

What is Child Care?

The law defines child care as...

- ✓ Three or more unrelated children under 13 years of age
- ✓ Receiving care from a non-relative
- ✓ On a regular basis, of at least once a week
- ✓ For more than four hours per day but less than 24 hours

When all these conditions exist, a license is required. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for regulating child care. This is done through the Division of Child Development (DCD). The purpose of regulation is to protect the well being of children while they are away from their parents.

The North Carolina Child Care Commission is responsible for adopting rules to carry out the law. Some counties and cities in North Carolina also have local zoning requirements for child care programs.

Types of Care

- **Child Care Centers**-A larger program providing care for more than three children but not in a residential setting. The number of children in care is based upon the size of individual classrooms and having sufficient staff, equipment and materials.
- **Family Child Care Homes**-A smaller program offered in the provider's residence where there are five or fewer preschool children in care. In addition, they may also provide care for three school age children.
- **Exceptional Children's Programs**-Public pre-kindergarten programs that assure children with varying abilities have the opportunity to develop mentally, physically and emotionally when provided with an appropriate individualized education in the least restrictive environment with their typically developing peers.
- **GS 110-106 (Religious-sponsored child care facilities)**-Child care facilities or summer day camps operated by a church, synagogue, or school of religious charter.
- **Head Start**-A federally funded community-based program for low income children and their families that promotes school readiness.
- **Early Head Start (EHS)**-A federally funded community-based program for low-income pregnant women and families with young children from birth to age 3.
- **Centers in a Residence**-A smaller program in a home that is licensed to care for up to 12 children.
- **Legally Exempt Family Child Care Homes**- Allowed to care for two non-related children in addition to their own without being licensed by the state.
- **More At Four**-A state-wide, voluntary program that prepares eligible four-year-old children for school success by providing them with high quality pre-kindergarten experiences.
- **School-Age Child Care**-Programs for children before/and or after school hours and during holidays and vacations.
- **Part Day Preschools**-Operate for four hours or less per day serving children between the ages of 0-5 years.
- **Public Pre-Kindergarten Programs**- Include center-based and school-based classrooms for four-year olds that are fully or partially publicly funded.
- **Summer Day Camps**-Generally designed for school-age children and operate during the day for less than four months.
- **Non-Regulated Child Care**-Includes In-Home Caregivers (Nannies, baby-sitters, housekeepers) and Informal Child Care (Care given by family members, etc.)

Quality Indicators

- ✓ **Ratios**-Ratios are the number of staff required to supervise a certain number of children. Group size is the maximum number of children in one group. Low teacher and child ratios and small group sizes are important to the quality of care. Ratios and group sizes for minimum licensure are shown below.

Minimum Requirements		
Age of Children	State Minimum requirements	Maximum Group size permitted
	Ratio: Staff/Children	
to 12 months	1/5	10
12 to 24 months	1/6	12
2 to 3 years	1/10	20
3 to 4 years	1/15	25
4 to 5 years	1/20	25
School Age	1/25	25

Small centers in a residence that are licensed for six to twelve children may keep up to three additional school-age children, depending on the ages of the other children in care. When the group has children of different ages, staff-child ratios and group size must be met for the youngest child in the group.

- ✓ **Health and Safety**- These are some of the health and safety issues that indicate high quality child care. Space is clean, free of items which are potentially harmful to children; smoke-free; well lighted, comfortable temperature; toys and equipment are safe, clean and in good repair; emergency plans, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, monthly fire drills; frequent hand washing, first aid equipment available, rules for giving and storing medicine; infants 12 months and younger are placed on their backs to sleep to reduce the risk of SIDS; nutritious meals served, food stored properly; drinking water freely available to children of all ages; parent permission is required to transport children; outdoor play area is fenced, safe and clean.
- ✓ **Positive teacher-child interaction**-Teachers consistently treat all children in a warm, caring manner; guidance techniques such as positive reinforcement and redirection are used.
- ✓ **Discipline**- Corporal punishment (spanking, slapping, or other physical discipline) is prohibited in all licensed child care programs. Religious-sponsored programs that notify the Division of Child Development that corporal punishment is part of their religious training are exempt from that part of the law.
- ✓ **Staff Education**- The law requires that, at a minimum, a lead teacher be 18 years old and has either experience or receives in-service training. Once hired, the lead teacher must take community college coursework during the next two years to receive a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential. (There are additional options that are equal to the Credential). To earn higher points in the education component of the rated license child care staff must complete more formal education and have

