

# High Quality Child Care



Your Guide to Finding and Selecting the Best Care for Your Child

Child Action, Inc.





Child Action, Inc. is your local Child Care Resource and Referral Program, funded by the California Department of Education, Child Development Division. We can talk with you about the kind of child care you need, help you find child care near your home, school or job, and tell you if you are eligible to receive financial assistance for your child care expenses. We can also give you information about selecting high quality child care programs. We look forward to assisting you!

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# introduction



## **Many Choices, Many Feelings**

Many parents just like you face the challenge of finding child care. For most families, child care is a necessity. Finding child care that meets your needs is a big responsibility.

We hope this book will ease your worries by providing information and support to help you find child care that provides peace of mind for you and a nurturing and loving environment for your child. High quality child care offers more than just a safe place for children; it has a positive effect on your child's early development. It also sets the foundation for positive relationships and a lifetime of learning.

It is hard to think about separating from your child when you have to go to work or school. You might worry that your child will not get the best care or your child might develop a stronger bond with the child care provider than with you. You might be concerned that your child will not be able to tell you if something is not quite right about her child care program.

These feelings are completely normal. As a loving and nurturing parent, you want the very best for your child and these feelings of anxiety come from your natural desire to protect your child.

At Child Action, Inc., we can help you find child care near your home, school or job. We can talk with you about the kind of child care you need and help you find the best care possible.

***This booklet will help you:***

- Understand your child care needs
- Consider your options
- Recognize high quality child care
- Find programs in your area
- Understand your rights
- Find help with the cost of child care
- Learn vocabulary specific to child care  
*(Terms in bold are defined in the Glossary on pages 36-37.)*



# section 1



## Balancing Your Family Needs

You have probably been doing a lot of thinking about the ways you can arrange your child care needs. Do you have friends or family who can help care for your child? Can you adjust your work or school schedule, reduce your work hours, or alternate work and child care responsibilities with your significant other?

Consider how each option will affect your family life. For example, if you work less, how will that change your long-term career choices? How will you feel if you cannot contribute as much to your family income? The answers to these questions will depend on your personality, values and needs.

Talk about this decision with people you can trust: friends, family, or the staff members at Child Action, Inc. Use the Basic Budget Worksheet (see pages 38-39) to help you find out how different choices will affect your finances.

## Flexible Work Options

There are many different ways employers can give you the flexibility you need to work and take care of your family. You may be able to work more hours each day, but fewer days per week, do some of your work from home, or work during non-traditional hours. Your employer may allow you to use vacation and sick time by the hour instead of by the day so you can attend to your family needs without missing a full workday. Part-time hours and job sharing can also reduce the number of hours you work per week.

### What is Paid Family Leave?

*If you are the parent of a newborn or newly adopted child, there are state-sponsored Paid Family Leave options that can help you take time off to bond with your child. Paid Family Leave may be paid to workers who lose pay when they take time off work to care for a seriously ill family member or bond with a new child. For more information about Paid Family Leave in California, visit [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov)*

## Talking to Your Employer About Flexible Work Options

- Before you ask, decide what you need and why.
- Improve your job performance before asking for a flexible schedule.
- Find out if other employees at your workplace have flexible work arrangements.
- Join forces with other workers who are seeking flexible work schedules - there is strength in numbers.
- Anticipate the reasons why a supervisor might say no, and prepare responses.
- Explain how flextime will improve your ability to do your job.
- Suggest a trial period.
- Discuss ways to measure the success of your plan.
- Put your proposal in writing.
- Be willing to compromise.

Source: [www.abcnews.com](http://www.abcnews.com) and [www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)



## section 2



# What Makes a High Quality Child Care Program?

High quality child care programs provide a safe and nurturing place for children to play and grow, through activities that help children develop physical, social, emotional, and intellectual skills.

There are four main components of high quality child care:

- **Staff**
- **Learning Environment**
- **Health & Safety**
- **Parent Involvement**



## Staff: The Foundation of High Quality Child Care

People are the foundation of any child care program. When you visit programs, look for staff members who truly enjoy caring for children and have a background in child development. The staff members should also have regular opportunities to attend training and professional development classes.

### A Heart for Children

When a provider truly enjoys caring for children, she is warm and responsive to their needs. Nurturing care shapes a child's ability to learn and helps her develop a sense of trust and security.

Look for providers who:

- Cuddle, touch, talk to and listen to children
- Show respect for children by responding to their feelings and needs with nurturing and acceptance
- Celebrate children's new skills
- Use a respectful tone of voice and sit or kneel down to get on the child's level

### A Heart for Parents

High quality providers want to develop a positive and respectful relationship with you, too. They will take the time to get to know your family.

Look for providers who:

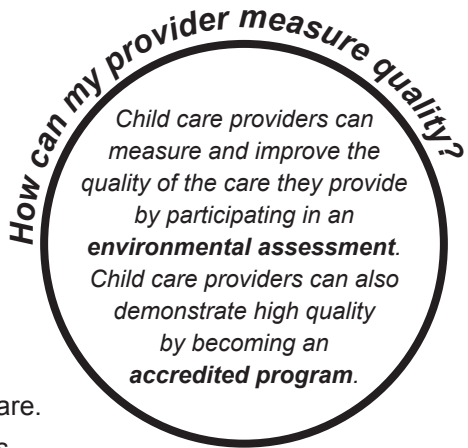
- Talk to you on a regular basis about your child's development and learning
- Encourage you to visit the program any time your child is in care
- Encourage parent participation
- Share information about conferences, family nights, and community resources
- Are sensitive to the separation anxiety you and your child may feel in the beginning



## Training

High quality providers know training is important. Look for providers who have a background in early care and education or child development. Educated providers are more prepared to understand the needs of the children in their care, have more knowledge about how children grow and develop, and have a more professional approach to child care.

