

Child Care FAQ

What are my choices in child care?

There are many kinds of child care arrangements that parents can choose. Finding the right child care for your child is hard work that only you, the parent, can do. Here is some information to help you in your child care search. The information below describes the two primary child care settings – child care centers and family child care homes.

While quality child care may be expensive and difficult to find, remember that infancy and the preschool years are probably the most critical developmental stages in your child's life. There is no one right way to make the decision.

- Trust your instincts and try to sort out what you feel strongly about, and what are minor concerns.
- Be honest with yourself about which child care situation makes you feel most comfortable and where your child would be happiest.
- Observe which caregiver has the best relationships with the children and parents in the program.

The right kind of child care can be a wonderful opportunity to enrich your child's life and help your child realize his or her full potential.

What are Child Care Centers?

What are Family Day Care Homes?

How do I choose a child care program that is right for my family?

What if my child has special needs?

What if I want to have a caregiver come into my own home?

How do I check on a caregiver's background?

How do I prepare my child for child care?

What are Child Care Centers?

A child care center is care for children in a group setting. Community Care Licensing regulates all types of centers, including full-day centers, part-day nursery schools, preschools, school-age programs, and parent cooperatives.

Full-day child care centers are open all day and all year to cover the hours needed by working parents. Part-day centers, called nursery schools or preschools for children 3-5 years old generally offer a program for 3-5 hours a day only during the school year.

Infant child care centers are licensed to care for infants and toddlers under age 2. School age centers are licensed to

serve children who are enrolled in kindergarten and above.

What is the legal teacher-child ratio in a child care center?

State law requires a teacher-to-child ratio of 1:4 for children under age 2, 1:12 for children 2-5, and 1:14 for children over 5.

What does a child care license tell me about a facility or provider?

Some forms of child care require licensing and others do not. The State of California requires that most child care centers and family child care homes be licensed by the Community Care Licensing division of the Department of Social Services.

The following types of care do not require a license:

- care provided in the child's home or by relatives
- family child care for the children of just one family in addition to the provider's own children
- care provided as a cooperative arrangement among parents, when the caregiver is not paid, and there are no more than 12 children receiving care in the same place at the same time
- extended day care programs operated by public or private schools for school age children

In the licensing process, a child care program is inspected by a state licensing analyst to ensure that the program meets minimum health and safety standards specified by law. There is a limit to the number and ages of children for each adult caregiver, and anyone caring for children must undergo a FBI background check. You can view all child care licensing requirements at the Community Care Licensing website

Parents should ask to see any family child care home or center's license, but a license by itself is no assurance about the quality of care provided. It is up to you to interview, ask questions, and make your own determination on which care is the best for your child.

What are the key state requirements for child care centers?

- All programs must maintain close contact with parents. They must inform parents about children's activities, adjustments, and development. Parents have the right to visit a center unannounced whenever their children are in care.
- Directors must have at least 12 college units in early childhood education or child development, as well as 3 additional units in administration. At least one director or teacher must have 15 hours of training in preventive health, including pediatric CPR and first aid.
- Teachers must have 12 college units in early childhood education or child development, half of which must be completed before employment.

- Teachers and directors in infant centers must complete 3 additional college units in infant care.
- The state lists certain methods of discipline which can never be used, including physical punishment of any kind.

What are Family Child Care Homes?

A family child care home is child care offered in the private residence of the person who provides the care (called a provider). California's family child care home regulations distinguish between a "small" home and a "large" home. Homes must meet certain requirements before being granted a license. They are inspected before receiving a license, when there is a complaint, and once every 5 years to be sure they continue to meet these requirements.

What is the group size and provider-child ratio in family child care homes?

In a "small" home, one provider alone may care for up to 6 children, including the provider's own children under age 10. Not more than 3 of the children can be infants (under 2 years old). Two additional school-age children may be enrolled if certain requirements are met.

In a "large" home, a provider may care for 7-13 children, with the help of an assistant. Two additional school-age children may be accepted if the home meets all the licensing rules for large homes. Whenever more than 12 children are present, no more than 3 of the children may be an infant.

What are the key state requirements for family child care homes?

- Parents have the right to visit a family child care home unannounced whenever their children are in care.
- If a small family child care home enrolls more than 6 children, the parents must be notified in writing.
- If a large home enrolls more than 12 children, the parents must be notified in writing.
- Providers must have 15 hours of training in preventive health practices, including CPR and first aid. No formal training in early care and education is required.
- Providers in "large" family child care homes must have one prior year of child care experience as a licensed family child care provider or the administrator of a center.
- The state lists certain methods of discipline which can never be used, including physical punishment of any kind.

