



## Selecting Quality Child Care

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All parents need to find someone to help with child care at one time or another. Good child care arrangements can improve the quality of life for children and parents. Contacts with caring adults can broaden a child's experience. It can give the parent some relaxation time and important information about the child's development. Play with other children can help a child gain mental, social, and physical skills. It can also help a child gain emotional stability.

It is not unusual for parents to feel guilty when leaving the care of their child to another person. It is easier for parents to deal with these feelings when they select quality care and spend quality time with their child. Your child can adapt to new situations. She will need the security of knowing that you are there to help her feel comfortable in her new arrangement. You are still the most important person in her life.

Selecting child care is an important decision. Even when a parent uses child care only once in a while, she will want a caring person with special training. Consider hiring youth in a 4-H Child Care Project or those with Scout training in child care.

If you need regular care while you work, start your search early. Take advantage of agencies that can help.

### Child Care Information Resources

#### Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral:

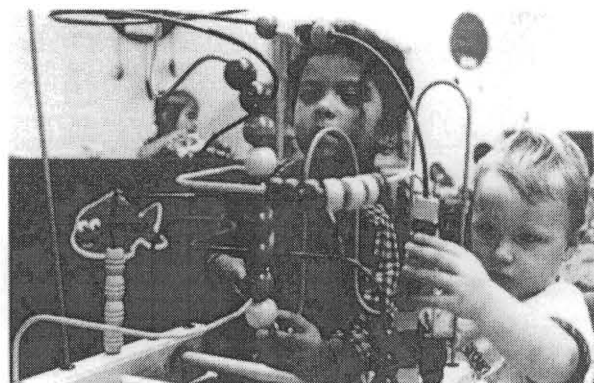
Oklahoma parents can call 1-888-962-2772 to receive information on how to choose quality care. They can also receive the number for their local resource and referral agency ([www.occrra.net](http://www.occrra.net)), and Department of Human Services licensing representative ([naccrra.org](http://naccrra.org)).

These agencies serve many Oklahoma counties and have lists of licensed facilities. They can help locate local care and guide a parent toward the type of care they want. Call Oklahoma Child Care Aware at 1-888-962-2772 for information on this service. Call National Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246 for information on resource and referral agencies nationwide or visit their web site at: [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)

#### Department of Human Services:

Department of Human Services has lists of licensed homes and centers. Call to request a list. Visit the office to read the records of facilities you might use, or visit their web site at: [www.okdhs.org/childcarefind](http://www.okdhs.org/childcarefind)

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets are also available on our website at: <http://www.osuextra.com>



**Play with other children helps a child gain mental, social and physical skills.**

#### Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

##### Offices:

County educators provide research based information to parents and caregivers. They present talks on child care, child development issues, and can refer parents to other helpful resources. The educator can help parents and community leaders organize to improve the quality of child care for community development projects.

##### National Academy of Early Childhood Programs:

By calling 1-800-424-2460, or visiting the web site at [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org), parents can receive a list of accredited programs in Oklahoma. As of summer 2001, Oklahoma had 60 accredited centers and 87 in the process.

##### National Association for Family Child Care:

By accessing the web site [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org), parents and providers can view a list of accredited family child care homes and accreditation students in Oklahoma.

##### Licensing and Accreditation - What is the difference?

A licensed facility, whether a home or center, must meet **minimum** requirements established by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. You may request their publica-

tions "Licensing Requirements for Child Care Centers" and "Licensing Requirements for Family Child Care Homes." They include standards for health and safety, adult-child ratios for age groups, training requirements for staff, the daily program, nutrition, and behavior and guidance. **Licensing regulations apply to all programs serving children more than 15 hours a week.**

In Oklahoma, centers receive a star ranking: 1H = required minimum licensing standards; 1H + = working toward higher status; 2H = trained teachers, interest centers, and parent programs; 3H = 2H + national accreditation.

An accredited program has passed rigorous **national screening** by either the National Association of Early Childhood Programs or the National Association for Family Child Care. Accredited programs meet standards beyond those established by the state licensing agency. These standards include lower staff-child ratios, smaller group size, curriculum that fits the age and level of development. As of the summer of 2001, there were 60 accredited programs and 87 in the process in Oklahoma.

## Selecting Child Care

While cost and convenience are important issues in selecting care, you will want to think of what is best for your child. Consider your child's age, personality, abilities, and interests. Think about your beliefs and attitudes in such areas as discipline, education, nutrition, and staff training. You will want the caregiver to respect your family values. Most of all, you want a caregiver who genuinely likes you and your child.

