



# Guide to Child Care Services

Thank you for choosing Child Care Aware® of Missouri to help you in your search for quality child care. Our free and confidential service gives you a list of child care programs based on the needs you tell us about. The early care and education programs on the list we provide you are only **referrals**, not recommendations. We hope the information included here can help you make an informed child care choice.

## What Are the Different Types of Child Care Programs?

As you begin your search, it is important to know the different types of child care and the legal requirements for each type. Child Care Aware® of Missouri's referral database has information on licensed, license-exempt, and exempt child care, early learning and before- and after-school programs.

### Licensed Child Care

Many, but not all, child care programs are required by state law to be licensed by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Section for Child Care Regulation. Licensed facilities have regular fire, sanitation, and health inspections. They also have inspections by the Section for Child Care Regulation each year.

A copy of the licensing regulations is available at every licensed program. The child care license must be posted close to the entrance. Check the dates on the license to make sure it is current. You can also read Missouri's child care rules online at: <http://health.mo.gov/safety/childcare/lawsregs.php>.

Child care licensing records are open for public review and can indicate how well a program follows the child care rules. See page 5 for information about how to ask to read a child care program's licensing record.

### ***Licensed Family Child Care Home***

This is a small program licensed to provide child care for up to ten children, who are not related to the family child care business owner, in the provider's home. Children related to the child care business owner that are also being provided care in the home at the same time are not counted when determining how many adults there are watching the total number of children being cared for. The number and the ages of the unrelated children allowed in care are listed on the license, which must be posted at the facility. The number of children under the age of two will affect the total number of children allowed in care in the home.



### ***Licensed Group Child Care Home***

This is a medium-sized program for between 11 and 20 children not related to the business owner. The space used for child care can be attached to the owner's home. It may also be in a separate location. Group homes must meet the same licensing rules as child care centers, including the number of staff available depending on the ages and number of children in care.

### ***Licensed Child Care Center***

This is a child care facility for more than 20 children. Centers are separate from the owner's living quarters. The number of staff that must be present to provide care depending on the age and number of children at the facility follows:



- Birth to two years of age: 1 adult to every 4 children;
- Two-year olds: 1 adult to every 8 children;
- Three to five year olds (not in school): 1 adult to every 10 children; and
- Five years of age and up (in school): 1 adult to every 16 children.

Special rules apply for mixed age groups.

### **License-Exempt Child Care**

By law, certain types of programs do not have to be licensed, but they are regulated, meaning they have to follow certain rules. These include child care programs run by a religious organization or programs for preschool children that are open no more than four (4) hours per child per day. These programs must follow health, sanitation, and safety rules and requirements. However, they are exempt from following other requirements such as the number of adults required to be present to care for the ages and number of children in care, discipline practices, and staff training.

### **Exempt Family Child Care Home**



Someone caring for no more than four unrelated children in their home is not required to be licensed or follow state child care rules. Related children do not count in the total number of children allowed to be cared for. Children who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption to such person within the third degree shall not be considered in the total number of children being cared for.

For Exempt Family Child Care Homes to be listed in our database for referrals, Child Care Aware® of Missouri requires them to:

- Submit a Child Abuse/Neglect and Criminal Record screening OR Family Care Safety Registry screening. This report must be free of criminal charges related to child abuse, neglect, or death of a child. Screenings must be submitted on every member of the household who is 14 years or older. These must be updated every two years;
- Submit a signed statement saying safe sleep procedures will be followed for infants 12 months of age and under. Safe sleep procedures can be viewed at [http://www.sidscenter.org/documents/safe\\_sleep\\_manual.pdf](http://www.sidscenter.org/documents/safe_sleep_manual.pdf);
- Submit fire and tornado plans showing exit routes and a description of the emergency plan.
- Submit a self-certification for health and safety (provided by the Referral Center) every two years;
- Provide a negative TB screening for all staff within the past 12 months;

- Submit a one-time physician’s statement of good health for all staff. This must be signed by a doctor within the past 12 months;
- Submit two written references from non-related people; and
- Submit proof that caregiver is at least 18 years old.