How do I choose a child care program that is right for my family?

Here are some tips if you decide to use a licensed family child care home or child care center:

Allow yourself plenty of time to look at a variety of child care arrangements. If possible, begin your search several months before you need the care.

Consider what you will need from your provider:

- What are your beliefs regarding child care and parenting?
- How do you feel about pacifiers, infant feeding, toilet training, and napping?
- What are your views on discipline and education?
- What kinds of activities do you want for your child?
- What are your family's or child's special needs?

Decide on a location and if you need care:

- Close to your home.
- On your way to work or near your work.
- Close to public transportation.

Get a list of names from the local child care Resource & Referral agency and from friends and family. In Southern Alameda County, call 4C's at 510-582-2182.

Do a telephone screening. Start your selection process on the phone and take notes on the following points:

- Availability
- Location
- Hours of operation
- Costs
- Licensing and accreditation
- Staff education and training, credentials and experience
- Staff-child ratio
- Toilet training requirement
- Transportation
- Meals

Visit a variety of facilities. In addition to looking at the environment, observe the interaction between the caregivers and children.

- Visit the facility during different times of the day to get a better feel for the atmosphere.

- Look at the rooms where children spend most of their time, plus the kitchen, bathroom, and transportation vehicle (if applicable).
- Ask about sleeping arrangements and meal menus.
- Look at the playground, building, and toys. Is there enough indoor and outdoor play equipment for the number of children? Is it e-appropriate and safe?
- Ask how long the TV is on during a typical day.
- You may want to make your first visit alone so that you can interview the director or family child care provider and decide if the program merits a second look. Take your child with you on the next visit to see his reaction to the facility, teachers, and other children.

Interview the director or family child care provider and each staff member who will care for your child.

- Ask about staff turnover and employee pay scale and benefits.
- Ask the director or family child care provider about program philosophy and discipline methods.
- Let the provider know about your family, your concerns, and your expectations.
- Use a specific situation, such as biting or hitting, and ask how the situation would be handled. Ask about sick child care policies and provisions for a disaster situation.

Check for reports of any complaints filed against any of the programs you are considering.

- Parents have the right to get complaint information on any child care program they are considering. Copies of licensing reports, including complaint investigations, must be made available at the child care facility.
- Call Community Care Licensing at 510-622-2614. You will need to provide the center or provider's name, address, and license number.

Get references from other parents in the program. Ask the center director or family child care provider to give you a list of names and phone numbers of parents who are currently using the program or who have used the program in the past.

Have a "test-period" with the program to see how your child adjusts and to give yourself time to evaluate your decision.

What if my child has special needs?

Early childhood programs, both family child care homes and child care centers, provide environments in which all children can grow and develop. The opportunity for children with special needs to participate in playful experiences with other young children has great value for all of the children; as they play together, they develop a sense that everyone, regardless of ability, makes an important contribution to the group.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. This means that child care providers are required to make reasonable accommodations to support and enable children with disabilities to become fully included in their programs. An accommodation is considered reasonable if it does not cause an undue hardship to the provider. This is assessed on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the provider's available resources. The ADA is trying to encourage the attitude of

“Let’s see what we can work out…” instead of “We can’t do that.” For more information on the ADA law and best practices for inclusion in child care, contact our Resource and Referral Department at 510-582-2182.

What if I want to have a caregiver come into my own home?

In-home care is provided in the child's own home by someone the parent has hired, perhaps a nanny, student, or a sitter. The caregiving may be provided by someone who comes in every day, or by someone who lives in your home. Because there are no state or national regulations or standards for in-home care, careful recruiting, interviewing, and reference checks on your part are essential. You can provide your own background check through a statewide program called TrustLine. This service checks for criminal convictions and substantiated child abuse reports. A parent can find out if someone is listed in the registry by calling 800-822-8490 and giving the caregiver's full name and driver's license number.

How do I choose a caregiver for my own home?

Here are some tips if you decide to have someone come into your home to take care of your child:

1. Create a job description.

- Decide whether you want someone to live in your home or to come to your home in the daytime only.
- Think through your expectations, including specific hours and responsibilities.
- Make a list of the benefits you are offering, such as vacation time or sick days.
- Be very specific.

2. Approach your search through a variety of methods.

- Look at ads in your local newspaper and those posted at community locations.
- Place your own help-wanted ad.
- Call 4C's of Alameda County child care referral line 510-582-2182 to get the phone numbers of nanny agencies serving southern Alameda County.