The names of the types of child care arrangements can confuse consumers, so look at the program carefully. A play-based program is best for preschool children. A formal program is too stressful for children. It may interfere with a young child's natural enjoyment of learning. These are some typical child care arrangements that may be available in your community.

**Family child care homes** provide care for children of various ages in the provider's home. Licensed homes provide care for up to seven children. Infants and toddlers need much individual care and attention. Oklahoma regulations allow only five children with one provider if all the children are under two. This is the most popular type of care for children under three. Most parents want their baby to be with a small number of other children. A child who has no brothers or sisters can have an experience of being with children of different ages in a child care home. Children may participate in activities usually available in a neighborhood setting. They can visit the library, go to the park, and attend special events. Family child care may offer flexible hours. Some provide transportation to schools and lessons. The child and family enjoy the consistency of one provider.

**Day care centers** may be in private homes, churches, or specially built facilities. Centers usually serve eight or more children and must meet state licensing requirements. Hours of operation vary. Child care centers may offer less flexibility in hours and program because they care for large numbers of children. Quality centers offer a program suited to the age and developmental ability of the children served. Child care corporations offer franchised child care nationwide and regionally.

**Head Start** offers educational programs for children and supplemental health and social services for families. The

ages of the children served vary, as do the hours. Most of the programs in Oklahoma operate mornings for children three and four years old. The program serves low income families or children who are differently abled.

**Nursery schools and mother's day out** programs may enroll children under the age of five. They usually operate mornings or early afternoons, two to five days a week. The Department of Human Services will license these programs.

**Military child care centers** on base serve dependents. Some branches of the military require accreditation to ensure quality.

**Employer supported child care** refers to programs that a corporation operates or supports. An example is an on-site child care center at a hospital. On-site care in two Oklahoma hospitals reduced employee absenteeism and tardiness. Some employers buy spaces at local centers and family child care homes. Others help existing centers and homes gain accreditation or training to improve quality.

**In-home care** is perhaps the most popular child care arrangement. Parents hire relatives or non-relatives to care for their children in their own home. To find a provider, most parents ask friends and neighbors. Some may use ads in local newspapers. If the provider works on a regular basis, the parent must pay minimum wage and Social Security.

**Nannies** may have had special training in child care, health and safety, and nutrition. Families may hire nannies to live in the home or to come to the home daily. Wages will be higher for this skilled care.

**Kindergartens** may be public or private. They usually enroll children who are five to seven years of age. They may be an all or part day program. They provide an educational program. They usually follow the holiday schedule of the public schools. Many children express stress in structured and academic kindergartens. A formal school setting of desks and workbooks is not appropriate in early childhood. Look for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten.

**Camps, fun clubs, and school-age child care** serve children enrolled in elementary school. Schools, churches, parks, and community centers may house these programs. They operate after school, on school holidays, and during the summer months. Some have before school hours.

**Child Care Cooperatives** offer child care to suit one group of parents. The parents usually form a corporation and hire a director. The parents set the policies and procedures, pay fees, and volunteer services in return for quality child care. Rural communities find that cooperatives work well.

## Research Findings

The following results of research studies of different arrangements for child care may help you make your selection.

- The majority of parents select in-home care by relatives and friends. This may suit your needs, especially if your child is under three years of age or older than six. Recent research findings show that being licensed is more important to quality child care, and being a relative is less important than most parents believed. Being regulated or licensed has a stronger relationship to quality than any other factor. Relatives and friends may not really want to be taking care of children. They may do it to help a working mother. Their care may be of lower quality since

they may not have had specialized training.

- Different arrangements have different effects on children. Find one that best serves you and your child. No arrangement is best for all children. It is usually the quality of child care, not the type of care, that really matters. In almost all situations, good quality care is good for children and their families.
- Smaller group sizes work best. Select care that places your child among a small number of children with a few adults. Licensing requirements determine maximum group size. Many centers operate at the maximum size to reduce costs. Be sure your child is not changing groups or teachers frequently just to keep ratios within the licensing limits. The equipment, supplies, room size, and arrangement must adequately serve the number of children. Children experience stress when there are too many in one room or they must continually share the play equipment.
- People who have received training in child care usually do a much better job. Training in child care usually does not increase cost of the care. Cost does increase with a caregiver's level of college education. Look for training certificates from Child Care Careers, Vo-Tech, Friends of Day Care, or Oklahoma Early Childhood Association. These indicate that the caregiver has completed specific training in child care. Caregivers in centers, family daycare homes, and Head Start programs may be Child Development Associates. This is a national early childhood professional credential. Child Development Associate candidates complete 120 hours of specific training. A candidate must pass a parent opinion survey, a written test, an oral interview, and an on-site observation.

