



Selecting Quality Family Child Care

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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

Family child care is an arrangement in the home of another family. This is often not a relative. Many parents prefer family child care. It is more like their home. Parents can choose a family child care home that shares their family values and spiritual practices. The provider may speak the language the child hears at home. A family child care home may be able to take care of a mildly ill child. Parents who need child care early or late in the day or on weekends often choose family child care. Parents with transportation problems like child care in their neighborhoods.

A variety of ages may be present in a home. In Oklahoma, a licensed home may have up to seven children with one provider. A large family child care home may have up to 12 children and more than one provider. A home may serve infants through school age children. Family child care is most popular for children under three.

Positive Features of Family Child Care

- Your child receives one on one care when needed.
- The setting is more like a family.
- Your child has one consistent caregiver for many years.
- You may find family child care close to home.
- All of your children may be able to attend the same family child care home. Look for one that has infant through school-age care.
- More flexible hours suit part time employees or shift workers.
- Fees may be the same or less than child care center costs.

Licensing, Accreditation, and Credentials

A **licensed** family child care home ensures **minimum** standards for the care and protection of children. A licensing agent checks such areas as health and safety, adult-child ratio, caregiver training, equipment, nutrition, and behavior and guidance. Only licensed family child care homes can participate in the Child and Adult Food Program. Only licensed homes can receive payments from the Department of Human Services. Look for the license when you visit each home.

Licensed family child care homes in Oklahoma have a 1, 1+, 2 or 3 star rating. A one star program meets minimum licensing standards. A one star plus program is working toward 2 star status. A two star program has a well trained provider, interest centers and a parent program. A three star program



has two star status plus national accreditation.

An **accredited** family child care has met **additional** standards established by a national association. The family home providers are proud of this professional recognition.

All licensed family child care providers must have training in child care every year. Some have a Child Development Associate credential. This means they have training in family child care and resources. They must take a written exam and an oral interview. An advisor observes their work with children and families. Some providers will have associates degrees in child development or early childhood education from two-year colleges. Provider training in child care is an important sign of quality.

Finding Licensed Family Child Care Homes

Several agencies help inform parents about quality child care. They can help families locate licensed child care homes near their home or workplace.

Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral. Oklahoma parents can call 888-962-2772 or visit www.occrra.net to receive information on how to choose quality care. They can learn how to contact their local resource and referral agency.

Local Resource and Referral Agencies. These serve many Oklahoma counties. They have lists of licensed Family Child Care Homes. They can match your needs to available child care. Call 888-962-2772 to find out about resource and referral agencies serving certain areas of Oklahoma. Call National Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246 for information on local resource and referral agencies nationwide.

Department of Human Services. Ask for a list of licensed homes. Visit the office to read the records of each child care home you consider. Their publications help parents choose quality child care.

County OSU Cooperative Extension Office. The county extension educator provides research-based information about child care to parents and caregivers. The extension educator presents talks on child development and child care. She will refer parents to other helpful resources. She can help organize local efforts to improve the quality of child care.

National Association for Family Child Care. Parents and providers can view a list of accredited family child care homes in Oklahoma and accreditation standards on the NAFCC website www.nafcc.org.

Benefits of Quality Care

Family child care provides the same kinds of experiences a child would have at home. Quality family child care offers your child a chance to work at daily household chores. Your child will be with younger and older children. Family child care makes use of local parks, libraries, and special events. The small group and home setting allow children to be alone or with others.

The provider continues the parent's role of caregiver, nurturer, comforter, and first teacher. The provider is not just a babysitter. A sitter comes into your home for a few hours. You tell her what you want for your child. A family child care provider welcomes you and your child into her home. She makes decisions about meals, schedules, and safety rules. She organizes the children's activities. She may ask for your ideas. She will appreciate your family values and child rearing practices. She is a professional and you can rely on her judgment. Working together as a team, you provide the best care for your child. The provider is not a substitute for you. You are the most important person in your child's life. The provider respects that fact.

Choosing a Family Child Care Home

Call several licensed homes to ask some basic questions. Call in the evening when providers have more time to talk, then schedule a personal interview. These questions will help you develop a short list of programs you may want to visit when the children are present.

Telephone Interview Questions:

1. Are you accredited through the National Association of Family Child Care?
2. Do you have space for my age child?
3. What are the ages of the other children in your home?
4. What are three references you can give me?
5. What are your fees, hours, holidays, and vacations?
6. How many years of experience do you have?
7. What training have you had?

8. Do you plan to continue home care for at least a year?
9. Are you a two or three star program?

Personal Interview Questions:

1. What is your typical daily routine?
2. What do you try to accomplish with the children?
3. How do you handle toilet accidents?
4. What happens when a child hits, bites, or uses bad language?
5. What if a child refuses to eat or doesn't nap anymore?
6. How do you feel about spending tens hours a day with young children?

Visiting the Family Day Care Home:

You will want to select a home where your child can learn to develop good social skills. You will want your child to develop a healthy attitude toward himself/herself and others by learning to:

- trust others and feel safe;
- express feelings and feel understood;
- get along with others;
- feel independent, successful and capable;
- be healthy.

There is no substitute for a visit to the home where your child will be spending most of his/her waking hours each work day.