Ask how often the staff members have the opportunity to attend additional training and professional development classes. Ask if any staff members have a **Child Development Permit**.



## Reliable and Consistent Caregivers

A high quality child care program does a good job of hiring and keeping staff members. You should look for programs that have low staff turnover. Turnover happens when one caregiver leaves and the program must hire someone new. Ask potential providers how long the staff members have worked for the program.

Consistent caregivers help your child develop positive relationships and confidence. Research has shown that nurturing care in the first years of life has a positive effect on children's emotional and intellectual development.

## Environment: Where Play and Learning Come Alive

A high quality environment should be warm and inviting for you and your child, as well as safe, clean, and well organized. Most of all, the environment should give your child the opportunity to play in many different ways.

Play helps children learn to solve problems, make decisions, and practice new skills. The provider should offer free access to a variety of materials and activities so children with different learning styles and abilities can find activities they enjoy. A high quality child care environment will have two important components to support play: the physical environment and the emotional atmosphere.

## The Physical Environment: Hands-On Fun and Learning

Inside, the main activity space should be cheerful and welcoming. There should be enough space to play on the floor, with child-sized furniture, and quiet areas where children can relax. Play areas should be a comfortable temperature and well lit. Look for inviting, well-organized play areas including:

- A dramatic play area with a variety of materials including dress-up clothes, props, dolls and puppets
- Hands-on activities that encourage children to use their five senses to learn about plants, animals and nature
- Activities that help children practice their **fine motor skills**: drawing, using a spoon or fork, putting together puzzles, cutting with scissors, and learning to button, zip and tie shoes
- A wide variety of books in all areas of the program

Outside, children should have the opportunity to run, jump, and climb. You should see shaded areas, places to sit down, and access to drinking water. For safety, there should be 6 inches of cushioning material such as sand or woodchips under swings, climbing structures and slides. High quality outdoor environments have:

- Natural objects like rocks, trees, plants, or a garden
- Sand and water play areas
- Equipment including bikes, wagons, and balls
- Places to climb
- Fences or natural barriers that keep children away from streets and other hazards



## **The Emotional Atmosphere: A Welcoming Place for All Children**

A high quality program provides a balance of activities each day, giving children choices, celebrating the diverse cultures in the community, and offering positive discipline to help children understand what is expected of them.

Daily routines and schedules create a sense of order and help children feel more secure and independent, because they know what to expect. A high quality child care program will have a posted schedule of activities and the provider will ask the children for input about activities. Ask to see a copy of the activity schedule.

A creative curriculum gives children a chance to discover the world around them. The environment should be a good match for your child's age and stage of development. Look for:

- Children who seem comfortable, happy, active, and engaged in what they are doing
- Daily **sensory activities** like sand and water play and exploration of textures and tastes
- Daily music activities (singing, playing instruments, listening to music, dancing)
- Hands-on opportunities to explore numbers, quantity, size, and shape

There are many ways a high quality child care provider can help your child develop friendships and understand the world around her. Warm and responsive relationships will help your child develop trust and help her learn to understand and manage her own feelings and needs. A high quality child care program will use toys, materials, art, and photographs that reflect different cultures and different types of families. Look for a program that teaches children acceptable behavior and gently uses **redirection** when they forget. Activities that promote understanding and acceptance help your child learn to make friends with children of different backgrounds and abilities.

## **Positive Discipline**

When discipline is necessary, a high quality provider should work with children in positive ways. Look for a provider who notices and praises children when they share, help one another, and work together. A high quality provider should explain rules to children in simple and positive ways (“walk in the room” instead of “no running”). He should have realistic expectations about children's behavior based on what is appropriate for their stage of development.

Close supervision is important, but children also need time to explore without being told “no” all the time. Providers should gently redirect children to appropriate activities so children learn what they can do, rather than what they cannot do. There should be enough toys and materials so children do not have to compete for them. The provider should help children use their words to express their feelings when conflicts arise. Talk with potential providers about the methods of discipline they use so you can decide if their discipline practices fit with your beliefs.

*Please note: California Licensing standards do not allow child care providers to use physical punishment or any other type of punishment that interferes with a child’s personal rights (food, toileting or rest).*

## **Health & Safety: Preventing Illness and Injury for Children and Staff**

An organized and well-maintained child care program keeps children, and the adults who care for them, comfortable, healthy, and safe. The main components are:

- Supervision of children
- Staff training
- Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Emergency procedures

### **Supervision of Children**

High quality providers should carefully supervise children in all areas of the program. Observe different areas (outdoors, restrooms) and routines (mealtimes, free play, and activity time) to make sure that the provider keeps children in sight at all times. Licensed child care providers must have the correct number of staff necessary to supervise the children. This is called the staff-to-child ratio.

### **Health and Safety Training for Staff**

In California, providers working in child care centers and family child care homes must take 15 hours of training about health and safety. This training must include Pediatric First Aid, Pediatric CPR, and Preventive Health Practices.

### **Smoke-Free Child Care**

*Health and Safety Code Section 1596.795(a) states: “The smoking of tobacco in a private residence that is licensed as a family child care home shall be prohibited during the hours of operation as a family day care home and in those areas of the family day care home where children are present.”*

## **Nutrition, Meals, and Snacks**

At meal times, children do more than just eat. They explore different textures of food and develop hand-eye coordination as they learn to pick up their food, use a spoon or fork, and serve themselves. In high quality programs, adults and children eat together, family style, and conversation is encouraged. Pleasant, relaxed meal times set the foundation for good nutrition and healthy habits. If a program provides meals or snacks, they should be nutritionally balanced. Ask if the program accommodates special diets, if necessary. Look for a posted menu.