experience working with preschool children. The number of points a center can earn for staff education is based on:

- The education and experience levels of the administrator
- The number of lead teachers with child care credentials
- The number of lead teachers with more early childhood education and experience
- The number of teachers with formal education and/or experience

The rated license education standards for family child care home providers and school-age staff are slightly different. However, it is still based on the same notion of the importance of both formal education and experience working with young children.

- ✓ **Staff Turnover**-Consistency and minimal turnover in caregivers are critical elements of high quality child care. It is important for the emotional health of children and helps them develop security, confidence and an overall sense of well-being.
- ✓ **Family Involvement**-It is important for parents to be involved and informed about what is happening while their children are in care. Family involvement can include visiting the child care facility, getting regular updates from caregivers, helping with field trips and newsletters.
- ✓ **Parental Rights**
 - Parents have the right to enter a family child care home or center at any time while their child is present.
 - Parents have the right to see the license displayed in a prominent place.
 - Parents have the right to know how their child will be disciplined. *A Quality Care Checklist is provided in this packet for you take with you while visiting any programs you might be interested in.*
- ✓ **Accreditation**- There are several national accrediting organizations for child care programs. Getting accredited is voluntary and usually involves an intensive self assessment as well as outside observation. For Child Care Centers the accreditation process does not impact on their star rated license. For Family Child Care Homes, accreditation can contribute to earning more points in the program standards piece of the star rated license.
- ✓ **Developmentally Appropriate Activities/Curriculum**-These are some examples that the program has developmentally appropriate activities: there are age appropriate materials available; activities focus on both fine and large motor development; a variety of books are available to children and they are read to daily; children are allowed to make choices; TV viewing is limited or excluded from the program.

Regulation of Child Care Programs


The Division of Child Development employs child care consultants to ensure child care regulations are being met. The consultants are located throughout the state and are responsible for a caseload of licensed programs in one or more counties. The consultants conduct site visits, most of which are unannounced. Visits may be made for a variety of reasons such as:

- Pre-licensing visits for new programs
- Annual visits
- Complaint investigations
- Technical assistance
- Rated license evaluations
- Follow-up visits, as necessary

The North Carolina Star Rated License System provides information and feedback for improvements as well as identifies program strengths. To achieve a five-star rating, a program is judged on their staff education as well as program standards. Programs can also choose to earn a Quality Point for enhanced standards in staff education and program standards. In September 2000, the Division of Child Development issued star rated licenses to all eligible Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes. (Note: Religious-sponsored child care programs continue to operate with a notice of compliance and will not receive a star rating.) A rating of one star means that a child care program meets North Carolina's minimum licensing standards for child care. Programs that choose to voluntarily meet higher standards can apply for a two to five star license.

Two Component Example

A program scores 4 points in program standards and 4 points in education standards, and 1 quality point. The total is $4 + 4 + 1 = 9$ points. The program would get a three-star rating under the two component system.

Two Component Example	
Program Standards	4 Points
Education Standards	4 Points
Quality Point	1 Points
Total Score	9 Points
Star Score	

What are "Program Standards"?

Program standard points are based on an evaluation of the daily environment at your child's program. This includes:

- The Program Environment
 - Sufficient space for activities
 - Variety of play materials
 - Clean and comfortable play area

The Number of Staff per Child

The Interactions Between

- Adults and children
- Children with other children
- Children with activities and materials

Programs applying for the highest level in this component may choose to have an environment rating scale completed.