## School-Age Care

School-age children may prefer the quiet of a small group or active involvement with many other children. Their needs depend upon their personalities and type of experience they have at school. Children in highly structured classrooms need a relaxed after-school program. The location of the program (school, church, YMCA) does not ensure quality. An after-school program needs the same close look that you would give any care arrangement. If licensed, read the licensing records. Follow the same steps for evaluation that you would for the care of a child of any other age or at any other facility.

If the child is especially mature, some parents arrange for the school-age child to be at home alone. Latchkey children need definite guidelines. They must have access to responsible adults. The home and neighborhood must be safe. If you select self-care, contact your Oklahoma State University Extension

|                         | Staff:Child<br>Ration | Maximum<br>Group Size |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Infants (0-9 months)    | 1:4                   | 8                     |
| Toddlers (10-23 months) | 1:6                   | 12                    |
| 2-year-olds             | 1:8                   | 16                    |
| 3-year-olds             | 1:12                  | 24                    |
| 4 and 5-year-olds       | 1:15                  | 30                    |
| 6 years and over        | 1:20                  | 40                    |

office for videotapes and literature to help you and your child.

**Stability of care is important.** Look for family child care homes with a year or more of experience and plans to stay in business. Look for centers where staff has remained at work for several years. A 1988-89 study of Oklahoma child care programs showed a staff turnover rate of 44% for teachers and 60% for assistants. Quality programs will have a much lower turnover rate, giving your child care from the same experienced, trained workers for a year or more. Changing caregivers can often stress children and families.

## Interviewing and Visiting

Make a first screening of caregivers or facilities by phone.

Ask caregivers about:

- their years of experience,
- references,
- training completed,
- fees, holidays, and hours of operation,
- accreditation,
- the ages of the children,
- the schedule and activities provided for the children,
- receiving written descriptions of the program and its financial strength, and
- staff turnover (Will my child have the same caregiver for at least a year?).

If your child will receive care away from your home, visit the home or center. Look around at the rooms and children. Remember that everyone has good and bad days. You may need to visit again to get a realistic idea of the atmosphere your child will experience. Plan to do so at lunch, nap, indoor and/or outdoor times. Ask yourself:

- Are the children happy and actively involved?
- Would the noise level be comfortable for your child?
- Is the setting more home-like or an institution?
- Are the rooms clean, safe, and not crowded?
- Is there enough suitable equipment for your child? Is it available on low shelves, or must children wait for an adult to hand them materials?
- Is there a safe and pleasant place for outdoor play?
- Would your child enjoy the schedule and learning experiences?

**Observe the caregiver(s)** as they interact with the children.

- Do the caregivers greet children and parents as they arrive?
- Do caregivers use simple, positive directions? Do they speak to children in a friendly manner?
- Do they have a sense of humor and seem to enjoy the children?
- Do they say negative things like "no" or "don't" to excess?
- Are they showing much interest in the children, or do they tend to spend too much of their time doing housekeeping tasks and talking to each other?

**Ask the caregiver** (whether at a center or in a home) some specific questions about discipline. Ask for any other information that you feel is important.

- What do you try to accomplish with the children?
- What happens when a child hits, bites, or uses bad language?

- What if a child refuses to eat or does not nap anymore?
- How do you handle accidents?
- Why do you do this work?
- What training have you had?

If your child is an infant or toddler, look for these practices or ask about:

- Do the adults respond to children quickly?
- Are children crawling and moving about in safe areas?
- Do caregivers leave children in cribs when awake?
- Can children sleep and eat according to their own schedules?
- Do adults wash hands after each diaper change or nose wipe and before handling food?
- Do adults hold, talk to, and play with children?

### Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Quality child care offers activities that are appropriate for each child's age, interests, abilities, and family background. The staff and other families respect and appreciate different cultures and lifestyles. They do not require children to learn particular material, to stand in line, or to sit quietly and listen for more than five to ten minutes.

The classrooms are active and pleasantly noisy. You mainly hear children's voices and sometimes, the teacher's. Children choose their own play activities and play at their own pace. Rarely are all the children doing the same thing at the same time. In developmentally appropriate programs, you see very creative art work, not ten little Easter bunnies all alike.

Appropriate programs welcome parents at any-time. Parents share their talents and culture with the group. Family members can come into the center or home and play with the children. Staff arrange time to talk with parents.

### Preparations

After you have selected the type of care and the facility, be sure you understand details that can make the change easier for you and your child. Many family care homes may have, and all centers should have, a brochure that explains many of these details. It is wise to have them in written form.

