



## Child Care Aware Series

# Selecting Quality Family Child Care

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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 use 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 five to seven children. 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 he needs it.
- The setting is more like a family.
- Your child has one consistent caregiver.
- 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.
- Costs 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 guid-



Find a Child Care provider your child can draw close to.

ance. 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.

An **accredited** family child care has met **additional** standards established by the National Association for Family Child Care. 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 pass a written exam and an oral interview. An advisor observes and corrects their work with children and families. Some providers will have associate 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 locate licensed homes in their area.

**Oklahoma Child Care Aware.** Oklahoma parents can call 1-800-799-1699 to receive infor-

mation on how to choose quality care. They can learn how to contact their local Resource and Referral Agency, Oklahoma State University Extension office and Department of Human Services licensing representative.

**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 Oklahoma Child Care Aware at 1-800-799-1699 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 publication "Quality Child Care: A Handbook for Parents" helps parents in evaluating a home. Another helpful information sheet is "Know Your Family Day Care Mother."

**County OSU Cooperative Extension Office.** The county home economist provides research-based information about child care to parents and caregivers. The home economist 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 can call 1-615-834-7872 to receive a list of accredited family child care homes in Oklahoma.

### **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. These questions will help you develop a short list of programs you may want to visit.

#### **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?

#### **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 ten 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 him to develop a healthy attitude toward himself 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 waking hours during the day.***

#### **Health and Safety**

Do not hesitate to look for and check cleanliness and safety. Many parents feel uneasy inspecting a private home. Licensed providers experience unannounced visits by licensing representatives at least three times a year. 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 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 the 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 may 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.



**Base your choice on what is best for your child.**

- 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 reading this information. 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 a license.	_____	_____
It is easy to get along with the provider.	_____	_____
The provider has training in Child Care.	_____	_____

## Resources

**OSU Cooperative Extension Family Living Topics** - Call your local Cooperative Extension office.

- T-2322 Selecting Quality Child Care
- T-2323 Selecting A Quality Child Care Center
- T-2343 Home Alone: Working Parents and School Age Child Care

**OSU Cooperative Extension Videotape Library** - Call your local Cooperative Extension office.

- VT 281 Home Alone
- VT 304 Take Charge: A Program for Latchkey Children and Parents
- VT 312 Child Care Alternatives
- VT 440 Choosing Quality Child Care
- VT 514 Selecting Day Care for Your Child

## Oklahoma Department of Human Services Publications

- Call your county DHS office.
- 87-91 Quality Child Care: A Handbook for Parents
- 84-29 Know Your Family Day Care Mother
- 83-26 Day Care - A Family Service

## 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: Abdington Press.

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