High quality providers will also:

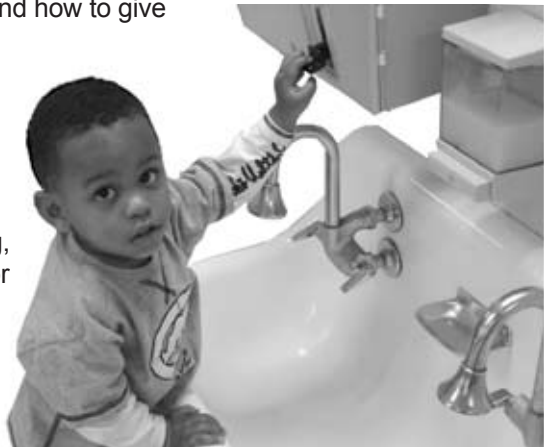
- Work with you to introduce your child to new foods
- Serve foods that are safe for young children
- Model healthy eating habits
- Post up-to-date information about children's allergies and dietary restrictions
- Offer healthy snack and lunch ideas

If you are breastfeeding, look for a provider who has an open door policy and offers you a clean, comfortable place to nurse your child. Supportive child care providers will also know how to store and serve breastmilk so your baby can have the advantages of breastfeeding even when you cannot be there.

## **Health and Hygiene**

The provider should offer prompt and gentle care when a child is hurt or sick. She should have a plan to determine when to notify a parent if a child is ill and when a child may need to go home. High quality providers will also have set guidelines that will explain when a child is well enough to return to the child care program. If a provider must give a child medication during the day, she will be sure to store it out of the reach of children and make sure she understands when and how to give the medication.

Good hygiene and cleanliness throughout the program help keep the children and staff healthy. Look for clean tables, floors and toys. The facility should have separate spaces for sleeping, eating, diapering, toileting and play. Look for running water, soap and towels within easy reach. Watch to see if the staff and children wash their hands regularly.



During diaper changes, providers can talk, sing a song, or play peek-a-boo with your child. When caregivers approach diapering positively, children learn that body functions are a normal part of everyday life. Caregivers may also partner with parents to develop a plan for toilet learning.

## **Emergency Procedures**

Licensed child care providers are required to have written emergency and evacuation plans. Ask how often the program conducts fire and disaster drills. Find out how the provider would contact you in the event of an emergency. A high quality child care program will have:

- Well-stocked first aid kits
- Emergency supplies
- Staff trained in CPR and first aid on site at all times
- Up-to-date emergency contact information for each child
- Posted emergency evacuation plans

## **The Parent-Provider Relationship: Building a Partnership**

Developing a good parent-provider relationship takes commitment, dedication and communication. Together you can build a wonderful support system. When you have a strong relationship with your child care provider, it is easier to talk about your child's experiences and feelings.

High quality child care providers recognize that you, your family, and your culture are the biggest and most important influences on your child. Providers should welcome and encourage your participation. Look for providers who keep you informed through one-on-one contact, newsletters and meetings. Spend some time seeing what your child does, who she plays with and how the provider cares for her. You can also participate by:

- Making toys, games, or favorite foods
- Attending parent meetings
- Visiting for lunch or field trips
- Helping on weekend work crews
- Serving on the Board of Directors or Parent Advisory Committee

Together, you and your provider can make child care a positive part of your family!





## Child Care Choices

There are different types of child care programs available in the community. Some programs are “licensed” which means they must follow state health and safety regulations (see page 27 for more information). There are other types of child care arrangements that do not require a license, these programs are called “license-exempt” programs. All licensed programs must follow specific staff-to-child ratios. These ratios determine the number of children each adult may care for and limits the total group size.

### Licensed Programs

There are two different kinds of licensed programs:

- Family Child Care Homes
- Child Care Centers

## Family Child Care Homes

A family child care home provides care in a family-like setting for small groups of children. Many of these providers are parents who decided to start a family child care home so they could care for their own children while earning a living at the same time.

Family child care providers are required to have 15 hours of health and safety training, including Pediatric CPR, Pediatric First Aid, and Preventive Health and Safety. In addition, they must pass a background check and have a tuberculosis clearance. They are not required to take college courses in child development; however, some providers voluntarily take these kinds of classes. Child Action, Inc. also provides free training to family child care providers. Ask potential providers about their education and training background.

Sacramento County issues licenses to family child care providers. There are two types of licenses for family child care homes, a small license and a large license.

For a small license, one adult may care for:

- 4 infants; or
- 6 children with no more than three infants; or
- 8 children with no more than two infants, when at least two children are six or older and attend kindergarten or elementary school

For a large license, one adult plus an assistant may care for:

- 12 children with no more than four infants; or
- 14 children with no more than three infants, when at least two children are six or older and attend kindergarten or elementary school

Please note: These ratios must include the provider's and/or assistant's children (under age 10) in care.



## Child Care Centers

Child care centers are programs licensed by the state to care for groups of 12 children or more. Private businesses, colleges, community agencies, city government and other types of organizations run these programs. Child care center staff are required to take college courses in the field of child development. In addition, they must pass a background check and have a tuberculosis clearance. Child care centers must meet building, fire and zoning codes.

*Know before you go.*

*We strongly encourage you to check a child care provider's licensing history. Please see page 27 for details.*

For a private child care center, governed by Title 22 of the California Health and Safety Code, the staff-to-child ratio is:

- Infants (birth to two years): One adult for every four infants.
- Toddler (18 months to 30 months): One teacher for every six toddlers or one teacher and one aide for 12 toddlers.
- Preschool (two to five years): One teacher for every 12 children or 1 teacher and 1 aide for 15 children or one teacher and one aide (who meets specific education and continuing education requirements) for 18 children.
- School-age (kindergarten to 12 years): One teacher for every 14 children or one teacher and one aide for 28 children.