3. Develop interview questions.

- Learn about the caregiver's experience, knowledge, and problem solving skills.
- What discipline methods does the caregiver use?
- What is her previous experience with infants, toddlers, and school age children?
- If required as part of the job, what is the applicants experience in household duties (i.e., cleaning and cooking chores)?

4. Do a preliminary screening over the phone.

- How much experience has the person had?
 - What are her salary requirements?
 - Trust your instincts and set up interviews only with people you have a good feeling about.
5. Do an in-person interview.
- Have your child with you during the interview so you can observe the caregiver's interaction.
 - Set up the interview at a time when you can give the applicant your full attention.
6. Get references from previous employers.
7. Ask to see the applicant's DMV record if she will be driving your child.
8. Do a background check on TrustLine, 800-822-8490.
9. Pay the potential applicant to spend a day with you and the child.
10. Create a contract and a "test period."
- Take time to evaluate your decision by having a "test period." Clarify tasks, work hours, housing arrangements, benefits, and payment.
 - Be clear about what you want the caregiver to do with your child - and just as important, what you don't want her to do.
 - Be aware of government requirements. The government considers you an employer and responsible for related paperwork for your employee.

At the very least, when you have a full-time in-home caregiver, you are required to pay:

- at least minimum wage
- social security and Medicare taxes (FICA)
- federal unemployment tax (FUTA) - if the caregiver makes more than \$1,000 per quarter (amounts change, so always check with the IRS)
- federal income tax withholding - only if the caregiver specifically requests it
- state income tax withholding.
- If you use an agency to help you find your in-home caregiver, the agency may also strongly encourage you to pay for benefits, such as health insurance, vacation, and sick time. Go to www.irs.gov and download IRS Publication 926 .

How do I check a caregiver's background?

There are several ways to do so – interview the caregiver, get references from others who have used the caregiver, check with Community Care Licensing for licensing reports and complaint investigations, and request information from California's TrustLine criminal background database.

What is TrustLine?

TrustLine is a database of nannies and baby-sitters that have cleared criminal background checks in California. It is the only authorized screening program of in-home child care providers in the state with access to fingerprint records at the California Department of Justice and FBI. It was created by the California Legislature in 1987 and is a powerful resource for parents hiring a nanny or baby-sitter.

All caregivers listed with TrustLine have been cleared through a fingerprint check of records at the California Department of Justice. This means they have no disqualifying criminal convictions or substantiated child abuse reports in California. TrustLine is administered by the California Department of Social Services and the non-profit Child Care Resource and Referral Network . It is endorsed by the California Academy of Pediatrics .

How can a parent use TrustLine?

Parents can check whether a nanny or baby-sitter is already listed with TrustLine by calling 800-822-8490. Parents will need the person's full name and driver's license number.

What if the person that I want to hire as a nanny or baby-sitter is not already listed with TrustLine?

You may request that potential child care providers go through the TrustLine process to check their fingerprints for any disqualifying criminal convictions or substantiated child abuse reports in California. 4C's has applications available and can submit completed applications to the California Department of Social Services for listing with TrustLine. To obtain an application, please call the referral department at 510-582-2182. For more information about TrustLine please call 800-822-8490 or visit TrustLine's website.

How do I prepare my child for child care?

First, prepare yourself. Many parents experience guilt, frustration, jealousy, and unhappiness when leaving their child with a caregiver for the first time. Have confidence in your ability to find the best situation for your child and talk to other parents to help clarify your feelings.

Here are some tips to help prepare your child:

- Prepare your child by reading books and talking about child care.

- Give your child the words to describe the experience. Words give your child some power over what is happening to him.
- Gradually introduce your child to care by arranging to stay as long as your child needs you on his first day or week in the new caregiving situation.
- Remember, change requires time for adjustment. Your child may fall back on more familiar and comfortable behavior while he adjusts to new surroundings. If he was toilet trained, he may start having accidents. If she was beginning to talk, she may have less to say. These are temporary delays while your child adjusts to a new situation.
- Let your child take a favorite stuffed animal, blanket, or toy and a picture of you and the family. These things will give him comfort with something familiar to touch and hold.
- Establish a daily routine so your child knows when you'll be leaving and returning.
- Take a little extra time in the morning when you leave your child with the provider and in the evening when you pick him up. This is a good time to talk to the provider and let your child gradually enter or leave on his or her own terms.
- Keep the lines of communication open so everyone can enjoy the child care experience. The care of your child is a partnership that requires good communication between you, your provider, and your child.