What is An Environment Rating Scale?

Environment rating scales are nationally recognized tools used to measure the quality of care offered by programs. These quality assessment scales were developed through the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Trained evaluators visit programs to observe the children and their environment. Evaluators score programs on how well, or how often, certain things occur. For example, evaluators will:

- Determine if good health practices, such as hand washing, are followed when children are diapered or fed
- Watch how the caregivers interact with the children and whether they respond to the children's needs
- Observe activities to see whether the children have opportunities to play and learn according to their levels of development
- Evaluate the safety of the classroom area

For more information on the rating scales, access the [North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project web site](#).

What are "Education Standards"?

Studies have shown that the more education and experience a Child Care Center administrator has, the greater the impact on the center because of improved management, lower staff turnover, and better classroom practices. Caregivers with more early childhood education and experience interact better with children and create more enriching classroom experiences. Studies have shown that children whose caregivers had higher qualifications did better both academically and behaviorally at least into early elementary school.

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Choosing Quality Child Care - The Right Decision

Choosing high quality child care for your child is one of the most important decisions that parents will ever make. But why is it so important? Did you know that 85% of a child's intellect, personality and social skills are developed by age 5? Quality child care also greatly improves school readiness in children by:

- ❖ enhancing social skills
- ❖ increasing language skills
- ❖ enhancing higher attention and thinking skills
- ❖ decreasing behavioral issues

High quality child care should support a child's emotional, social, intellectual and physical well-being.

There are many different factors that affect children and parents that are included in quality child care, such as:

- ❖ adult-child ratio
- ❖ group size
- ❖ caregiver training and education
- ❖ the curriculum
- ❖ the physical environment
- ❖ caregiver-child interactions
- ❖ parent involvement

Choosing quality child care can be a time-consuming and complex task. Nothing is better than seeing a program first-hand!

Paying for Child Care-Types of Financial Assistance

- ✓ **Child Care Subsidy Program**-(NC and Federal Funding) North Carolina's Division of Child Development uses a combination of state and federal funds to provide subsidized child care services to eligible families through a locally administered state-supervised voucher system. Annually each county receives a combination of state and federal funding from the Division of Child Development for subsidized child care services. The amount of funding allocated to each county is determined by legislation. If the county department of social services or other local purchasing agency does not have enough funding to serve all families who apply for subsidized child care, the agency may establish priorities for services. For example, an agency may choose to give priority to working parent(s) or families who need child care to support child protective services.

If a family meets the eligibility criteria, the state of North Carolina pays a portion of the cost of child care. Parents are free to choose a child care arrangement that best fits their needs as long as the provider chosen participates in the Subsidized Child Care Program.

The amount the state pays for child care depends on: The family's situational criteria, the family's income, the cost of the child care provided.

- ✓ **Tax Credits**- with the **Child Tax Credit**, you may be able to reduce the federal income tax you owe by up to \$1,000 for each qualifying child under the age of 17.

A qualifying child for this credit is someone who meets the following criteria:

- Age - Was under age 17 at the end of 2007
- Relationship - Is your son, daughter, adopted child, stepchild or eligible foster child, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of these individuals
- Citizenship - Is a U.S. citizen, U.S. national or resident of the U.S.
- Support - Did not provide over half of his or her own support, and
- Lived with you - Must have lived with you for more than half of 2007 (note that some exceptions to this criteria exist)

The credit is limited if your modified adjusted gross income is above a certain amount. The amount at which this phase-out begins varies depending on your filing status:

- Married Filing Jointly \$110,000
- Married Filing separately \$ 55,000
- All others \$ 75,000

In addition, the Child Tax Credit is generally limited by the amount of the income tax you owe as well as any alternative minimum tax you owe.