For a state- and/ or federally-funded child care center, governed by Title 5, of the California Department of Education Code of Regulations, the staff-to-child ratio is:

- Infants (0-18 months): One adult for every three infants.
- Toddler (18 months to 36 months): One teacher for every four toddlers.
- Preschool (three to five years): One teacher for every eight children
- School-age (kindergarten to 14 years): One teacher for every 14 children.

## License-Exempt Care

Examples of different types of license-exempt care:

- A person you hire to provide child care in your home (nanny, au pair)
- A drop-in child care program at a health club
- Some youth recreation programs and day camps
- Care by family, friends & neighbors (caring for children from one other family)
- Parenting groups/parent co-ops

## After-school Enrichment Programs

State and county licensing officials do not inspect these types of child care arrangements for basic health and safety standards. Some of these programs may voluntarily develop their own standards of care. For example, programs run by school districts and recreation programs may impose their own staff requirements, background checks, and training requirements; however, these providers are not required to do so. If you select a license-exempt child care program for your child, please ask about their complaint policies and procedures. If you would like more information about complaint procedures for license-exempt care, please contact Child Action, Inc. at (916) 369-0191.

## TrustLine

TrustLine is California's registry of in-home child care providers, tutors and in-home counselors who have passed a background screening.

All caregivers listed with TrustLine have a fingerprint clearance through the California Department of Justice.

This means they have no disqualifying criminal convictions or substantiated child abuse reports in California. The California Department of Social Services and the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network administer TrustLine. Call Child Action, Inc. at (916) 369-0191 to find out how your provider can register with TrustLine or visit their website at [trustline.org](http://trustline.org).

All child care providers working in licensed child care centers and family child care homes have to go through a similar screening process. TrustLine is updated and providers are removed from the registry if they commit a disqualifying crime.



## section 4



# Child Care and Your Child's Developmental Needs

## Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers discover the world using their five senses. They are learning to trust others, gain control over their bodies and interact with the world around them.

Look for providers who engage infants and toddlers with nurturing physical contact and gentle conversation when looking at books or playing simple games like peek-a-boo. High quality caregivers should respond to your child's verbal cues, help him name objects he sees, and label his feelings. During mealtimes, providers should hold infants or sit with toddlers.

A high quality infant and toddler environment should give young children the opportunity to explore activities that allow them to crawl around and through things, creep, pull up to a stand, and play with toys that introduce cause and effect. Different textures, tastes, sounds, sights, and smells help children discover and understand the world around them.

The provider should place infants to sleep on their backs at nap time. The provider should be responsive to the children’s individual needs for sleep and provide nap time rituals (soft music, comfort items, familiar blankets, and calming stories) to help children relax and get cozy.

## Preschool

Children in preschool are becoming more independent and self-confident. They are curious about the world. Look for a child care program that offers activities that encourage preschoolers to cooperate, make friends, follow routines, and be part of a group. They enjoy problem solving and asking questions. Activities like sorting, classifying, counting and making patterns help preschoolers develop their thinking skills. Opportunities to communicate with others, participate in conversations, understand written words, recognize letters, and begin writing help preschoolers develop their language and communication skills.

Preschoolers also enjoy activities that develop their coordination and physical skills. Balancing, jumping, running, and catching increase their **gross motor skills** and tasks such as buttoning, stringing beads, cutting, drawing and writing help develop their **fine motor skills**.

As your child grows, he may outgrow his need for a nap.

During naptime, providers should let children who do not nap listen to music or stories on headphones, play quiet games, look at books or have supervised outdoor playtime.



## School-Age

School-age children are developing their independence and skills. Look for programs that allow your school-age child to follow her interests and natural abilities to help her feel successful and build her self-esteem.

School-age children need down time after school to relax and socialize with friends. Quality providers should encourage positive development in your school-age child by offering activities that promote cooperation, friendship, and responsibility.

Sports and games relieve stress and develop children's physical abilities. School-age children also enjoy activities that involve hand-eye coordination and **fine motor skills** like sewing, weaving, beadwork and other crafts. Homework support, trivia, brainteasers, and other skill-based games like chess and checkers help your child develop thinking skills.

Many school-age child care programs operate on school grounds. If the provider operates off grounds, find out if the program offers transportation to and/or from school. The provider may walk children to and from school or pick up children by van from several local schools. Ask if there are any additional costs for transportation services. Some local schools offer free **after-school enrichment programs** to provide supervised activities when the school day is done. Call Child Action, Inc. at (916) 369-0191 for more information about child care options for your school-age child.

## Mixed Aged Groups

Family child care homes may care for children of different ages together in a group. This type of care helps children develop a sense of community because it includes children at various stages of development, with different interests and skills. Children can develop their self-esteem, and learn empathy and patience, while helping others. This type of environment is an option if you are looking for a child care setting where you can keep siblings together.

High quality care for mixed age groups should have:

- Enough space so each age group has room to play
- Effective barriers to separate babies from rough and tumble play
- Different types of activities to meet the needs of each age group
- Inclusion of infants or crawlers in the group whenever possible
- Caregivers who engage the older children in activities while younger children nap
- Open-ended toys such as blocks, Lego® and other multiple use items for a variety of age groups



## Children with Special Needs

Your child may have behavioral, developmental, health or mobility needs that require special consideration when you are choosing a child care program. A high quality child care program should give all children the opportunity to feel accepted. At Child Action, Inc. we can help you find child care providers who will be responsive to your child's needs. We also provide training, equipment and other resources for parents and providers caring for children with special needs. See page 25 for more information about Enhanced Referrals for children with special needs.