Health and Safety

Do not hesitate to look for and check cleanliness and safety. Many parents feel uneasy in inspecting a private home. Licensed providers experience unannounced visits by licensing representatives. Providers respect parents who show they care. See if cleaning agents, medications, and other harmful objects are visible and in reach of children. Look under sinks and in medicine cabinets. Observe whether electrical outlets have safety covers. Check the safety of electrical cords and their placement.

Notice if diapering and toilet areas are clean and fresh smelling. See if adults and children wash their hands after using the toilet and wiping their noses before handling food. Be sure the toys are right for your child's age, interests, and abilities. You will want to see toys that are clean and unbroken. Young children need small servings of nutritious meals and snacks. Watch for an enjoyable, relaxed atmosphere while the children eat. Check the weekly menus on display for parents. Walk through the outdoor area. Check for fencing. Look for safe equipment your child would enjoy outdoors.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Look for these signs of appropriate practices:

- Children are playing happily.
- Rooms seem comfortable and not crowded.
- There are enough attractive toys to reduce the stress of sharing.
- The schedule includes daily planned activities, free play, rest and outdoor time.
- The provider uses simple, positive directions by speaking to children in a friendly manner at their eye level.
- The provider rarely says negative things like "no," "don't," and "bad."

- The provider shows a sense of humor, smiles, and seems to enjoy being with children.

Making a Decision

After looking over several homes, base your choice on what is best for your child. Good communication with the provider is important for your comfort level and your child's welfare. You will want to choose someone who genuinely likes you and your child. Be sure you and the provider can speak freely.

As you make your decision, look at the provider's answers to your questions. Think about what is most important to you and your child. Trust your feelings about the home and the provider. You may not find a perfect family child care home. Be sure you find one you genuinely like. Maintain a good relationship with the provider. Respect the provider and her family. They have opened their home to children during business hours. At other times, they need their rest and privacy.

Respect the business aspect of home child care. You will sign a contract with the provider. The contract lists each of your responsibilities. Be sure to:

- Pick up your child on time. Many providers charge late fees.
- Know the provider's policy about caring for a child that is ill.
- Pay on time. The provider has bills to pay. You want the home to stay in business.
- Give two week's notice before your child goes on vacation, visits relatives, or leaves her care.

You will have a daily opportunity to talk about your child's adjustment and activities. If things are going well, tell her. We all like thanks for a job well done. Offer help, suggestions, and materials when appropriate. If a problem or concern arises, make an appointment to discuss it. It is hard to talk at pickup time. Children are weary and hungry. Other parents and families need the provider's attention too. Perhaps an evening phone call will give you the privacy and time to solve the problem.

Visit with your child about the day's activities on the way home, as you fix dinner, and other routine times during the evening. Let him know you think about him during the day. Have a bedtime routine of reading a story and talking about the day's happenings. Make plans for the next day. This routine gives your child a sense of security. Your child needs your attention and affection.

Help your child prepare for a change when it comes time to leave the provider. She can do this by making a card for her provider or taking pictures of friends. If possible, bring your child back for a visit. She has become an important part of the provider's work. Your child and her provider will miss each other and need time to adjust to their new arrangements.

Becoming a Wise Consumer of Child Care

It takes much thinking, listening, and watching to become a wise consumer of child care. Take some time to think about what is important to you. We hope our information will add wisdom to your search for child care. Some of your thinking may change.

Here are five important things about quality child care. All are important. Try to rank their importance to you before and after visiting child care programs. Put 1 beside the item

of greatest importance to you. Put 2 beside the second most important item. Continue ranking. Place 5 beside the item, still an important aspect of child care, but least important of these five for your family.

	Before	After
There are chances for family involvement.	_____	_____
The location, cost, and hours are convenient.	_____	_____
The family child care home has 2 or 3 star status.	_____	_____
It is easy to get along with the provider.	_____	_____
The provider has training in Child Care.	_____	_____

References

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- Kontos, S. (1992). *Family day care: Out of the shadows and into the limelight*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Kontos, S., Howes, C., Shinn, M., & Galinsky, E. (1994). *Quality in family child care and relative care*. New York: Teachers' College Press.
- Manfredi-Petitt, L.A. (1993). Child care: It's more than the sum of its tasks. *Young Children*, 49, 40-42.

OSU Cooperative Extension Video Tape Library - Call your local Cooperative Extension Office
VT 440 Choosing Quality Child Care

Web Sites

- National Association for Family Child Care www.nafcc.org
- Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral www.occrra.net
- National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies www.naccrra.net
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services www.okdhs.org/childcarefind
- OSU Parenting Page fcs.okstate.edu/parenting
- Fact Sheets agweb.okstate.edu/pearl/fci

- Children's Books about Child Care
- Isadora, R. (1990). *Friends*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Rogers, F. (1985). *Going to Day Care*. New York: Putnam's Sons.
- Yates, M. (1988). *Mommy's Coming Back*. Singapore: Abington Press.

Resources

OSU Cooperative Extension Family Living Topics – Call your local Cooperative Extension office or online.
T-2137 School Age Child Care: Exploring the Alternatives

T-2304 Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A Sign of
Quality Child Care
T-2318 Your Child's Immunization Record
T-2322 Selecting Quality Child Care

T-2323 Selecting Quality Child Care Centers
T-2380 Child Care Instructions



www.okdhs.org/childcarefind

1-888-962-2772

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 0607