



A Parent’s Guide to Quality Child Care

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INTRODUCTION

The 4-C Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) service is part of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). We offer child care referrals and consumer education to help you make an informed decision. All the information provided is held strictly confidential. There may be a small fee to use the CCR&R service. A sliding fee scale is used based on family size and gross annual income. CCR&R staff do not recommend one child care provider over another.

Selecting child care is a parental choice. There are many things to think about and questions to ask when you are selecting the best child care for your family. This booklet is designed to assist you in your child care search.

OUR MISSION

4-C's Mission is to promote children's well being by advocating for quality, affordable child care. We support parents and those providing child care by offering information, education, resources and services. Serving Carroll, DeKalb, Lee, McHenry, Ogle and Whiteside Counties.

TYPES OF CHILD CARE

FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

Family child care is care for children of mixed ages in the home of another family. Family child care homes are required to be licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) if there are more than 3 unrelated children in care.

Family child care providers who care for three or fewer unrelated children, including their own children 12 years of age or under, do not need a DCFS license. This is called License-Exempt care. License-Exempt programs are not monitored by DCFS. Parents are encouraged to check for basic health and safety standards and assess program quality.

GROUP CHILD CARE HOMES

Group child care homes are similar to family child care homes. They are required to be licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and can care for up to 16 children. The number counted includes the family's natural, foster, or adopted children and all other persons 12 years of age or under.

CHILD CARE CENTERS

In a child care center children are cared for in classrooms with children of the same age level. Age appropriate experiences and activities are planned to enhance development. Child care centers must be licensed by DCFS unless they are specifically exempt from licensing. If you are in doubt as to whether a provider is legally license exempt, call 4-C or DCFS.

PRESCHOOLS AND SCHOOL AGE PROGRAMS

Preschools provide group socialization and activities designed to enhance the development of children 3 to 5 years of age. These programs meet on a part time basis and usually follow the school calendar. They do not provide comprehensive child care.

School age care is for children 5-12 years old during out of school hours. It is found in a variety of settings such as elementary schools, family child care homes, summer camps, community centers or existing child care centers.

Preschools and school age care are licensed under the same regulations as child care centers.

IN-HOME CARE

An in-home child care provider is employed by the parent to provide care in the child's own home. In Illinois there is no provision for licensing of in-home providers. Nanny agencies must be registered with the Illinois Department of Labor.

CHILD CARE LICENSING STANDARDS IN ILLINOIS

DCFS sets licensing standards for child care homes and centers. Licensing standards cover basic health and safety requirements, maximum group sizes, child to adult ratios and minimum requirements for child care training. There are requirements for appropriate activities, discipline, space, equipment, supplies, policies and records.

All DCFS licensed child care home and center providers must be able to communicate well and promote children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. DCFS completes criminal background checks and Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System (CANTS) checks on all providers working in licensed settings. There must be someone certified in First Aid and CPR present at all times in every licensed child care home and center.

DCFS also operates a Day Care Information Line that you can call to check the child care provider's history of compliance with the DCFS licensing regulations. The toll free number is 1-877-746-0829 and is available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

ACCREDITATION

Accredited programs have gone through a voluntary self-assessment and have met nationally recognized standards for quality child care. Accreditation indicates a strong commitment to provide quality child care.

Programs may be accredited by:

- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association for Child Care Professionals (NACCP)
- National After School Association (NAA)
- National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

THE SEARCH, INTERVIEW & VISIT

The Search

Finding quality, affordable child care takes time. Your search will include phone calls and visits. Plan ahead so that you have ample time to research your options and make an informed decision.

The Phone Interview

The phone interview will help you decide which centers or homes you will visit. Identify your family's needs so you can ask questions that address your concerns. During the interview gather information about the services offered. Some points to address include:

- The age of the child
- The days and hours you need care
- Group size
- The provider's experience and educational background
- Licensing and accreditation
- Description of a typical day
- Special needs of your child
- Costs

Ask questions that are of particular importance to you. If the child care program meets your needs, arrange an on-site visit.

The Visit

- Allow ample time.
- Visit once when the children are there and again with just the provider.
- Make observations and ask questions about the child care provider, environment and program. Pay attention to the children. Consider whether they seem happy and at ease with the provider.
- If the program meets your family's needs and you feel you can develop a cooperative relationship with the provider, arrange to visit with your child. Observe how the provider and your child interact before making a final decision.