**Inclusion** is the philosophy that children with special needs should have the opportunity to participate in all activities. An inclusive program gives all children the chance to play side-by-side with their peers, learn new skills, and develop friendships. High quality programs provide additional support and adapt activities for children with special needs. Look for high quality providers who create an inclusive environment by:

- Encouraging all children to meet goals appropriate for their development
- Developing the curriculum and activities so all children have access and can participate
- Using support services to help meet the needs of each child

When talking to a potential provider, explain your child's special need and share any special care plans, including eating, toileting, communication strategies, and medication needs. Find out if the caregiver has experience working with children with special needs and if so, what special skills she has. Tell the provider about the goals you have set for your child and find out if the provider is willing to work with a physician, clinic, therapist, teacher or other professional. Share information about any adaptive equipment your child uses. Is the facility accessible? Tell the provider about the kinds of activities your child enjoys and does well.

Child care providers cannot discriminate against parents or children with special needs, nor can they charge more to care for children with special needs. Child care programs are required to make "reasonable accommodations" to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that ensures civil rights to people with disabilities including access and accommodations in preschool and child care settings. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates inclusion of young children with disabilities. The intent of these laws is to make it easier for families of children with special needs to access education and social services.

## section 5



# The Steps to Finding High Quality Child Care

This section will outline the six steps to finding quality child care:

1. Call Child Action, Inc. for referrals
2. Call potential providers
3. Visit potential providers
4. Check the provider's licensing history
5. Make a decision
6. Adjust to a new child care program

## Step 1: Call Child Action, Inc. for a list of child care programs near your home, school or workplace.

Child Action, Inc. is here to help you with your child care needs. We have up-to-date information about licensed and license-exempt child care programs. We can provide information about schedules, rates and program details for each facility.

### Child Action, Inc. offers child care referrals in three ways:

1. Call (916) 369-0191 to speak with a Child Care Information Specialist.
2. Email our office at [info@childaction.org](mailto:info@childaction.org). Enter “Child Care Referrals” in the subject line. Let us know your address and/or zip code, ages of your children, and the hours you need care.
3. Visit [www.childaction.org](http://www.childaction.org) and click on “Finding Child Care.”

*Please note: Child Action, Inc. provides information about providers as it is available, but does not make recommendations. The choice of your child’s care is your responsibility. Child Action, Inc. has not inspected or warranted the condition of the provider’s facility or the quality of supervision the children will receive. Child Action, Inc. is not responsible for arrangements between parents and providers.*

### Enhanced Referrals for Children with Special Needs

Child Action, Inc. offers Enhanced Referrals for parents seeking care for a child with special needs. A “special need” is any accommodation you believe is necessary for your child. Special needs can be related to a child’s behavior or developmental needs, as well as sight, hearing, or medication needs. Our Inclusion Specialist will talk to you about your child’s needs, strengths, and interests and ask about the type of environment you prefer. The Inclusion Specialist can also share information to help you care for your child and connect you to community resources.

The Inclusion Specialist will contact potential providers in your area to discuss your child’s needs and learn about their availability to accommodate them. We will keep in touch with you as you contact and visit potential providers. Once you have selected a program, we will follow up with you and your provider for at least three months to support a successful experience for your child.

### What is the ADA?

*The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that requires anyone who works with the public, including child care providers, to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. Child care centers and family child care homes must provide equal access for all children, including those with special needs, and charge the same rate for all.*

## **Step 2: Call potential providers.**

Call the providers on your list of referrals from Child Action, Inc. and ask a few questions to help you decide if you would like to visit their programs. Here are some things to ask:

- What is a typical day like at your program?
- What training, education and experience do you have?
- How do you help new children adjust to your program?
- Do you accept children who are not potty trained?
- How long have you worked at this program?
- Tell me about your experience caring for children with special needs.
- What are your hours?
- Do you close for vacations and holidays?
- Do you accommodate flexible schedules?
- What are your rates?
- What do you provide (meals, snacks, diapers)?
- What do you expect parents to provide?

If you feel comfortable with the provider over the phone, set up a time for you and your child to visit during business hours.

## **Step 3: Visit potential child care providers.**

Look for a provider who warmly welcomes you and your child. Expect that she will make time to answer your questions and give you a tour. Carefully observe how the provider interacts with your child and the other children in her care. The provider should ask questions about your child and take time to get to know you. She should ask about your child's routine, likes and dislikes, personality, and any previous child care experience. Help the provider get to know your child. Let the provider know if your child is under extra stress (divorce, a new sibling, etc.). If your child likes to be comforted in a particular way, share this when you visit the child care provider. The child care provider's responses to this information can help you decide if she would be right for your family.

Look for the basic signs of quality:

- Staff members who truly enjoy caring for children
- A warm and inviting environment
- General cleanliness, supervision and good hygiene
- Opportunities for parent involvement

Visit several child care providers before you make a decision. Take the time to talk to each caregiver you visit and make sure you agree on important issues. See page 41 for a list of questions to ask during your visit.

## **Step 4: Check the provider's licensing history.**

If you think you have found a provider who would be a good fit for your family, call and check the provider's licensing history. This information is public. Call the appropriate number below to ask about the provider's complaint history.

### **Family Child Care Homes:**

Sacramento County Family Child Care Licensing (916) 875-2808

### **Child Care Centers:**

River City Child Care Program (916) 263-5744

## ***What Does A License Tell You?***

A license is a set of standards put in place by Community Care Licensing, the California state agency responsible for inspection and monitoring of licensed child care programs. Their goal is to protect the health and safety of children in child care.