If the amount of your Child Tax Credit is greater than the amount of income tax you owe, you may be able to claim some or all of the difference as an "Additional" Child Tax Credit. The Additional Child Tax Credit may give you a refund even if you do not owe any tax. For 2007, the total amount of the Child Tax Credit and any Additional Child Tax Credit cannot exceed the maximum of \$1,000 for each qualifying child.

Child and Dependent Care Credit:

If you paid someone to care for a child under age 13 or a qualifying spouse or dependent so you could work or look for work, you may be able to reduce your tax by claiming the **Child and Dependent Care Credit** on your federal income tax return. To qualify, your spouse, children age 13 or older, and other dependents must be physically or mentally incapable of self-care.

The credit is a percentage of the amount of work-related child and dependent care expenses you paid to a care provider. The credit can be up to 35 percent of your qualifying expenses, depending upon your income.

To claim the credit for child and dependent care expenses, you must meet certain conditions including:

Income - You must have earned income from wages, salaries, tips, other taxable employee compensation, or net earnings from self-employment (one spouse may be considered as having earned income if they were a full-time student or physically or mentally not able to care for himself or herself)

Payee - The payments for care cannot be paid to someone you can claim as your dependent on your return or to your child who is under age 19, even if he or she is not your dependent

Filing Status - Your filing status must be single, married filing jointly, head of household, or qualifying widow(er) with a dependent child

Care - The care must have been provided for one or more qualifying persons

Home - The qualifying person must have lived with you for more than half of 2007

There are some limitations on the amount of credit you can claim. If you received dependent care benefits from your employer, other rules apply.

Earned Income Tax Credit:

If you're like millions of Americans, you work hard but you don't earn a high income, and want to keep more of what you earn. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a credit for people who earn low-to-moderate incomes. EITC can reduce your taxes, and can mean a refund. In simple terms, working families and individuals may keep more of what they work for. You must meet the following EITC requirements:

- Must have a valid [Social Security Number](#)
- You must have earned income from employment or from self-employment.
- Your filing status cannot be married, filing separately.
- You must be a U.S. citizen or resident alien all year, or a nonresident alien married to a U.S. citizen or resident alien and filing a joint return.
- You cannot be a qualifying child of another person.
- If you do not have a qualifying child, you must:
 - be age 25 but under 65 at the end of the year,
 - live in the United States for more than half the year, and
 - not qualify as a dependent of another person
- Cannot file Form 2555 or 2555-EZ (related to [foreign earn income](#))

Watch out for common errors!

- Claiming a child who is not a qualifying child
- Using incorrect Social Security numbers
- Filing as single or head of household when married
- Reporting income incorrectly

EITC errors can potentially delay or even result in denial of the EITC portion of a refund.

✓ Other Forms of Assistance:

Head Start and Early Head Start-

Eligible Children: Families have incomes below the federal poverty line; families receive SSI or TANF; foster children; up to 10% of children can be from families that do not meet these requirements.

More At Four-Public Pre-K Program

Eligible Children: Will be 4 years old by August 31 of the school year, will enter kindergarten the following year AND are at risk for poor school outcomes, based on factors including low income, limited English proficiency, identified disability, chronic health condition and developmental or educational need or from Active Duty military families.

Private Programs with sliding fee scales or other discounts

Dependent Care Assistance Plan-Employer sponsored flexible spending account which allows for a certain amount of income to be set aside before taxes to pay for child care.

Disclaimer Statement

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral will make referrals, not recommendations, to licensed child care center, licensed family child care homes, legal/unregulated providers, summer camps, preschool programs, and church sponsored facilities with specification requested by parents.

Referrals will be made without regard to race, color, sex, age, disability, religion, or national origin of consumer or provider.

We do not license, endorse, or recommend any provider, nor can we assure that any provider offers quality child care or any additional services required by customers. Customers are sent an information packet and checklist to help evaluate services, encouraged to visit and interview prospective providers, and urged to check references. It is the customer's responsibility to select and investigate the provider as to their appropriateness and/or ability to provide child care to meet the family's needs.

