



# Child Care Guide

A RESOURCE GUIDE Helping Parents  
Select Quality Child Care



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Please keep in mind that the Helpline Center Child Care Guide provides helpful information in selecting child care, but cannot guarantee the selection of a quality child care provider. You, as parent or guardian, are responsible for determining and monitoring the quality of each child care facility. You must make the final decision about child care arrangements.

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# About the Child Care Helpline Guide

The Helpline Center has been connecting parents in the Sioux Empire with child care resources for over 25 years. We've provided this guide as a tool for parents to help them in selecting quality child care that will best meet their needs. 11 million children under the age of 5 spend 35 hours per week or more with a child care provider. Confidence that your child is safe and happy in a stimulating environment allows you to excel in your workplace. Research has shown that a child's healthy development is dependent on positive early experiences, and the child care provider you choose can have a major impact. Being able to depend on high quality, reliable daycare is essential for parents, but considering all of the aspects of child care may make this choice seem overwhelming. This guide can help you make the best decision for you and your family.

## This guide can help you:

- Understand what quality child care is and why it's important
- Choose child care that is right for your child's unique temperament
- Know what to look for in quality child care providers
- Understand licensing requirements
- Understand different types of care, and the advantages and disadvantages of each type
- Understand and facilitate the interviewing process
- Understand the resources available for Child Care Assistance, as well as budgeting for care
- Maintain a great relationship with the provider you choose
- Recognize when something is wrong
- Prepare your child for daycare

# Steps to Choosing Quality Child Care

1

## Dial 2-1-1 to reach the Child Care Helpline for resources and referrals

Start looking for care as far in advance as possible. Finding quality child care of any type—whether it is a child care center, a family daycare, care for infants, toddlers, or school age—can take some time. Some providers may have waiting lists, so try to give yourself at least 2 months to make this decision. By calling 211, visiting the Helpline Center’s website [helplinecenter.org/childcare](https://helplinecenter.org/childcare) or searching the Helpline Center Child Care database you can receive provider referrals that list child care options that are customized to meet your needs.

2

## Visit and ask questions

When you visit child care providers, consider key indicators of quality. Use the checklist inside this guide to help determine if the provider meets your needs.

3

## Make a choice

Use the Child Care Helpline Guide when selecting a provider for your family. Consider what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family.

4

## Stay involved

The work isn’t over once you have found quality care for your child. You and your child care provider are now partners, and positive communication is essential for this relationship.

# Understanding Your Child's Needs

Knowing your child's strengths and needs will help you in choosing a child care program. It is important consider their temperament and development stage:

## Infants

Infants have unique and personal rhythms, strengths, styles and needs:

- Some infants adapt to change easily, while others are more cautious.
- Activity levels can vary for infants; some are more energetic, some less.
- As is true with everyone, babies' social temperaments can vary; some love lots of interaction, while others can be more reserved.

Because infants' brains develop rapidly, it is important that caregivers provide a stable, yet flexible routine that offers plenty of personal, thoughtful and caring interaction and affection.

## Toddlers

Because they are mobile, verbal and curious, toddlers' worlds expand rapidly. Toddlers possess:

- A desire to be independent, as well as a limited awareness of risk.
- Developing verbal abilities.
- Vibrant curiosity about the world around them.
- Desire to do things themselves, while still depending a great deal on caregivers.

Caregivers who understand and enjoy toddlers can work with their independence and help them grow, so that the "terrific twos" can be a time of growth and learning.

# Understanding Your Child's Needs

## Preschoolers

Enthusiastic, outgoing and eager to try new things, preschoolers:

- Are curious about the world around them. They question how and why things work, experiment with new words and form new friendships.
- Play with materials and their friends in order to learn new information and work out normal fears and fantasies.
- Need routines in their daily schedule to feel comfortable and safe in exploring and learning.

Caregivers who provide ample opportunities to learn within a structured environment, with adequate time to adjust to new information, will be a valuable asset in the growth and development of your preschooler.

## School Age

Children in this age group seem to have settled down to a steadier pace of growing and learning:

- Younger school aged children are interested in real-life tasks and activities, and teamwork and following rules becomes important.
- Older school-agers have a deeper sense of self; social acceptance and achievement become priorities. School and community influences become important to them, in addition to home and family priorities.