By law, a child care facility that is exempt from licensure cannot falsely tell any parent or guardian of children in its care that the facility is licensed when it is not. (HB 1323, Sections 210.211 and 210.245)

### Other Exempt Child Care Programs

By state law, the following programs do not have to be licensed or follow child care rules:

- A business offering care for children as a service for its customers or employees for no more than 4 hours per day;
- Boarding schools, summer camps, hospitals, or other entities as explained in state law;
- Residential facility or day programs licensed by the Department of Mental Health; and
- Child care facilities operated by School Systems (Private & Public)

### What Does a Quality Child Care Program Look Like?



#### Group Size

In general, fewer children and more adults leads to higher quality care. Some children enjoy working in small groups or one-on-one, while others enjoy being around a large number of children. Consider your child's needs as you choose the program size that will be best for your family.

#### Ratios

Younger children typically need more one-on-one care. When each adult is responsible for fewer children, your child can get more attention. Interaction with caring adults is important for your child’s social and emotional development. Look at the adult to child ratios listed on page 2 to see if the program meets this requirement.

#### Family Involvement

Quality programs work with families to meet the needs of all children enrolled. They often have an open door policy, which means parents, grandparents, or guardians are free to visit at any time. Encouraging family involvement is often a sign of a quality program.

#### Caregiver Education and Turnover

Education and ongoing training of the caregiver(s) is an important indicator of quality. Caregivers working in a licensed child care program in Missouri are required to earn 12 clock hours of training each year. Many choose to attend more training, and some have taken college courses.

Higher quality child care programs often keep the same employees for a long time. Low staff turnover provides stability for children. This also shows the program is a welcoming, supportive, and positive environment. This may lead to better care for your child.

## Health and Safety

Health and safety practices protect children from harm and illness. Those caring for children should wash hands, disinfect diaper changing stations, and clean toys regularly. Cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials should be stored properly and out of reach of children. Licensed programs must meet the state's health and safety standards.

## Accreditation

Accredited programs meet higher standards of care above licensing regulations. An accredited program will have a certificate available for your review.



## What Are Some Questions to Ask Each Program?

1. Does the program have written policies for discipline, payment, and attendance?
2. Is there an open door policy for families? Can a parent drop in unannounced?
3. Does the teacher or family child care business owner have special training or credentials?
4. Does the teacher or family child care business owner have CPR/First Aid certifications?
5. Has the teacher or family child care business owner been screened for child abuse and neglect?
6. Are there enough adults to provide care and supervision for the number and ages of children?
7. Does the teacher or family child care business owner have an emergency evacuation plan posted?
8. Is a daily schedule posted? Does it include a mix of times for play, activities, stories, and rest?
9. Can children play alone and in groups?
10. Do the activities allow children to think and play creatively?
11. Are the children's hands washed before and after meal time, using the restroom, playing outside, or messy play?
12. What is the program's policy on care for ill children?



## What are the Next Steps to Take in Your Child Care Search?

### Learn How to Check Licensing Records



Licensing records are open for public review and can indicate how well a program follows the child care rules. You may call the Section for Child Care Regulation to schedule a time to review the file of any licensed or license-exempt program. See the enclosed Contact Information booklet for the phone number of your local office. You can also view a program's licensing inspection reports online at: <https://webapp01.dhss.mo.gov/childcaresearch/searchengine.aspx>.

The licensing inspection record includes information from both scheduled and surprise inspections. If you have questions or concerns or want to file a complaint about a child care program, see the information on page 8.

### Make Sure Your Child is in Safe Hands

All workers in licensed child care facilities undergo a background screening as part of the licensing requirements. Background screening information about a child care teacher or family child care business owner includes a Missouri state criminal background check, child/abuse and neglect records, and sexual offender information. Background screenings can also be performed on informal caregivers, neighbors, nannies, etc. by contacting Missouri's Family Care Safety Registry (FCSR).

For more information about the FCSR, to request background information, or a screening form, call 1-866-422-6872 toll-free Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. You can also visit the website at [www.dhss.mo.gov/FCSR](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/FCSR). You will need the child care individual's social security number and date of birth. Screening forms are also available online. Please note that the FCSR only produces results for criminal charges, child abuse and neglect charges, and sex offender charges that occurred in Missouri. Any charges that occurred in states other than Missouri are not reported in the FCSR.

To view information regarding sexual offenders in Missouri, or to view the sexual offenders list for your county, visit the Missouri State Highway Patrol website at [www.mshp.dps.missouri.gov](http://www.mshp.dps.missouri.gov) or call 888-767-6747.

To view past or current criminal charges, case records, and judgments, you can do a name search by visiting Case.net at [www.courts.mo.gov/casenet/base/welcome/do](http://www.courts.mo.gov/casenet/base/welcome/do)

## Creating a Positive Child Care Experience

Talk and/or read stories to your child about going to child care. Visit with other parents whose children attend child care.

