Choosing Child Care

Child Care Resource & Referral
trcac.org
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Choosing Child Care can be one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent, and sometimes it can be one of the most difficult decisions. Research has found that safe and positive experiences during the early years have an impact on a child’s development. Finding good quality child care that supports your individual child’s development takes time and effort. You will want to know that the person taking care of your child understands how children learn and develop, and has similar ideas and values about child care as you do.

The Resource Connection provides free child care referrals to parents in Amador and Calaveras counties. Referrals are made to providers in licensed family child care homes and child care centers and license-exempt centers. Resource and Referral Coordinators at The Resource Connection can help you learn about the child care options available in your area so you can choose what works best for you and your family. They will listen to your questions and concerns: however they can’t make your decision for you. That is up to you.

Steps to Choosing Quality Child Care

7 Steps to Choosing Quality Care

1) **CALL** our Child Care Resource & Referral program to learn about your options for child care
2) **REQUEST** a list of child care referrals
3) **LEARN** about child care options and quality
4) **VISIT** the child care programs
5) **INTERVIEW** the provider(s) at the child care facility, ask for and check references
6) **BE INFORMED** about regulations and call Community Care Licensing
7) **CHOOSE** the right child care provider for your child

After your visit with the potential provider check complaints and violations by calling Community Care Licensing at (916) 263-5744.
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Phone Interview Questions

Questions to ask:

- Is there an opening at the time I will need child care?
- What hours/days are you open?
- Where are you located?
- When is it a good time to visit and schedule an interview?
- What are your rates and what is included in the rates (vacations, illnesses, holidays, etc.)?
- How many children do you have enrolled and what are their ages?

Interviewing and Observing for Quality Care

Caregiver Qualifications

- What is your philosophy of caring for children?
- Why did you choose child care as a profession?
- Tell me about your training and experience?
- Do you attend any classes or trainings to improve your skills?
- May I see a copy of your license?

Best Practices:
Good caregivers are eager to learn about child development through classes, trainings etc... research shows that the more child development training a caregiver has, the better the care your child is likely to receive.
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Health & Safety Questions:

- Have all caregivers passed a background check and have the required health and safety courses?
- Can I see your CPR and First Aid certifications? Check to make sure they are valid.
- What do you do in a case of emergency? Is your emergency disaster plan posted? Do you practice evacuation drills?
- Do you have working smoke detectors, a first aid kit, and a fire extinguisher?
- Do you serve meals? Is there a posted menu? What nutrition guidelines do you use? Is water available at all times? What about food allergies?
- What is your sick child policy? What is your procedure for administering medication?
- Where will you change diapers and how often do you change them?
- Do you work with parents and children for toilet training? What age do you start?
- How do you handle nap time? Where do the children sleep? Do they have their own bedding?
- What precautions are taken to reduce the spread of illness? What do you use to sanitize?
- Do you transport? Do you provide transportation for before/after school care?
- Do you have pets?
- Is this a smoke free environment?

Best Practices:
Good child care providers make health & safety a priority. Evacuation procedures should be posted and practiced on a monthly basis. Guidelines to reduce the spread of germs include routine hand washing using soap and water, including babies, regular sanitizing with a bleach solution toys and surfaces. Diapers should be changed on a washable surface close to a sink, but away from food and bottle preparation. Chemicals should be inaccessible to children and safety gates, door and cabinet locks should be used where needed. The play area, furniture and flooring should be clean and in good condition. Outlets, electrical cords, wood stoves and heaters should be inaccessible as well as pools, spas and other bodies of water.
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Play & Learning

- What is the daily routine of your program?
- What types of activities do you do with the children?
- Are there areas for quiet play? Active play?
- Are the children’s toys and materials displayed so the children can access them?
- How often do you read with the children?
- Tell me how you plan activities to promote a child’s development?
- How much screen time (TV, computer, video games) is allowed?
- Is there time for outside play, music, art, dramatic play and exploration?
- Do you offer an educational component?
- How will your program help prepare my child for school?

Best Practices:
Children learn through using age appropriate play materials that are of interest to them. Child-sized furniture encourages independence in children. Ample opportunities for interactions with adults and other children help to build language and vocabulary. Babies should not be kept in car seats outside of the car, swings, or bouncy seats, and should not be allowed to sleep in these objects.

Supervision & Discipline

- How are children supervised?
- Do you supervise the children while they sleeping?
- What are your policies on guidance and discipline?
- How do you settle disputes between children?
- Ask what if questions such as what if my child bites? What if my child will not nap? What if she cries all day?