Caregivers who understand the growing social and community awareness and developing sense of self in school-age children will provide stimulating and nurturing environments for them to mature.

# Defining Quality Child Care

The National Association for The Education of Young Children suggests that a quality child care provider is one that “provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.” Similarly, for parents, a quality child care setting is one where their child feels safe and secure, and receives individual attention. When a family receives quality child care, their quality of life at home is better. Their children will be more likely to have higher rates of physical, intellectual, and socio-emotional development.

To find out how South Dakota ranks in providing quality child care, visit [childcareaware.org](http://childcareaware.org).

## A quality provider will:

- Show love and respect towards children
- Exhibit genuine enjoyment in interacting with young children
- Provide children with learning experiences that match their ages and interests
- Talk with and read to children daily
- Positively acknowledge children’s accomplishments
- Positively encourage children
- Provide a safe environment in which children can freely explore

The most important elements to consider when making your choice for quality child care are **Health & Safety, Learning Environment, Staffing & Qualifications**. The following sections will help you know what to look for when considering a provider.

# Defining Quality Child Care

## Health & Safety

It is important to keep the following health and safety standards in mind when choosing a quality provider:

### Cleanliness:

- Quality providers will emphasize hand washing for staff and children.
- Floors, tables, and toys should be clean and in good repair.
- There should be a separate area for diapering, with a procedure for handling soiled diapers.

### Nutrition:

- Providers should have a sample menu.
- There should be specific guidelines in place to promote healthy eating habits and variety in menus.

### Emergency Preparedness—Look for:

- A written emergency plan.
- A well-stocked first aid kit and emergency supplies.
- Up-to-date contact information for the children.
- A plan in place to notify parents if a child is sick or hurt.



## Learning Environment

In a quality daycare, a child is supervised at all times, yet has the opportunity for independent play. Look for the following signs of a healthy learning environment:

- Compliance with mandated child-to-staff ratios—research shows that smaller group sizes work best, especially for infants and young children.
- A well-organized, warm and inviting physical environment.
- A variety of play materials and access to hands-on activities that promote healthy emotional, social and physical development.
- Fenced, outside play area with opportunities to safely run, jump, climb, and explore.
- Children that seem happy, comfortable and engaged.
- Commitment to consistent, positive discipline or redirection.
- Realistic expectations of behavior based on the children's ages and stages of development.

## Staffing & Qualifications

When evaluating the quality of those whom you will be hiring to care for your children, the following should be taken into account:

- Licensed and registered providers are required to meet a minimum number of training hours every year. Training areas could include First Aid/CPR, child development, cultural diversity, food handling, etc.
- Open communication between providers and parents is imperative; parents should feel well-informed and have confidence that any concerns are addressed quickly and appropriately.
- High quality providers do a good job of hiring and keeping staff, including thorough background checks and employee review processes. Quality providers will have low turnover rates.

# Choosing the Right Setting

Some parents have a preference for smaller, in-home daycares, while others prefer child care centers. In order to choose the setting that will be right for your family, it is helpful to examine the advantages and disadvantages of each type of care.

## Day Care Center

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- ✔ Reliable (have staff available to fill in when someone is sick)
- ✔ Ample supervision
- ✔ Staff is trained in Early Childhood Education
- ✔ Licensed and regulated
- ✔ Some may offer preschool curriculum
- ✔ Structured activities
- ✔ May offer field trips, have a playground, or other activities
- ✔ May offer transportation
- ✘ More expensive than home daycare
- ✘ Centers that care for infants may be difficult to find or may be full
- ✘ Kids may get sick more often in a daycare center due to exposure to more children
- ✘ Closed during holidays
- ✘ Rigid pick-up & drop-off times
- ✘ Higher turnover rate

## In Home Daycare

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- ✔ Nurturing, home-like atmosphere
- ✔ Total number of children is smaller than at large daycare centers
- ✔ Kids may receive more individual attention
- ✔ Kids socialize with other kids of the same or different ages
- ✔ Usually more flexible with pick-up and drop-off times
- ✔ Some may offer preschool curriculum
- ✔ Low turnover rate
- ✘ Less regulation, may or may not be licensed/regulated
- ✘ May need to find backup care if provider is sick
- ✘ May not have formal training in child development
- ✘ Less stringent licensing requirements
- ✘ Closed for holidays & vacation



# Defining the Types of Child Care

## Child Care Center • State Licensed

There are two types of licensed child care centers. Group Family Day Care Homes are licensed for 13-20 children. Child Care Centers are licensed for 21 or more children. South Dakota law defines licensed care as providing child care for a part of a 24-hour day to children from one or more unrelated families, including the provider's own children under the age of six years, regardless of the source of income.