Open communication with the teacher, family childcare business owner, or individual caring for your child is very important. See page 4 for questions you may want to ask.







Share any information that will help the teacher, family child care business owner, or individual caring for your child meet the child's needs.

Make sure there are clear written agreements, including contracts and policies, to prevent misunderstandings.

Find out what types of family involvement opportunities are available. You may be able to volunteer in your child's room, or the program may need donations of useful items.

Respect the program policies. Pay on time. Pick up your child before closing. Keep sick children at home.

Show the teacher, family child care business owner, or individual caring for your child your appreciation. Say thank you, offer to help, and donate useful items.

## **Do You Need Additional Support and/or Resources?**

### **Do You Know about Your Child's Brain Development?**

The first three years of life are a critical time in a child's development. The enclosed handout, "Your Child's Brain" has useful tips for promoting brain development. Visit [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org) to learn more about nurturing your child's brain.

### **Are You Concerned about Your Child's Development?**

#### First Steps

First Steps is Missouri's early intervention system. For help for a child aged birth to three who has disabilities or developmental delays, call 866-583-2392.

#### Local Public Schools

For children over the age of three, contact your local public school district. Many of them have a public preschool program (Title I) or other intervention services.

### **Does Your Child Have Special Needs?**

Our database includes information about child care programs that have experience working with children who have various special needs. An "inclusive" program is one that includes children with and without disabilities in the same routines and play activities. Caregivers in inclusive programs learn to recognize each child's strengths and needs. They make creative changes to routines and activities so that each child can be successful. For more information regarding inclusive child care, contact us at 1-866-892-3228.

## **Do you have a complaint or concern about a child care program or about our services?**

Child Care Aware® of Missouri responds to all complaints received. We record concerns and consult with you on further action to take. If you have a concern or complaint about a child care program, please call our office at 1-866-892-3228.

If you suspect child abuse or neglect, we encourage you to call the Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 1-800-392-3738.

For concerns regarding health and safety issues in a child care program, contact your local Section for Child Care Regulation. See Contact Information handout, or visit <http://health.mo.gov/safety/childcare/concerns.php>.

We expect the highest quality of service from our staff. If you have a concern or complaint regarding Child Care Aware® of Missouri's referral service, please contact the Referral Center Manager at 1-866-892-3228.

## **Do You Need Help Paying for Child Care?**

There are many options available to help make child care more affordable. The state of Missouri provides help with payments for child care to eligible families. Some child care programs offer multi-child discounts, a sliding fee scale, or scholarships from outside funding sources.

### Child Care Assistance Program

The Child Care Assistance Program helps eligible parents or guardians pay for child care. Payments are based on the household size and income level or whether the child that needs care has special needs. The purpose of the program is to help families to gain employment or stay employed. See the Contact Information handout to find the phone number for your local Family Support Division office that provides Food, Health Care and Family care services in your county. You can also view at <http://www.dss.mo.gov/cd/childcare/>.



### What is a Sliding Fee?

All families, except those of special needs children, must pay for part of the child care provided for each child in care. This payment is called a sliding fee and is based on the number of people in the household and the amount of income. The sliding fee may be deducted from the amount the child care provider charges or from the amount the state pays, whichever is less, and can be deducted from the payment made to the provider or to the family. Sliding fees differ, depending on the number of hours a child is in care per day.

### What is a Co-payment?

A co-payment is the amount the family pays the child care provider if the child care costs more than the Child Care Fee Assistance programs pays for child care. The amount paid for child care includes the amount the state

pays and the parent's sliding fee. If the state pays \$30 and the parent's sliding fee is \$2 a day, the total paid is \$32 per day. However, if the child care program charges \$35 a day, the parent is responsible for paying the difference (the co-payment) to the child care program. In this example, the co-payment would be \$3 per day ( $35-32=3$ ). Child care business owners cannot charge co-payments for children with special needs.

### Financial Assistance Offered by Some Child Care Programs

#### Multi-Child Discount

Some child care businesses offer a discount if you have more than one child enrolled. Check with the child care program to see whether they offer this discount.

#### Sliding Fee Scale

A sliding fee scale is when a program considers a family's income and bases the cost of child care on the income. For example, a parent who makes \$200 per week will have a higher rate to pay than a parent who makes \$100 per week. Parents are responsible for paying any costs based on their sliding fee scale set by the program.

