iowa
Department
of
Human Services

**For More Information
Contact
The Lead Agency
Serving Your Region**

Child Care Resource and Referral of Northwest Iowa

Mid-Sioux Opportunity, Inc.
Remsen IA
1-800-859-2025
712-786-2001

Child Care Resource and Referral of Northeast Iowa

Exceptional Persons, Inc.
Waterloo IA
1-800-475-0804
319-233-0804

**Child Care Resource and Referral of Southwest and
South Central Iowa**

West Central Development Corporation
Harlan Iowa
1-800-945-9778
712-755-7381

Child Care Resource and Referral of Central Iowa

Child Care Resource Center
Des Moines IA
1-800-722-7619
515-286-3536

Child Care Resource and Referral of Southeast Iowa

Iowa East Central T.R.A.I.N.
Davenport IA
1-800-369-3778
319-324-1302



Making an Informed Decision

By contacting the Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral System, you have taken the first step toward obtaining quality child care. The caregiver you choose will play an important role in the growth and development of your child.

The Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral agencies are working to help improve the availability, affordability and quality of child care statewide. The services they offer benefit parents, caregivers, employers and communities.

This pamphlet is designed to help you as a parent understand the individual needs of your family and the different types of child care available to meet those needs.

As you weigh your choices, remember that the most important considerations revolve around trust. You should be able to trust that the caregiver you choose will attend to your child's individual needs. It is essential that your child feel comfortable and safe in the setting you choose.

Types of Child Care

Once you have determined your needs for child care, compare those needs to the services available in your community. Some common types of child care include:

Child Care Homes: Individual providers may become registered with the state Department of Human Services under one of the following categories:

- ◆ Family Home Registration. One adult may care for up to six children (no more than four children under the age of two years) and may provide before-and-after school care for a maximum of 5 school-age children for periods of less than two hours. Persons offering this form of child care may voluntarily register with the State of Iowa.
- ◆ Group Home Registration. One adult and a helper who is at least fourteen years old may care for up to eleven children (no more than four children may be younger than two years, not more than six children total may be not yet in school). In addition, care may be provided for four school-age children for periods of less than two hours. Persons offering this form of child care must be registered with the State of Iowa.
- ◆ Group Home Joint Registration. Two qualified adults may care for up to eleven total preschool children (no more than four children may be younger than 24 months, no more than 10 children may be 24 months or older, but not yet in school). In addition, care may be provided for 4 school-age children for periods of less than two hours. Persons offering this type of care must be registered with the State of Iowa.

Child Care Center provides care for seven or more children and is licensed by the Iowa Department of Human Services. Licenses are valid for up to one year.

Preschool provides an educational program for seven or more children three to five years of age for up to three hours per day. It does not provide comprehensive child care, but is required to be licensed. Licenses are valid for up to one year.

In Home Child Care is provided in the child's own home by an individual employed by the family. Persons offering this type of care may voluntarily register with the State of Iowa.

School-Age Child Care is available in a variety of settings including public school programs, child care centers, child care homes and others.

Care for Children with Special Needs are services provided to meet a variety of individual needs in one of the other types of child care.

Registration

A group or family child care home that is registered with the Iowa Department of Human Services has agreed to meet safety and sanitary standards, to provide programs and equipment appropriate for the ages of children being cared for and to maintain records on each child. Child care professionals at registered facilities are required to be 18 years or older and must pass a child abuse registry check and a criminal records check. Under registration, a caregiver must self-certify that they meet minimum health and safety standards and minimum annual training requirements.

Licensing

A child care center licensed by the Iowa Department of Human Services is found to be in compliance with minimum standards, including the requirements of the State Fire Marshal. Centers must comply with, among others, requirements for personnel, staff ratio, child records, health and safety policies, activity programs, discipline policies, building standards and food services. Programs must be designed to be appropriate for the ages of children cared for by the center. Child abuse registry and criminal record checks are completed on all staff caring for children.

Narrowing the Choice

When it comes to deciding what is best for you and your child, you are the expert. Trust your instincts to help you decide what you value and what care situation will best meet your child's needs.

When sorting through referrals for child care, allow plenty of time to explore all the possibilities available. Many child care programs have waiting lists for infant and toddler care, so it is important to begin checking these facilities several months in advance.

When scheduling a visit with a caregiver, allow enough time to ask questions and observe the children's activities and their interactions with the caregiver and with each other.

- ◆ Establish a list of questions you would like to have answered by the caregiver or child care center director.
- ◆ Screen caregivers by telephone. Ask general questions over the phone to determine if the setting meets your basic requirements.
- ◆ Respect the caregivers policies on phone interviews.
- ◆ Schedule a visit. Reserve at least an hour to tour the home or center and to talk with the caregiver or director. Do not end the visit until all your questions have been answered. Ask for references so you can discuss the caregiver and program with parents who have had experience with it.
- ◆ Interview several different caregivers to give you a basis for comparison before you make your final decision.