- A licensed facility may be located in the provider's own home or in a separate facility.
- Licensed facilities are mandated by law to be licensed regardless of funding source.
- A licensed facility may be operated as a nonprofit organization or as an independent, proprietary facility.
- A licensed facility is required to obtain a license prior to operating.
- Licensed facilities are inspected once each year.



# Family Child Care Home

## Family Child Care Home • State Registered

South Dakota law defines a Family Child Care Home as one in which care is given on a regular basis for any part of a 24 hour day to 12 or less children from more than one unrelated family. This includes any children under the age of six who are living in the home.

- Family child care is a service provided in the provider's home.
- Family child care providers are registered rather than licensed. Registration is a voluntary process where the applicants declare their intent to provide family child care and agree to comply with standards that have been established by the Department of Social Services. A registration certificate is in effect for two years. Registration is legally mandated when a provider receives compensation from public funds. Providers who are not receiving reimbursement from public funds and caring for 12 or fewer children are exempt from registration. A registered family child care provider must be at least 18 years old.
- Family Day care homes are inspected once every two years.

## Before & After School Care Center • State Licensed

Before & After School Care Centers provide care and supervision before and after school hours for children who are five years of age or older and enrolled in school.

- Before & After School Care Center providers serve only school-age children and may be providing care for either part of a day or full-time during school breaks.
- Before & After School Care Centers are required to become licensed regardless of the funding source or location of the program. Centers are inspected each year.
- Before & After School programs are required to obtain a license prior to opening.
- The exemption to this requirement is if the after school program is providing educational or recreational activities.

Licensed and registered child care providers may be eligible to receive reimbursement through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This program is administered by the Child and Adult Nutrition Services Program in the SD Department of Education.



# Types of Daycare, as regulated by the City of Sioux Falls

(Applies only to in-home providers within the Sioux Falls city limits)

A Family Day Care Home means a dwelling, occupied as a residence by the care provider, in which family-like care is given to not more than 12 children including the provider's own children who are under the age of six years, for any part of the 24-hour day, for compensation, whether paid directly or indirectly.

**Day Care:** The providing of care and supervision of children/adults as a supplement to regular parental/home care, without transfer of legal custody or placement for adoption, with or without compensation, on a regular basis for a part of a day.

**Day Care, Home:** Care is provided in a dwelling and the number of persons cared for is limited to a maximum of six adults or six children under the age of 14 years. Included in the number of children are the provider's own children 6 years and under. The dwelling shall be used as the principal use, and the day care use accessory.

**Day Care, Family:** Care is provided in a dwelling. The number of persons cared for is seven to twelve adults or children under the age of 14 years including the provider's own children six years and under. The dwelling shall be used as the principal use, and the day care use is accessory.



# STATE & CITY REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

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## STATE REGISTRATION 2018

Voluntary for providers caring for 12 or less children

## CITY OF SIOUX FALLS REGISTRATION

Mandatory for any Family Child Care provider living within the Sioux Falls city limits

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Initial home inspections followed by annual inspections

Inspections are currently done on newly registered day cares and only at those in which the Health Department has received a complaint

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Orientation training, 6 hours of annual training, valid CPR certification, and First Aid training

6 credit hours of continuing education per year; valid CPR certification and first aid training

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One-time initial physical exam for provider

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Providers and household members over age 10 complete Central Registry and Sex Offender Registry screening

Central registry screen is done for anyone over the age of 15 in the household

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Current immunization records for provider's children and children in care

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Felony background check for providers and household members age 18 and over that live in a providers home and have unsupervised access to children

Felony background check anyone who frequents the home; providers are required to report if anyone who frequents the house is on the sex offender registry

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Ratio: 4 children under the age of two years; of those 4 children, no more than 2 can be under the age of one year

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Meet minimal health and safety standards

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Ability to accept Child Care Assistance

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Qualify to receive assistance from a federal food program

**If you have additional questions about licensing or registration requirements, please call the Child Care Helpline by dialing 211.**

# THE INTERVIEWING AND DECISION PROCESS

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Once you have received a list of referrals from the Child Care Helpline, call several that fit your needs. Start early, because finding good care can take some time. When you call, introduce yourself as a parent looking for child care, so they can inform you right away as to whether or not they have vacancies. If they do, schedule a time to go. When you visit, keep in mind three things: **Look, Listen** and **Count**. Be sure to prepare a checklist of questions, a notepad and paper to bring with you before you visit.