CHECKLIST FOR IDENTIFYING QUALITY CHILD CARE

The Provider

- Appears to be warm, patient and sensitive to children's individual needs.
- Speaks directly and positively to the children.
- Encourages the children to be creative and express themselves freely.
- Fosters cooperation and problem solving among the children.
- Helps children develop language skills by talking to them about their activities.
- Has clear, consistent and age-appropriate expectations for children's behavior.
- Redirects children to more acceptable behavior.
- Encourages boys and girls to participate in the same activities.
- Continues to learn by attending classes, trainings and conferences.
- Communicates regularly and openly with parents about children's activities and achievements.

The Child Care Center

- The staff is DCFS qualified and has knowledge of child development.
- Staff turnover is relatively low.
- The child will remain with the same teacher for more than one year or will have sufficient time to transition to another teacher.
- There are security procedures in place for entering or leaving the premises.
- All families are welcomed and respected.
- There are multiple avenues for communicating with parents.
- The adult to child ratio is low. There should be no more than four infants to one adult. A ratio of one adult to ten children is acceptable for preschoolers.
- The group size is small enough so children are safe, secure and well supervised.

The Program

- There is a fairly consistent schedule each day.
- There is a balance of free play and guided learning, quiet time and active play.
- The children play outside when the weather permits.
- There is a variety of equipment and materials to help the children learn and grow.
- The toys are attractively displayed at the children's eye level.
- The materials reflect ethnic and cultural diversity.
- There are books available for the children, and stories are read daily.
- There are opportunities to experience music, art and nature.

Health and Safety

- There is adequate heat, light and ventilation.
- The facility is clean and well maintained.
- There is enough space indoors and outdoors for children to move freely and safely.
- The space outside is free of dangerous materials and protected from traffic.
- An adult supervises the children at all times.
- The equipment is clean, safe and in good condition.
- The diapering area is away from the eating and play areas.
- The children wash their hands before meals and after using the bathroom.
- The provider washes his/her hands before and after: preparing meals, using the bathroom, attending to diapering, cleaning cuts and wiping runny noses.
- A variety of nutritious food is served.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are present and working.
- Emergency numbers and escape plans are posted.
- First aid kits and fire extinguishers are easily accessible but out of children's reach.

- ❑ The environment is free of hazards. (Check for sharp edges, staircases without railings, small objects that could pose a choking hazard, exposed electrical outlets and cords, loose area rugs, sharp objects such as tools and knives, cords dangling from blinds and draperies, medicines, cleaning supplies or other household chemicals.)

Preparing Your Child for a Smooth Transition

- Spend time with your child getting to know the provider and the other children.
- Try to feel and act positively about the new arrangement.
- Explain some of the details of your child's day so he/she knows what to expect.
- When you leave always say goodbye. Never try to slip away. Your child will learn to trust that you have left temporarily and will return.
- At the end of the day be available to share the highlights of your child's day and to give some extra TLC.

MAKING CHILD CARE WORK

When you establish a positive relationship with your child's provider, everybody wins. Knowing that you like and respect the provider will help your child do the same. Your child's provider will communicate more readily with you and likely be more motivated in their job if they feel respected and appreciated. Remember that you and your provider are partners, working together in the best interests of your child.

Tips for Developing a Positive Relationship with your Child's Provider:

- Be warm and respectful.
- Communicate openly and honestly about a variety of topics.
- Ask advice and share ideas so that you can both benefit from each other's experience.
- Let the provider know of any events at home, or changes in the routine that may influence your child's behavior.
- Give a minimum of two weeks notice for schedule changes, vacations or termination.
- Be on time dropping off and picking up your child. Call if you are running late.
- Keep ill children at home and promptly pick up children who become ill while in care.
- Read all notes, newsletters and communications.
- Express your appreciation by saying thank you or writing notes.
- Inform your provider of any allergies or medical conditions.
- Make sure you understand the written contracts and policies.
- Give the provider all phone numbers where you may be reached.
- Keep important phone numbers such as family doctor and emergency contacts up to date.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR CHILD CARE PROVIDER

- A commitment to provide a safe and nurturing environment for your child.
- Clear communication of all policies, written and verbal.
- Regular and open communication about your child's activities, growth and development.
- A willingness to discuss concerns in a positive manner.
- A minimum of two weeks written notice when there is a change in fees, policies, procedures or schedule.
- An open door policy at all times.