1. **Ask about fees.** Is a payment necessary to reserve a space for your child on a waiting list? When are payments due? Is there a fee for late pickup? Are there extra activity fees, especially during summer programs? Does the program accept DHS payment rates if you qualify?
2. **Get medical records and release forms.** Provide up-to-date immunization records and emergency contacts. Provide the names of all those who will be picking up your child.
3. **Keep tax records.** Contact the IRS about tax credits and deductions for child care. Inquire about minimum wage, social security, and income tax withholding if you employ in-home care.
4. **Bring familiar materials from home.** Provide a change of clothing for your child, and include a sweater for weather changes. Find out if your child may bring toys and food from home. Respect the caregiver's policy concerning these matters.
5. **Plan an adjustment period.** Plan to spend extra time when you take your child the first several days, or when the caregiver comes to the house. You may need to stay with your child for a while. It is natural for a child to show

some anxiety by crying and clinging when you leave. A calm departure by the parent may help this transition. Some parents must go to work right away. Ask a friend or family member to help by staying with your child for a while the first several days.

### Stay Involved with the Caregiver and your Child

You have spent time and energy in selecting appropriate child care for your family and opened communication with your child's caregiver. Keep involved by asking how things are going, expressing thanks, and offering help, suggestions, and materials. Keep the caregiver informed about what is happening in your child's life. Do not wait for a problem to happen. Make an appointment to discuss concerns. It is hard to talk at pickup time with everyone tired, hungry, and in a hurry. Have the caregiver call you when time allows. Friendly cooperation will give the best results for your child. When things are going well, let the caregiver know. We all like thanks for a job well done.

Visit with your child about the day's activities as you ride home, prepare dinner, or carry out other daily routines. Let your child know that you think of him or her when you are apart. Do not be so busy at the end of the day that you do not have time to spend with your child. Bedtime routines, which include a story, a review of the day, and a plan for tomorrow, can be especially important for developing a child's sense of security and well being. Children need plenty of physical warmth and affection from you.

Sometimes, despite a careful search and selection of a quality program, you may find that your child does not adjust to or like the child care arrangement. Some of the reasons may be the particular makeup of the group, personalities of a few children, or size of the group. Listen to your child. If it is not in his or her best interest to remain there, follow your intuition and make other child care arrangements.

Selecting child care is a difficult task, and one you will not want to do very often. However, your needs may change, or your child may show a need for a change. Work with the caregiver if you need to make a new arrangement. Your child and the caregiver need time to prepare for this change. Help your child adjust by having him visit the new setting. He may want to make a special card for his previous caregiver or take pictures of his friends. All people, regardless of age, need support for beginnings and endings in their lives.

### Check Your Consumer Wisdom

Are you and your family becoming wise consumers of child care? It takes much work to learn about quality child care. This information and other materials can help you learn about developmentally appropriate practices for young children.

Here are some true/false items for you to think about and talk over with others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In Oklahoma, the Department of Human Services licenses and assigns star quality levels to child care centers, family child care homes, and mother's day out programs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. College graduates do a better job of teaching and caring for young children, even if they have a degree in an unrelated field, like history.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Oklahoma does not license a child care program if it is in a church, or only cares for a few children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Young children learn best through play.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. In Oklahoma, licensed child care programs must use positive guidance.

1. True    2. False    3. False    4. True    5. True

## Resources

OSU Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets - **Call your local Cooperative Extension office or visit the web site at: [fcs.okstate.edu/parenting](http://fcs.okstate.edu/parenting)**

- T-2137 School Age Child Care: Exploring the Alternatives
- T-2220 Selecting Family Child Care
- T-2304 Developmentally Appropriate Practice: A sign of Quality Child Care
- T-2318 Your Child's Immunization Record
- T-2323 Selecting Quality Child Care Centers
- T-2380 Child Care Instructions

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

- VT440 Choosing Quality Child Care

## Children's Books

- Isadora, R. 1990. *Friends*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Rogers, F. 1985. *Going to Day Care*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Yates, M. 1988. *Mommy's Coming Back*. Singapore: Abingdon Press.



**Quality child care encourages creativity and independence by giving children plenty of time to complete the activities they choose.**

## References

- Atkinson, A. M. (1994). Rural and urban use of child care. *Family Relations, 43*, 16-22.
- Bredenkamp S. Ed. (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age eight*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Manfredi-Petitt, L.A. (1993). Child Care: It's More Than the Sum of Its Tasks. *Young Children, 49*, 40-42.

## The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service *Bringing the University to You!*

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.



1-888-962-2772

[www.okdhs.org/childcarefind](http://www.okdhs.org/childcarefind)

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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, Samuel E. Curf, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 42 cents per copy. 1002