## Look

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- Cozy, home-like setting
- Clean and safe
- Comfortable and organized
- Dangerous items out of reach
- Plenty of activities, books, toys
- Outdoor space to run and play
- Equipment in good condition
- Visible and accessible emergency numbers

## Listen

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- Happy and engaged children and teachers
- If it's too quiet, there may not be enough activity
- If there's excessive noise, it might indicate lack of control

## Count

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- Count number of children in the group, count number of caregivers. The smaller the ratio, the more attention your child will receive.
- Does the provider follow state and city ratio requirements?

**Take notes at each site you visit, what you liked/disliked. Use these notes for possible interview questions and discussions.**



# The Interview

Interviewing a potential provider can seem intimidating. The interview will likely tell you whether the provider will be a good match for your family, so it is very important. The Helpline Center has created an interview sheet with a list of specific questions that you can bring with you when you meet the provider. The interview sheet can be downloaded from the Helpline Center's website, [helplinecenter.org/childcare](http://helplinecenter.org/childcare).

It's a good idea to share with the provider that you will be asking them a series of questions to help make your decision. Make sure you are satisfied with their answers before you leave. You can find out if the provider has had complaints or citations filed against them by visiting these websites: [dss.sd.gov/childcare](http://dss.sd.gov/childcare) and [siouxfalls.org/health.aspx](http://siouxfalls.org/health.aspx) and by calling the Dept. of Social Services (605) 773-4766 or by contacting the City of Sioux Falls Health Dept. (605) 367-8760.

## Additional Considerations

Be sure to take a moment to ask yourself the following questions when you visit.

1. Do the children seem happy and engaged? Yes / No
2. Are crying children responded to immediately? Yes / No
3. Do caregivers cuddle babies? Talk directly to the children?  
Is their tone friendly and caring? Yes / No
4. Is the place clean and pleasant? Yes / No
5. Is the bathroom a pleasant setting, encouraging children to use it? Yes / No
6. Are appropriate safety measures (fire extinguisher, first aid kit, safety gates, safety plugs for electrical outlets, etc.) in place? Yes / No
7. During the hours you and your child are apart, will you feel at ease knowing your child is in this setting? Yes / No
8. If desired, is technology available to check on your child throughout the day? Yes / No

## Checking Parent References

Calling references is an important way to get more information. You would be well advised to pass on any provider who cannot or will not give you names of other parents. Ask each daycare you're considering for a list of past and present parent references—and call them. Ask specific questions: Instead of asking whether they like the daycare, ask what exactly they do and don't like about it. If their child is no longer there, ask why.

Can you give me the names & numbers of some families I could call for references?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduce yourself

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am considering using (provider's name) as my child care provider. (Provider's name) gave me your name as a reference. Would you be willing to take a few minutes to answer a few questions?"

## Possible Questions to Ask

- How long have you known the provider and in what capacity?
- Tell me about the strengths and weaknesses of this provider/program.
- Was there staff turnover and if so how was it handled?
- Did you have any concerns about the provider?  
If so, did the provider listen?
- How was discipline handled?
- Are you aware of any other parents having concerns about the care provided?
- What are the reasons you stopped care?
- Would you recommend this child care program?
- How do you communicate regarding milestones, scheduling, discipline, etc.?


Listen to what is and isn't said. Silence and hesitation can speak volumes. Find a non-threatening way to probe a little deeper if an answer puzzles or disturbs you. Even people who love their child care provider may tell you something which will help you decide whether or not the program will work for your child.

# Budgeting for Child Care

Child care is essential for the economy and for the family. It allows parents to concentrate on their jobs, and it helps children learn the social, emotional, and intellectual skills needed to succeed in school. It is very important to include child care expenses in your budget. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that parents spend no more than 10 percent of their family income on child care.