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR BACKUP CARE

Sometimes your child may be sick or the provider may be unavailable due to illness or other factors. It is important to have more than one backup care arrangement. One thing to consider is that if you choose a licensed program for temporary child care, you will have to complete the necessary paperwork from DCFS before bringing your child to that provider.

Some options for arranging backup care are:

- Contact 4-C for child care providers who do temporary/emergency care.
- Make cooperative arrangements with friends, relatives or neighbors.
- Some hospitals provide sick child care.
- Consider using college students or others with flexible schedules.

WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Even when the overall quality of the care is good, sometimes problems develop. Open communication with your provider may prevent small problems from becoming major complaints. If you are having difficulty resolving a conflict, contact 4-C to discuss your options.

COMPLAINT POLICY

4-C has a policy and procedure for complaints received concerning child care providers.

- 1.) 4-C staff will determine the nature of the complaint (child abuse, licensing violation or personal complaint).
- 2.) Complaints involving licensing will be referred to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).
- 3.) Complaints involving suspected child abuse and neglect will be referred to the DCFS hotline at (800) 252-2873.
- 4.) All information and actions concerning complaints will be documented and will remain confidential.

4-C also has a policy and procedure for complaints about our Resource and Referral Service. Please contact 4-C at any time if you are not completely satisfied with our service.

A copy of 4-C's complete Complaint Policy is available upon request.

HELP PAYING FOR CHILD CARE

Income eligible families can receive help paying for their child care while they work and/or attend an approved education or training program. The family makes a co-payment based on their annual income, family size and the number of children in child care. For more information about the Illinois Department of Human Services Child Care Assistance Program, contact 4-C at (815) 758-8149 ext. 225 or (800) 848-8727 ext. 225.

Child care programs may offer scholarships, sibling discounts or sliding fee scales. Some employers offer flexible spending accounts, or other programs, to help employees with child care costs. Families may be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or the Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) & CHILD CARE

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects children and adults with mental or physical disabilities from discrimination based on disability in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government services and telecommunications.

Child care centers and family child care homes, regardless of size and whether publicly funded or not, are considered "public accommodations" and must comply with ADA.

Children cannot be excluded from child care based on a disability. Programs must assess each child with a disability on an individual basis to determine whether the child can be cared for in the program.

Programs must make reasonable adaptations and changes to accommodate children with disabilities. These steps must be attempted unless they cause "undue burden" such as a significant difficulty or expense. Please call 4-C if you would like further information on the ADA.

OTHER 4-C SERVICES

Advocacy for Children and Families
Child & Adult Care Food Program
Education, Training & Support Services
Financial Assistance for Child Care
All Kids Health Insurance Application Assistance
Nursing, Social Work & Social/Emotional Health Consultation
Parent Education Program
Resource Libraries
Specialized Services for Business and Industry

CALL ON US ...

CCR&R Services for DeKalb, Ogle, Lee, Carroll
and Whiteside Counties:
155 North Third Street, Suite 300
DeKalb, IL 60115
Phone: 815-758-8149 or 800-848-8727 ext. 223
Please use the local number when possible.
Fax: 815-758-5652
Office/Walk In Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday – Friday

CCR&R Services for McHenry County:
667 Ridgeview Drive
McHenry, IL 60050
Phone: 815-344-5510 or 866-347-2277
Please use the local number when possible.
Fax: 815-344-5520
Office/Walk In Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday – Friday
*For Child Care Financial Assistance in McHenry County,
Please contact the DeKalb office.

For more information about 4-C, please visit our website at www.four-c.org

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)
LOCAL OFFICES

DeKalb County Office
760 North Peace Road
DeKalb, IL 60115
815-787-5300

Whiteside County Office
2607 Woodlawn Avenue, Suite 10
Sterling, IL 61081
815-625-7594

McHenry County Office
113 Newell Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
815-338-1068

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