- ◆ Choose the program that meets the needs of you and your child and that best matches your parenting style.
- ◆ Notify caregivers or programs you did not choose so they do not continue to hold an opening for your child.
- ◆ Notify the resource and referral agency that you have found a caregiver.
- ◆ Establish a written agreement to ensure that both you and your caregiver understand your respective responsibilities and commitments.

Caregivers enrolled with the Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral System will expect you to ask these questions:

- ┌ What background or special training in child care do you have?
- ┌ If you hire assistants, what is their background or special training? What is the turnover rate for those positions?
- ┌ How do you provide for regular communication with parents?
- ┌ Is there an open parent visitation policy?
- ┌ What is your policy on discipline?
- ┌ What meals and snacks are provided?
- ┌ What nutritional guidelines are followed?
- ┌ Do you participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program?
- ┌ How would you or an assistant handle a medical emergency?
- ┌ Have you or your assistants taken pediatric CPR or first aid training?

- | What insurance coverage do you carry?
- | What provisions do you make when you or an assistant are unable to care for children due to illness or some other emergency?
- | Is there a regular schedule of activities and does it allow for flexibility?
- | Do you have a policy on television and video viewing?
- | Is there a written parent agreement? What does it include?
- | What are your fees?
- | What are your long-term plans in regard to your child care business?
- | Are you registered or licensed with the Iowa Department of Human Services?

Visit and Observation Checklist

- _____ Is the caregiver warm and friendly?
- _____ Does the caregiver respond quickly to the child?
- _____ Does the caregiver talk directly to the children and communicate with them at their level?
- _____ Does the caregiver have a sense of humor?
- _____ Does the caregiver appear kind and patient with the children?
- _____ Do the children appear relaxed and happy?
- _____ Do the children interact well with each other?
- _____ Are there rules for the children to follow and are they easily understood by them?
- _____ Does the home or center appear clean and comfortable?
- _____ Is there enough space for play and napping areas?
- _____ Is there enough furniture, toys and other equipment for the children?
- _____ Are furniture, toys and other equipment safe and in good repair?
- _____ Are dangerous items such as medicine, cleaners, poisons, matches and sharp instruments stored in a safe place?
- _____ Are there safety caps on electrical outlets?

- _____ Is there an emergency plan posted?
- _____ Is a first aid kit on the premises?
- _____ Are there working fire extinguishers and smoke detectors?
- _____ Are foods stored properly?
- _____ Are there definite sanitation and hand-washing rules?
- _____ If there are pets, have they been vaccinated?
- _____ Are pets friendly toward children?
- _____ Is there evidence of adequate supplies such as soap, toilet paper, individual towels or paper towels, individual glasses?
- _____ Does the outdoor play area appear safe and accessible?
- _____ Are there materials available for creative expression in art and music?
- _____ Are children's books and educational toys available?

Checking References

References can be a helpful tool in helping you make your final decision about a caregiver. References should be requested from the caregiver. When you call the references ask the following questions:

- | How long has your child been in the home or center?
- | How does your child feel about the caregiver?
- | What do you like about the caregiver and his or her methods?
- | Is there anything you do not like about the caregiver's methods?
- | Is it easy to talk to the caregiver?
- | Is the caregiver open to your child's individual needs?
- | How does the caregiver deal with problems or concerns?
- | What kind of discipline does the caregiver use?
- | What would you like to see the caregiver do differently?
- | Would you choose this caregiver again?

The Written Agreement

A written agreement between you and your caregiver will help set the stage for open communication. It should explain what you expect of the caregiver as well as your responsibilities. Many caregivers already have established written agreements. Review any contract to make sure it covers all your areas of concern.

A comprehensive written agreement may include:

- ◆ Hours care will be provided and location at which care will take place.
- ◆ The fee schedule.
- ◆ Policies on caring for sick children.
- ◆ Responsibility for locating substitute care.
- ◆ Supplies to be provided by parents.
- ◆ Individuals authorized to pick up the child.
- ◆ Provisions for meals.
- ◆ Emergency procedures.
- ◆ Procedure for notification of fee changes.
- ◆ Policies on termination.

You also should be prepared to provide a brief medical history of your child including immunizations and any allergies or medical problems, the telephone number of the child's pediatrician or family doctor and dentist, and any insurance information a caregiver might need in case of a medical emergency. Physical examinations and proof of immunizations are required to be on file in licensed and registered child care programs.