Complaint Policy

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral is committed to educating parents, providers, and the community on child care issues and advocating for improved quality and availability of child care in Surry County. Anyone with a concern about a child care home or center is encouraged to call us at 336-786-1880. Our staff will make every effort to help the caller clarify his or her problem or concern and suggest further action if necessary.

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral is not a regulatory agency and the staff has no authority over the child care providers in this area. Staff members make no decisions about the truth of the allegations made in the complaint and do not investigate complaints. However, each incoming complaint will be handled according to the Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral complaint procedure. This procedure will be followed without regard to ethnicity, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability or political affiliation.

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral staff will interview the caller in order to determine if the concern is a personal issue, possible child abuse or neglect or licensing violations. Staff will ask if the caller has discussed these concerns with the director/owner of the child care facility. If not, staff will encourage the caller to do so. If the director/owner does not satisfactorily answer the caller's questions or correct possible concerns, the staff will provide information on the appropriate course of action.

Possible Child Abuse

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral staff will help the caller to report the problem to the Department of Social Services (336-401-8800) and/or the Division of Child Development (800-859-0829). Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral staff will make every effort to encourage the caller to report the problem. Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral is required by North Carolina law to contact the appropriate agencies.

Possible Licensing Violations

If a caller reports a concern that a child care home or center has violated state child care regulations, Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral staff will provide information about licensing requirements and if applicable encourage the caller to report the problem to the Division of Child Development (800-859-0829) and/or the Department of Social Services (401-8800). SCCCR&R may lodge licensing violation complaints.

Personal Complaints

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral will encourage a caller with concerns involving child rearing philosophy, differences in child care style, disagreement in business matters, etc. to speak directly to the provider in order to resolve these issues. If anyone has a complaint about the referral call or process, they may speak with the Executive Director at 336-786-1880.

Fee and Confidentiality Statement

Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral is funded through the North Carolina Partnership for Children to provide you with child care referrals for free. Child care referrals and information are provided at no cost to customers. The information requested Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral in order to assist customers searching for child care is used only for the purpose of providing child care referrals and collecting statistical information concerning child care needs to better serve the community. All personal or identifying information will remain confidential and will not be released to anyone outside of Surry County Child Care Resource and Referral without written consent.

**Some of the information on this form has been obtained from the DCD web site:
www.ncchildcare.net**

Five Steps to Choosing Quality Child Care

- ✓ **LOOK:** Begin by visiting several child care homes or centers. On each visit, think about your first impression. But don't stop there. Does the place look safe for your child? Do the caregivers/teachers who will care for your child enjoy talking and playing with children? Do they talk with each child at the child's eye level? Are there plenty of toys and learning materials within a child's reach? You should always visit a home or center more than once. And stay as long as possible so you can get a good feel for what the care will be like for your child. Even after you start using the child care, continue to come back and check it out.
- ✓ **LISTEN:** What does the child care setting sound like? Do the children sound happy and involved? What about the teachers' voices? Do they seem cheerful and patient? A place that's too quiet may mean not enough activity. A place that's too noisy may mean there is a lack of control.
- ✓ **COUNT:** Count the number of children in the group. Then count the number of staff members caring for them. Obviously, the fewer the number of children for each adult, the more attention your child will get. A small number of children per adult is most important for babies and younger children.
- ✓ **ASK:** It's very important that the adults who care for your children have the knowledge and experience to give them the attention they need. Ask about the background and experience of all staff. Ask about the center's license; ask for an explanation of the center's star rating. Ask for a copy of the center's handbook. Ask to see the center's sanitation rating.
- ✓ **BE INFORMED:** Find out more about efforts in your community to improve the quality of child care. For more information contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency.

The above article is compliments of Child Care Aware, a non-profit agency.

Check them out on the web at:

<http://www.naccrra.net/childcareaware/index.htm>

Surry County Early Childhood Partnership

Checklist for Choosing Child Care

Choosing child care can be a time-consuming and frustrating task. Below are some questions you may want to ask when choosing and visiting child care facilities. If you have any questions concerning child care, contact Surry County Early Childhood Partnership at 336-786-1880.