Best practices:
Warm, loving care is needed for all children and there should be 100% supervision at all times. Skilled providers are patient and reduce waiting and conflicts between children when transitioning from activity to activity. A variety of guidance techniques are used such as following a daily routine / schedule, redirection, consistency and positive reinforcement. Physical punishment, belittling or shaming should never be used.
Communication & Partnership

- Are the caregiver’s values compatible with mine?
- How will information be communicated to me about my child?
- Do you have written policies and procedures? Do I sign a contract?
- How would any dispute between us be settled?
- Are parents encouraged to drop in anytime and encouraged to become involved in the program? How?
- How do you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

Best Practices: Good communication between providers and parents is essential. It is important to build a partnership and have regular parent–provider meetings. If the provider doesn’t have a system, try to work one out so you have daily communication to keep you informed about your child’s routines, moods and activities. Ask for ways you can be involved by offering to volunteer to help with activities, reading, and field trips or clean up days. Don’t forget to tell your provider if you appreciate things she has done.

Look for:

- Responsive, nurturing, warm interactions between caregiver & children.
- Children who are happily engaged in daily activities and comfortable.
- A clean, safe, and healthy indoor and outdoor environment, especially napping, eating and toileting areas.
- A variety of toys and learning materials, such as books, puzzles and, blocks, and climbing equipment that your child will find interesting and which will contribute to their growth and development.
- Children receiving individual attention.

Finalize your decision

- Think about what you observed, heard and felt at your visits.
- Ask yourself which one best meets your family’s needs.
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Types of Child Care

Licensed Child Care

A facility that is licensed by the state of California has met all of the basic standards for health and safety. **Licensing does not assure quality**, but it provides guidelines for health & safety, a foundation upon which providers can build quality programs.

Community Care Licensing is a division of the State Department of Social Services that oversees all child care facilities in California. Community Care Licensing (CCL) is the agency to contact to inquire about complaints, violations, and to make sure that a Criminal record Clearance and Child Abuse Index Check has been done on all adults who will be providing care, supervision, or have contact with their children. You may Reach CCL at (916) 263-5744. Or visit them at: [www.ccld.ca.gov](http://www.ccld.ca.gov)

State law requires licensed child care facilities to make accessible to the public a copy of any report pertaining to the facility that documents a facility visit or substantiated complaint investigation. A complete file is available at the State Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division. You have a right to access any public information in these files.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes

This type of child care is offered in the home of a care-giver in a family-like setting and often includes a mixed-age group.

- The caregiver must be at least 18 years old and every adult living in the home must receive a criminal record clearance, including a child abuse index check, and have proof of tuberculosis clearance.
- The home must have phone service, smoke detector and fire extinguisher.
- Safe toys and play equipment should be available and the home must pass a health and safety inspection.
- The provider is required to have 15 hours of Health & Safety training including preventative health practices as well as Pediatric CPR & First Aid renewed regularly.
Family child care homes are licensed to care for up to 8 children with 1 adult (small) or up to 14 children with 1 adult and 1 assistant provider (large). The provider’s own children or foster children less than 10 years of age are counted in the total capacity.

**Licensed Child Care Centers**

Centers may be licensed to care for children in a group setting for full or part day. Centers are usually located in schools, religious facilities, public or privately-owned buildings and are licensed for specific age groups. Staff must meet educational requirements and the facility must meet building, fire and zoning codes. Adult-to-child ratios vary according to the type of setting, number and ages of children. All employees are required to have criminal background clearances, Tuberculosis test and the site must maintain one person that meets the Pediatric CPR and First Aid requirements at all times.

- State and federally funded child development programs, such as Head Start, Early Head Start, California State Preschool and some after school programs must meet state or federal standards and are designed to prepare children for school. Staff that works in this type of facilities may be required to have higher education levels than private centers, ratios of children to adults may be lower and they are required to provide nutritious meals.
- Private child care centers offer a variety of program philosophies which may include an educational component. Staff education requirements may be less than publically funded programs. Programs may offer more flexibility in operating hours and they may or may not provide meals.
Licensed Exempt Care

Exempt care means that the provider is not required to be licensed or follow any regulations. Often referred to as family, friend or neighbor care, license exempt care may include the care of children:

- Who are related to the provider, either by blood or marriage;
- In the child’s own home;
- From only one family, other than the provider’s own;
- In “drop in” arrangements such as a health club where parents remain on the premises or a co-op when no money is exchanged;
- In recreation programs that is exempt from licensure;
- In programs that are run by school districts on school grounds such as some after-school programs. (Contact individual districts for information on employee clearances.)

Trustline

Is statewide registry created by the California State Legislature to give parents an important tool to use when selecting in-home or license-exempt child care. TrustLine is a database of in-home child care providers, license-exempt providers, tutors, child care staff at Ancillary Child Care Centers that have passed a background screening in California. TrustLine is a free service for families receiving state assistance in paying for child care. For families that are not receiving assistance the cost is approximately $124. For more information, call (800) 822-8490, visit the website www.trustline.org

In-Home Child Care

An arrangement where a family hires another adult to care for children in the family’s home. This may be a friend, relative, au pair or nanny, full time or part time. Specific tax and employment rules apply to this type of care. It is not regulated by the State of California and you should consider using TrustLine to check the backgrounds of potential caregivers (see above).
The Resource Connection

Serving Amador and Calaveras

Office
8085 Highway 26, Suite G
Mokelumne Hill, CA 95245
T (209) 754-1075
F (209) 754-4244

www.trcac.org