According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referrals (2018), the average annual cost for full-time care in South Dakota for a four-year-old is **\$5,242** (for a day care center that number rises to **\$6,198**).

In the Sioux Falls area, the average annual costs for child care (based on figures from the 2018 Child Care Helpline database) are as follows:

Child Care Center		Family Child Care
Infants ————— \$8,684		Infants ————— \$6,570
Toddlers ————— \$8,320		Toddlers ————— \$6,344

Many providers do offer multiple child discounts, or sliding fee scales.

The state of South Dakota does provide Child Care Assistance for those who are eligible. You may be eligible if:

- You are working at least 80 hours per month and within established income guidelines (175% of the Federal Poverty Level)
- You receive TANF and are in an approved work activity
- You are a college student who works or attends school a minimum of 80 hours per month
- You are a high school or GED student
- You are a licensed foster care family

For more information on South Dakota Child Care Assistance, or to apply, please call 1-800-227-3020, or visit South Dakota Department of Social Services website [dss.sd.gov](https://dss.sd.gov).



# Building a Positive Relationship with a Child Care Provider

Trusting a person to take care of your children is a big decision. Here are several things you can do to establish and maintain a great relationship with your child care provider:

- Honor the contract you agreed to follow
- Pay your provider on time
- Provide requested items
- Hand in paperwork on time
- Speak to your provider for a few minutes every day
- Set monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss your child
- Let the provider know if there are any family or life changes or events that could affect your child
- Let the provider know of any changes in routine, or if someone else will be picking up your child
- Get involved! Ask your provider how you can get involved with the program

Your provider will appreciate your involvement and interest in the program, as well as being kept informed. Also, let your caregiver know that you appreciate what they are doing! Thank them and let them know when you are pleased with something they have done.

Most importantly, communicate openly and honestly. If there is a problem, address it promptly, but never in front of your children. When you address your issues, listen to your provider's response, and be willing to make compromises.

# Preparing Your Child for Child Care

## **Talk with your child about what is happening.**

New experiences can be scary. If your child is able to understand, you can ease a lot of fears by talking to them about going to child care. Let them know what to expect, what will be similar and what will be different about their experience. Visit the library to find books on the topic of daycare that you can read together.

## **Share your positive attitude about child care with your child.**

Your child will feel good about going to child care if you feel good about your decision. Share specific details about the schedule at the new place and the experiences your child will have. Let your child know that going to child care can be fun.

## **Begin new child care situations gradually.**

You can help ease the transition to a new setting by visiting the child care program together a few times before your child starts. Involve your provider in creating a smooth transition to the child care routine. The provider can also help your child adjust to the new situation.

## **Help your child with transitions.**

Transition time is when parents and children separate in the morning and return together in the evening. When child care is new, transition time can be very difficult for everyone. Reassure your child that you will return to get them soon, and express trust in the provider to care for them while you are gone.

## **Expect a reasonable amount of adjustment time.**

Some children will adjust almost immediately to a new day care situation, while others may take several months. Check in with your provider to see how things are going with your child, be sensitive to your child's emotions and allow time for the adjustment to run its course.

# Know When Something is Wrong

As a parent, one of the biggest fears you may have is that someone you trust may mistreat or neglect your child. This is a rare occurrence, but unfortunately it does happen. In addition to your natural instinct as a parent, there are many signs that can indicate something may not be going well between your child and the provider.

- Does your child act distraught when it's time to be left with his caregiver?
- Does your child become moody or withdrawn, or have problems eating or sleeping?
- Have you noticed that your caregiver doesn't respond appropriately to your child?
- Does your caregiver refuse to answer questions about the day's activities, or engage in a discussion regarding your concerns?
- Has your provider lied, stolen or otherwise betrayed your trust?
- Have you dropped in unannounced and found your child inadequately supervised or cared for?
- Has anyone, a friend, neighbor, or other parent, reported that your provider has not been treating your child well?
- Do you simply have a bad feeling?

Talk to your caregiver, or ask other parents or neighbors to let you know what they see. However, if you have a feeling that your child is being mistreated in any way, it is best to let the caregiver go and find new arrangements.

The Helpline Center is available to help answer any questions or concerns from parents as they search for quality child care. Please dial 211 to talk with our Child Care Specialist.



helpline  
center

[helplinecenter.org](https://helplinecenter.org)

DIAL 2-1-1