Pre-qualification items to consider:

- Do the hours of operation meet your needs?
- Is the location convenient for you?
- What is the cost of child care and what is included (meals, snacks, diapers, etc.)?
- Do they participate in subsidy programs?
- Are references available for the facility and staff?
- Is there a policy regarding inclement weather?
- What is the fee policy regarding when children are out sick or for vacation time?
- Is the facility required to be regulated by the state?

Questions to ask or observations to make during a tour:

Facility and Materials (health, safety, sanitation, stimulation, and security):

- Do children receive nutritious meals and snacks?
- Is there a policy/provision regarding care for sick children?
- Are there individual cribs (for infants), cots/mats (for others)?
- Is the facility child proof, safe, clean and orderly?
- Are the toys, equipment, and materials safe and non-toxic?
- Is there an outdoor space provided? If outdoor space is provided, is the play area safe?
- Where young children are cared for, are gates placed at stairways?
- What does the facility look like from your child's height (are there any hidden dangers)?
- Are there smoke detectors and fire extinguishers?
- How are emergency evacuations handled and are drills held regularly?
- Are emergency phone numbers posted?
- Is there a first aid kit available?
- Are bathrooms and/or diaper changing areas sanitary?
- Is kitchen area clean?
- Are hand-washing procedures followed by staff and children?
- Is the environment stimulating for young children?
- Are bright colors a part of the décor of the rooms?
- Where will the child spend most of their time?
- Is there enough space for the children and the children's activities?
- What security measures does the facility provide?

- Are there restrictions placed on who may pick my child?

Staff Quality:

- What level of staff training and accreditation is required? Is it ongoing?
- How long has most of the staff worked at the center and cared for children?
- What are hiring procedures and criteria?
- What is the staff/child ratio?
- Are the children carefully watched and supervised?
- Does the staff take the time to comfort, hug, and hold the children?
- Does the staff treat the children with respect, flexibility, patience, as well as provide individual attention?
- Does the staff listen and talk to the children responsively and are they enthusiastic as they interact with children?
- Do staff members greet and talk with each parent/child as they arrive and are they pleasant?
- Is the staff trained in first aid, CPR and early childhood education?
- Does staff check attendance every time children enter and leave the program?

Program:

- Will your baby be held when given a bottle?
- Will the program cooperate with nursing mothers?
- Does the program meet the special needs of your child?
- Is the program designed to enhance growth and development?
- Does the program offer a variety of educational, recreational and social activities?
- Does the program allow for each child's independence?
- Are the children grouped by age or developmental level?
- Do children have a supervised rest/nap time each day?
- Are the children taken outdoors and if so, for how long?
- Are stories read?
- Is there minimal supervised TV, if any?
- Are there opportunities for free play/free time each day? Are the toys, equipment, and materials age-appropriate and are there enough for all children?
- Does the staff post a schedule of activities?
- How is discipline handled and is good behavior encouraged?
- Are the parents encouraged to drop in and out?

- Is there a parent handbook, which clearly outlines the programs' policies, including those related to injury, sickness, discipline, dress, drop-off, etc.?
- Are there opportunities for parents to participate in program planning?

Overall Impression for final decision-making:

- Do you feel comfortable leaving your child at this center?
- Will the facility, staff, and program be able to meet your child's developmental and emotional needs?
- Do the children appear happy and does the staff appear to enjoy the children?
- Do you feel confident that the staff will take the time to discuss your child with you and will value parents as being experts regarding their own children?

Once you have made a decision:

- Set up a "trial day" when your child can join in activities while you observe.
- Drop in unannounced and visit regularly.
- Leave emergency contact information with the caregiver.
- Set up "back-up plans" in case your child or you are ill.
- Get involved with your child's day care experience!
- Review this checklist anytime to re-evaluate your child care needs.