Licensing standards:

- Determine the number of adults necessary to care for the number and ages of children in care
- Require child care providers to submit to a background check and fingerprinting
- Require that all child care providers have a tuberculosis clearance
- Require health and safety inspections for all child care centers and family child care homes before a license can be issued
- Mandate health and safety inspections for family child care homes and child care centers every 3-5 years
- Require family child care providers and at least one person in a center to have fifteen hours of health and safety training
- Ensure that parents and children have basic rights in child care (see Section 6 for more information)
- Ensure that parents have the right to review a program's licensing history

## Step 5: Make a decision.

Now that you have visited several child care programs, it is time to decide on a program for your child. Use the worksheet “After the Visit: Making Your Decision” on page 42 to help you.

Caring for your child is a partnership. The more the provider knows about your family, and the more you learn what is important to the provider, the easier it will be to determine if you have found the right partnership. Listen to your child’s opinion and feelings. Combine them with your own feelings and then make your decision. You should always trust your gut feeling.

Make sure that you have checked the licensing history of the program and are comfortable with the information you have received. It is common for providers to have minor complaints on file. When you review a provider’s licensing history, balance that information with what you saw when you visited the program.

Call the provider and let him know you would like to enroll your child in the program. Find out what information the provider will need for the enrollment process and determine the date your child will begin the program. Upon enrollment, licensed providers must inform you of your rights (see page 30 for more information).



## Step 6: Adjusting to a new child care program.

Both children and adults need time to adjust to new situations. Once you have chosen a provider, prepare your family for the transition. Talk to your child about where he will be staying and who will be taking care of him. Tell your child about the new people he will meet and some of the things he will be doing. Set aside time to visit the facility together before the arrangement begins. Let your child take a favorite stuffed animal, blanket, pillow, toy, or even a picture of you and your family. These things will give him comfort. Establish a daily routine so your child knows when you will be leaving and when you will return. It will make both of you feel better.

Spend a little extra time when you leave your child with the provider. This is a good time to talk to the provider and let your child separate from you gradually, on his own terms. Always say goodbye as you leave, even if you know your child will cry or cling to you. This will help establish trust in this new situation. Expect that your child will be upset and may seem very distressed. You will probably feel sad and worried at first too, but do your best to stay upbeat. Once you say goodbye, leave quickly so your child can focus on playing and making friends. Even though it is hard to leave a crying child, most children do quite well once their parent leaves. Some children will cry every time you drop them off, but this is often a developmental stage and is quite normal. It will pass.

Call the provider later in the day and ask how your child is doing. During the adjustment period, it is normal for children to have some developmental setbacks. If they were toilet trained, they may start to have accidents. If they were beginning to talk, they may have less to say. These are temporary delays while your child gets used to a new situation.

If you or your child have trouble separating, talk it over with your provider or one of the staff members at Child Action, Inc. Your provider may offer suggestions to make the separation easier for both of you. Consider several short visits or brief stays with the provider before beginning full-time child care. Be dependable about picking up your child on time. Young children cannot tell time, so instead, tell them you will pick them up after naptime or at another predictable time during the day. Remember: If you feel confident and enthusiastic, chances are your child will too. Change takes time!



# section 6



## Know Your Rights

All families with children in licensed child care programs are entitled to certain rights under California law. Upon enrollment, child care providers are required to inform parents of their rights and the rights of children. This information is available at [www.cclد.ca.gov](http://www.cclد.ca.gov).

### Children's Rights in Child Care

The State of California has determined that children in licensed child care facilities are entitled to:

- The right to be treated with dignity.
- The right to be accorded safe, healthful accommodations that meet their daily needs.
- The right to be free from corporal or unusual punishment, infliction of pain, humiliation, intimidation, ridicule, coercion, threat, mental abuse, or actions of a punitive nature.
- The right to be free of interference in daily living functions, including eating, sleeping, or toileting.

## Parents' Rights

The State of California has determined that parents with children in licensed child care facilities are entitled to:

- Enter and inspect the home/facility in which their children are enrolled during business hours without giving advance notice.
- The right and responsibility to review the licensing history of potential providers before placing their child in care.
- The right to get information about any substantiated or inconclusive complaints about a child care provider a parent selects for his/her child.

What is an "Open Door Policy?"

*The "Open Door Policy" gives you the right to visit your child's licensed child care center or family child care home any time your child is in care. Community Care Licensing, the California state agency that regulates licensed child care programs, sets this policy.*

## Reporting Health and Safety Concerns

If you have concerns about the care your child receives at a center or home, talk to your provider. If you still feel concerned after you have talked to your provider, you can call Licensing (see page 27 for contact information) and file a complaint. Reporting sub-standard care protects your own child and other children as well.

California law requires that all licensed child care centers and family child care homes make available, upon request, all reports concerning licensing visits and proven complaint investigations. All reports must be posted and kept on file for three years. In addition, a more complete file regarding licensed providers may be available at an office of the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division. You have the right to access any public information in these files. Some community-based programs are not required to hold a license. Ask about their complaint policies and procedures.

## Providers' Rights

The person in charge of the child care facility can deny access to a parent if the parent behaves in a way that poses a risk to the children in the facility, or the facility has a written request by a custodial parent to deny access to a non-custodial parent.

# section 7



## Child Care and Your Finances

Many parents find that child care is the second highest household expense after the cost of housing. High quality child care providers offer a valuable service to families. Like any service, high quality child care is expensive. Be prepared for this as you weigh your options. The budget worksheet on pages 38-39 will help you figure out what you can afford. Copy the worksheet so you can see how different choices work with your budget and your child care needs. Child Action, Inc. can support you as you weigh your options. Give us a call, we are here to help.