#### Scholarships

Some child care programs have funding to offer scholarships for children. Criteria for these vary by program.

### **Additional Resources**

#### MO HealthNet for Kids

Many child care programs require current physicals and up-to-date immunization records for children to enroll. Children may be eligible for MO HealthNet for Kids if they are under age 19, uninsured for six months or more, and meet family income guidelines. Some of the covered benefits include:

- doctor visits, including well-child checks, shots and sports physicals;
- hospital and emergency room care;
- mental health care;
- dental and vision care;
- prescriptions, lab tests, and x-rays; and
- speech and physical therapy.



For more information, call 888-275-5908, or visit [www.dss.mo.gov/mhk](http://www.dss.mo.gov/mhk).

#### Earned Income Credit

Families who are working and eligible (based upon income) qualify for earned income tax credits (EITC). To receive EITC, a family must file a federal tax return. For more information, and to see if you are eligible, contact the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040.

#### Parents As Teachers™

Parents As Teachers™ is a voluntary and free program that provides practical, effective help for all families with children birth to age three. It offers personal visits, group meetings, and developmental screenings. Parents As



Teachers™ is available throughout Missouri. Find your local Parents as Teachers organization online at <http://www.parentsasteachers.org/location> or call the National Parents as Teachers information line at 1-866-728-4968.

### ParentLink

ParentLink is a free program offering information on many topics helpful to families. ParentLink is operated by the University of Missouri. Parenting Specialists maintain a confidential toll-free warm-line at 1-800-552-8522 (en Español, 1-888-460-0008).

### **Child Care Aware® of Missouri's Parent Resources**



Parent Central is a free electronic newsletter for families. Each issue includes information on topics related to child development, parenting, and state and federal laws impacting child care. Information about useful resources for families is also included. Sign up today by visiting our website at [www.mo.childcareaware.org/ActionInfoCenter.aspx](http://www.mo.childcareaware.org/ActionInfoCenter.aspx).

Want to speak up on behalf of children and child care? Sign up for our action center by visiting our website at [www.mo.childcareaware.org/ActionInfoCenter.aspx](http://www.mo.childcareaware.org/ActionInfoCenter.aspx). We will notify you when it's time to take action on issues you care about.

Child Care Aware® of Missouri is on Facebook! Visit our page at <https://www.facebook.com/ChildCareAwareofMissouri> to stay informed about children's issues, child development, upcoming parent webinars, and ways you can help children in Missouri.

### **Are You Still Having Trouble Finding Child Care?**

If you are having a difficult time finding child care that meets your family's needs, consider the following:

1. Stay in touch with the Referral Specialists at Child Care Aware® of Missouri. We update child care information frequently, and new options may become available.
2. Look in a different location. There may not be programs in the area where you live, but there could be options available near your work, school, etc.
3. Talk to friends, family members, and neighbors. Check with your local library, church, or community center. Many of these people may have information about who provides child care in your area.
4. Contact local schools or universities. They may be able to put you in contact with people who care for children in the community.
5. Get on the waiting list at every program that would work for you in case an opening becomes available.

6. Consider asking a friend, neighbor, or family member to become a registered provider. This person must complete a Registration Payment Agreement with the Department of Social Services to provide child care to subsidy-eligible children. For more information, contact your regional Provider Relations Unit. In the St. Louis area, call 1-314-877-2232. In the Kansas City area, call 1-816-889-5050. In the rest of Missouri, call 1-573-522-1385. You can also access a state map showing which office handles your county at <http://dss.mo.gov/cd/childcare/pdf/ccpru-expansion.pdf>.

Remember background screenings can be performed on informal caregivers, neighbors, nannies, etc. by contacting Missouri's Family Care Safety Registry. See page 5 for more information.



Child Care Aware® of Missouri and its sub-contractor or sub-recipient agencies will preserve the confidentiality of families' contact information, child information, and other data gathered as part of any services delivered at all times in accordance with its contracts with state agencies, to protect their privacy and safety. Data about child care demand gathered from the referral process will only be shared at an aggregate level. Child Care Aware® of Missouri will contact families by mail, e-mail and/or phone to gather customer satisfaction responses, and may contact families by mail or e-mail to offer opportunities for further communications (e.g., receipt of e-mailed or mailed newsletters, receipt of information about available services).

Funding provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division, Early Childhood and Prevention Services Section.

**1-866-892-3228**

**[www.mo.childcareaware.org](http://www.mo.childcareaware.org)**