A Parent's Responsibility

It is important to recognize the valuable role your caregiver plays in your child's life. Talk together regularly about your child's progress and any problems he or she may be having. Show respect for your caregiver by being thoughtful and considerate in the following ways:

- ◆ Be on time.
- ◆ Call if you are going to be late.
- ◆ Pay on time.
- ◆ Notify your caregiver of vacations well in advance.
- ◆ Provide any personal items your child needs.
- ◆ Keep sick children at home.
- ◆ Have a back-up child care arrangement in the event your caregiver is not able to provide care.
- ◆ Give ample notice if you decide to no longer use the caregiver's services.

Preparation

Children and parents react to change in different ways. It is important to recognize any change in child care may represent an adjustment for everyone involved.

The following tips may prove helpful:

- ◆ Talk with your child about the new experiences he or she can expect. Focus on positive areas of interest to your child such as other children the same age or regularly scheduled special activities.
- ◆ Read children's books to your child that deal with working families and other children's feelings about adjusting to child care.
- ◆ Encourage your child to discuss his or her feelings with you. Throughout your discussions with your child maintain a positive attitude about the new experience and its benefits.
- ◆ Visit the caregiver's home or the child care center with your child at least once before you begin regularly scheduled care. Stay with your child during this visit and allow enough time for the child to meet the caregiver and any assistants and to explore the new surroundings.
- ◆ Share details about your child's habits, likes, dislikes and fears with the caregiver and any assistants. Be sure to discuss any area your child may have expressed apprehension about.
- ◆ Arrange for your child to take a familiar item to child care such as a favorite stuffed toy or blanket.
- ◆ Recognize that parents as well as children can suffer separation anxiety. You and your child will both find it easier to adjust to a new situation if you, as the adult, practice patience and stick to a regular routine.
- ◆ To ease the transition, always show affection when you say good-bye. Let your child know you accept his or her feelings by saying such things as "I know you don't want me to leave and I will miss you, too." Then be firm but friendly about leaving. When you pick up your child, treat returning home in the same firm friendly way.

Financial Aid

Depending on your family's income and size, you may qualify for a child care tax credit or subsidy. Some local communities may have additional financial assistance in the form of scholarships or discounts through community organizations.

The Iowa Department of Human Services in your county can help you determine whether you meet eligibility requirements. Current child care assistance programs include:

- ◆ Child Care Assistance, and
- ◆ PROMISE JOBS which may provide a certificate/voucher allowing parental choice of caregiver.

A child care resource and referral parent counselor is available to help you identify resources available that would be the most appropriate for your family needs.

Complaints

It is likely that your child care arrangement will provide only good experiences for your child, but there is always a chance that something may go wrong. You need to be prepared to recognize the difference between a “serious complaint” - a violation of state regulatory requirements; and a “personality related complaint” - such as a disagreement with your caregiver. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to work out disagreements through improved communication.

Personality Related Complaints

Complaints regarding style of interaction, personality, business practice or any other personality-related matter should be clarified and resolved between the parent and caregiver. If necessary, the child care resource and referral agency can provide assistance that may be helpful in reaching a mutually satisfactory solution to the current situation.

Serious Complaints

As a parent, you should report complaints indicating non-compliance with state regulatory requirements (i.e. licensing violations, unsafe environmental conditions) to your local Iowa Department of Human Services office. If you suspect possible child abuse or neglect, contact the Iowa Department of Human Services at 1-800-362-2178 and your resource and referral agency immediately.

When the child care resource and referral agency receives this type of complaint, the agency reserves the right to report the complaint and to temporarily suspend the caregiver from referrals and participation in the program. The caregiver will be notified if such action is taken. Information regarding an investigation of child abuse and neglect is confidential.

Your resource and referral agency can help you with your child care concerns. A parent referral counselor will assist you with both short-term and long-term arrangements when you wish to make a change for any reason.

Changing Child Care Arrangements

Finally, recognize adjustments may have to be made. Perhaps your working hours change or your caregiver can no longer provide service or you may want to find a caregiver closer to your work, home or school.

Change is inevitable as your child grows. When you need to change your child care arrangements, you will have the information necessary to make a decision.

Be prepared for the unexpected. Have a backup plan for emergencies. Keep the names and phone numbers of your resource and referral agency, friends or caregivers so you will have a head start in case you have to do another search.

Changing your child care arrangement can be made easier and less painful when you can plan for the change.

Talk with your child before an arrangement is changed. Young children don't have the same sense of time adults do.

Tell your caregiver in advance that you plan to change the arrangement and that you will explain the change to your child.

If possible, plan the last day and make it special by picking special foods or activities for the child and having pictures taken.

Be positive about the new arrangements you have made, whether it be another caregiver, school or home.