You may be eligible for programs that help families pay for some or all of the cost of child care. Parents who are working, enrolled in school, or participating in an approved welfare-to-work training plan, may qualify. To find out if you are eligible for child care payment assistance, call Child Action, Inc. at (916) 369-0191.

## **The Sacramento County Childcare Eligibility List (CEL)**

The CEL is a list of families who qualify for subsidized child care in Sacramento County. When you get on the CEL, your information is made available to participating child care programs in the county. When a space is available, a provider will contact you. Signing up for the CEL improves your chances of obtaining free or low-cost child care at locations of your choice and means you do not have to sign up for multiple waiting lists. The CEL serves families with the greatest need first. Getting on the CEL does not guarantee that you will receive subsidized child care.

There are two ways to get on the CEL:

- Visit [www.childaction.org](http://www.childaction.org) and click on “Childcare Eligibility List.” This will take you to the online application.
- Call (916) 369-0191 and ask to get on the CEL. An Information Specialist will determine your eligibility and help you fill out the application.

## **Income Tax Credits for Parents**

Child Care Income Tax Credits can help you lower your taxes and/or increase the amount of your refund. A quality child care provider will supply you with a Tax Identification Number (TIN) or social security number for reporting child care expenses on your tax returns. To use the Child Care Tax Credit, you must list the name, address and social security number or TIN of your child care provider(s). Be sure to get this information from all of the providers who cared for your child during the year. Neither Child Action, Inc. nor Licensing has this information. It is your responsibility to obtain it from your provider(s).

### **Points to Remember:**

- Request a receipt every time you make a child care payment.
- Keep all receipts and cancelled checks from child care payments.
- If you change providers, request a closing statement with the dates your child was in care, total amount paid, name, signature, and the provider’s TIN or social security number.
- At tax time, send a written request to the provider asking her to “fill out the attached W-10 form and return by (date) for the purpose of claiming child care costs.”
- If the provider does not return the W-10 or returns it incomplete, file your taxes and claim the cost of child care. Attach copies of all written requests documenting your attempts to complete the requirements.

## section 8



### **Child Care is a Journey, Not a Destination**

Your work as a parent is never done. The experience you have gained choosing child care for the first time will help you when your family faces a new transition and you must look for child care again. Families grow and change and their child care needs change, too. Child care providers, like all of us, have their own needs that may take them on new journeys in life and away from your family.

You may find that the child care choice you made is not working for your family. If you are unhappy with your current arrangement, you can call Child Action, Inc. and discuss your options. Trust your instincts about your child's provider, but balance that with the natural worries that all parents have about child care.

Is your concern important enough to disrupt your child's routine? If the answer is yes, discuss it with your provider. If your provider is not responsive, and you believe the health and safety of children is at risk, report your concerns to Licensing (see page 27 for more information). Filing a report protects the well-being of all children in the program.

If you must find a new provider, use the steps in Section 5 to guide you. Your child may worry that she is to blame if you must find a new provider or she may not want to make the change. Reassure and comfort your child about what will happen. Give her as much information as she can understand. Try to focus on the positive things your child can expect in her new child care arrangement.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship you and your child build with your provider is important. It helps your child develop trust, independence and self-confidence and gives you the peace of mind you need while you work or go to school. It takes time to find the right program, but it is time well spent.

Child Action, Inc. is available to give you support and information to meet the needs of your family. We have many resources to help you on your child care journey and we look forward to assisting you!



# Glossary

## **Accredited Program**

Child care centers and family child care homes can be recognized for quality by becoming an “accredited program.” These programs go beyond basic licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) are examples of organizations who have established best practices in the field of child care and accredit centers and family child care homes that follow their quality standards.

## **After-School Enrichment Programs**

These free, license-exempt programs serve students in kindergarten through grade twelve. These programs provide the opportunity for students to learn new skills after the school day has ended. Programs are typically open for a minimum of three hours a day and daily attendance is often required for continued enrollment. In most cases, programs are only open to students attending their respective school or district.

## **Child Development Permit**

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) issues six levels of permits to professionals in the field of child development: Assistant Teacher, Associate Teacher, Teacher, Master Teacher, Site Supervisor, and Director. In order to obtain this permit, child development professionals must have documented experience working directly with children, complete college courses in the field of child development, and continue to attend workshops and training classes for professional development.

## **Environmental Assessment**

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is a quality assessment tool, developed by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina, to help programs measure and improve the quality of child care services. There are assessments for infant/toddler programs (ITERS), family child care homes (FDCRS), and school-age programs (SACERS).



# Glossary

## **Fine Motor Skills**

Fine motor skills refer to the small movements and hand-eye coordination needed to pick up and use small objects and transfer things from hand to hand. Some examples of fine motor skills are using the thumb and forefinger to pick up small objects, cutting, coloring, writing, and threading beads.

## **Gross Motor Skills**

Gross motor skills refer to the movements of the large muscles in the arms, legs and torso. Some examples of gross motor skills are lifting one's head, rolling over, sitting up, balancing, crawling, walking, running, and pedaling a bicycle.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusion is an attitude and a philosophy that fosters belonging and acceptance of all children. A provider who values inclusion will encourage all children, with or without special needs, to participate according to their own capabilities in an environment where they can learn from each other and receive the support they need to succeed.

## **Redirection**

Redirection occurs when a parent or child care provider guides a child away from an inappropriate activity or negative behavior by focusing on the things the child can play with or do.

## **Sensory Activities**

Sensory activities engage the five senses (touch, taste, sight, smell and sound). Providers should give children opportunities to explore different foods, a variety of art materials, music, nature, and other activities. Sensory play is soothing and helps children of all ages discover the world around them.

# Budget Sheet

Total Monthly Gross Income \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Taxes, Health Ins. & Other Payroll Deductions - \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Savings, 401K & Other Deferred Money - \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Monthly Income = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

## HOUSING EXPENSES - MONTHLY PAYMENTS

Rent or Mortgage \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Utilities \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Homeowner's Insurance  
*(set \$ aside each month if paid annually)* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Repairs *(set \$ aside for future expenses)* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Taxes *(set \$ aside if paid annually)* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Housing Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

## CAR EXPENSES - MONTHLY PAYMENTS

Loan Payment(s) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Gas \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance *(set \$ aside if paid annually)* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Maintenance & Repairs  
*(set \$ aside for future expenses)* \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Car Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

## DEBTS - MONTHLY PAYMENTS

Creditor #1 \_\_\_\_\_ Payment \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

Creditor #2 \_\_\_\_\_ Payment \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

Creditor #3 \_\_\_\_\_ Payment \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

Creditor #4 \_\_\_\_\_ Payment \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

*(figure more on a separate sheet if needed)*

**Debt Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

# Budget Sheet (continued)

## MISCELLANEOUS

(Set \$ aside each month for annual expenses)

Church Tithes & Offerings	\$ _____
Other Charitable Contributions	\$ _____
Groceries, Lunches, Meals Out	\$ _____
Child Care	\$ _____
School Tuition/Supplies	\$ _____
Medical Bills and Co-Pays	\$ _____
Prescription Medicines	\$ _____
Pet Supplies & Vet Exams	\$ _____
Entertainment, Cable, Video Rentals	\$ _____
Club Dues	\$ _____
(Homeowner's Assoc., Fitness, etc.)	\$ _____
Newspaper, Magazine Subscriptions	\$ _____
Clothing	\$ _____
Haircuts	\$ _____
Gifts	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____

(continue on separate sheet if needed)

**Misc. Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

### Monthly Expense Totals

Housing Total + Car Total + Debt Total + Misc. Total =

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

*These are your Total Expenses.*

**Total Monthly Income - Total Expenses =**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

*A positive number is your monthly surplus.*

*A negative number is your monthly shortage.*

# Resources for Parents

## **NAEYC**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) focuses on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. For more information, visit [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

## **Parent Voices**

Parent Voices is an organization for parents who want to improve the quality of child care and help make it more affordable. By sharing their stories with elected officials and the media, these parents bring attention to important child care issues. Parent Voices is always looking for parents to get involved. For more information, visit [www.parentvoices.org](http://www.parentvoices.org).

## **Quality Child Care Collaborative (QCCC)**

The Sacramento County Quality Child Care Collaborative is a partnership of community agencies, educational and governmental institutions, private businesses and the First 5 Sacramento Commission. The QCCC provides program assessment, training, technical assistance and consultation services to help child care centers and family child care homes provide quality child care programs. Call (916) 369-0191 for more information.

## **Sacramento County Childcare Eligibility List (CEL)**

The Childcare Eligibility List (CEL) is a list of families in need of child care assistance. Child care programs funded by the California Department of Education or Head Start programs may call families from this list to offer free or low-cost child care. For more information, visit [www.thecel.net](http://www.thecel.net) or call (916) 369-0191.

## **Sacramento County Local Child Care Planning and Development Council (LPC)**

The LPC provides a forum for the planning of child care services that meet the diverse needs of families in Sacramento County. The LPC seeks to promote public participation in the planning process, advocate for the child care needs of families, and advise the Board of Supervisors and Board of Education on issues related to child care. For more information, visit [www.sac-lpc.org](http://www.sac-lpc.org).

# During the Visit: Questions to Ask

Copy the front and back of this page and take it with you when you visit a potential child care program. Ask the questions that apply to your needs.

- How many children attend this center or home?
- How are the children separated into groups?
- What would a typical day be like for my child?
- How do you help children feel secure and comfortable when they first begin your program or when they are sad?
- How do you encourage parents and families to get involved in the program?
- Can you show me your main play areas inside and outside?
- Do you have current first aid and CPR certification?
- Can you introduce me to the staff members who will be working with my child?
- What are the minimum qualifications for staff in your program?
- Do you or your staff have opportunities for ongoing training in child development?
- How long have you and/or your staff members worked at your program?
- Other than staff, who else is in your program during the day?
- What forms of discipline do you use?
- How do you keep parents up-to-date about their child's development and about activities in the program?
- Do you assist with toilet learning?
- Do you have a contract or parent handbook that describes rules, fees, and policies?
- What are your policies if my child is sick?
- Can you give me the names of two or three parents to call for references?

Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

# After the Visit: Making Your Decision

After you visit a potential provider, answer these questions. If you can answer “yes” to most of the questions, the provider has many quality standards in place.

Program Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Circle Yes or No:**

The staff treated the children with respect.	Yes	No
The provider made sure that all children were included.	Yes	No
The staff encouraged positive interaction between children.	Yes	No
I agree with the way this provider handles discipline.	Yes	No
This program understands and respects diversity.	Yes	No
The children seemed interested in what they were doing.	Yes	No
The children were able to choose from a variety of activities.	Yes	No
There were enough toys, equipment and books in good repair.	Yes	No
The provider supervised the children at all times.	Yes	No
The program was clean, safe, and well-organized.	Yes	No
The staff practiced good hygiene.	Yes	No
The provider gave me written information about program policies.	Yes	No
I agree with the program’s policies.	Yes	No
The program had posted emergency evacuation plans.	Yes	No
The program has hours that meet my needs.	Yes	No
The program is in a convenient location.	Yes	No
The program fits my child’s personality and needs.	Yes	No
I felt comfortable talking to this provider.	Yes	No

# Notes





**Child Action, Inc.**

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[www.childaction.org](http://www.childaction.org)

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