



Parents' Guide to Selecting Child Care

Selecting and Monitoring of
Licensed and Licence-not-required Child Care



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Children and
Family Development



BCHealthPlanning

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Choosing Quality Child Care

Choosing a child care arrangement for your child is an important responsibility. It takes time, planning and patience to find the right caregiver – but it *is* worth the effort.

This guide describes the range of child care choices available to BC parents, provides some guidelines to help you decide on the child care arrangement that's best for your family, and outlines the subsidies available to help parents pay for child care.

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The Early Years

The early years of a child's life are vital. This is the time when you, as a parent, can help to set the foundation for your child's healthy development.

Scientists and researchers around the world are now confirming that the brain growth and development of infants and young children is deeply affected by their early experiences. The more you can ensure that these experiences are positive, the better off your children will be in the future.

Finding the right caregiver for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent, because that caregiver, too, will have a significant impact on your child's life. You need to choose a caregiver who will work with you as a partner in your child's development, who will respect and support your ideas, and who will nurture and stimulate your child – in short, a caregiver who will provide you and your child with *quality child care*.

Quality Child Care

Quality child care is child care where all children receive individual care and attention, learn how to get along with others, and feel good about themselves. It is clean, safe and comfortable. It has a quiet space for rest or sleep, as well as both indoor and outdoor play areas and a range of toys and equipment for play and learning.

And it has caregivers who genuinely like children and understand their differences. These are caregivers who recognize behaviour that indicates a child needs help, who are aware of cultural and religious diversity, and who are able to tailor games and activities to the ages and interests of the children in their care. They are also able to build the self-esteem of each child through warm and loving guidance, and are willing to work with you – the parent – to develop common goals.

How to Find it

Your choice of a child care arrangement will depend upon a number of factors, including:

- your child's age;
- your schedule (what hours and days of the week you need care for your child);
- whether you want child care in your home, near your home, work or school, or en route to a particular destination;
- your ideas about how your child should be treated and raised;
- what child care is available in your community; and
- what your family can afford to pay.

The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program in your area is a good source of information on child care services in your community. The CCRR can provide you with referrals to local caregivers, advice about choosing quality child care, and information about government subsidies for child care.

Your local health authority, other parents, neighbourhood groups, local newspapers and community bulletin boards can also help you find local child care services.

To find the number of the CCRR or child care licensing office closest to you, please call Enquiry BC.

From Vancouver: 660-2421

From Victoria: 387-6121

Elsewhere in BC: 1-800-663-7867

Licensed or Licence-Not-Required?

In British Columbia, there are two basic child care categories: licensed and licence-not-required (LNR), also known as informal child care.

Whether or not a child care program needs a licence depends primarily on how many children a caregiver is looking after. BC law says that caregivers who look after more than two children not related to them must have a licence.

- **Licensed child care** programs must meet the requirements of the *Community Care Facility Act* and the **Child Care Licensing Regulation**.

Operators of **licensed child care** facilities must comply with regulations regarding:

- staff qualifications (academic, First Aid, medical clearance);
- staff-to-child ratios;
- criminal record checks;
- program activities (must be comprehensive and coordinated);
- space and equipment;
- nutrition, smoking, discipline and emergency procedures.

Licensing regulations are administered by the Ministry of Health Planning, and cover health and safety standards, space and equipment requirements, child/staff ratios and staff qualifications. Licensing Officers investigate complaints and monitor licensed child care programs to ensure they continue to meet program standards. All licensed caregivers – and anyone over the age of 12 who is ordinarily at the facility – must go through a criminal record check.

Licensed child care programs may be administered by parent or community non-profit societies, social service agencies, churches, private individuals, or companies. Each facility sets its own hours of operation, fee schedules and operating policies.

- Most **licence-not-required (LNR) child care** arrangements include the caregiver’s own children and one or two children not related to the caregiver.

LNR caregivers may or may not have had formal child care training or previous child care experience. Caregivers set their own hours of operation, fee schedules and operating policies. Parents are solely responsible for supervising and monitoring the quality of care provided in licence-not-required child care arrangements.

LNR child care providers are encouraged – but not required – to register with their local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program. Registration means these caregivers have met a number of important requirements, including:

- a criminal record check (for everyone over age 12 living in the home);
- character references;
- a home-setting review;
- a physician's report on their physical and emotional capacity to care for children;
- first aid training; and
- participation in child care training courses or workshops.

It also means they have access to caregiver group liability insurance through the CCRR.

Licensed Child Care Options

1. Group Child Care Centres

Group child care centres serve children either from 30 months to school entry (Grade 1), or children from birth to 36 months (also known as infant/toddler care).

Group centres offer year-round, full-day care, typically opening between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. and closing between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m. Part-time spaces are available in some centres; some centres offer on-site kindergarten, or before or after kindergarten care for 5-year-olds.

Maximum group size:

- Over 30 months - 25 children.
- Under 36 months - 12 children.

Staff/child ratio:

- Over 30 months - 1 Early Childhood Educator and 2 assistants for 25 children.
- Under 36 months - 1 Infant/Toddler Educator, 1 Early Childhood Educator and 1 assistant for 12 children.

Staff qualifications:

- Over 30 months - staff qualified in Early Childhood Education.
- Under 36 months - staff qualified in Early Childhood Education and Infant/Toddler Education.
- First Aid Certificate required.

Before or after kindergarten care

Kindergarten is a half-day program for 5-year-olds that introduces them to the school setting. It operates from September through June, either through the public school system (no fees) or through private schools (most charge a fee).

Some licensed child care settings – including group centres, family child care homes and out-of-school care centres – offer child care before or after kindergarten. This service may include responsibility for taking children to and from kindergarten.

2. Preschools

Preschools serve children from 30 months (at least 3 years old by December 31) to school entry. Some provide separate sessions for 3- and 4-year-olds, while others serve mixed age groups.

Preschools are part-day programs (four hours maximum). Program schedules vary widely. Most preschools operate on the school-year, September to June. Some preschools require that parents participate in the program some of the time.

- Maximum group size:** • 20 children.
- Staff/child ratio:** • 1 Early Childhood Educator and 1 assistant for 20 children.
- Staff qualifications:** • Staff qualified in Early Childhood Education.
• First Aid Certificate required.

3. Family Child Care Homes

Licensed family child care is offered in the caregiver's own home, and serves children from birth to age 12. Caregivers set their own hours; most provide full-day care. Part-time spaces and flexible hours may be available in some family child care homes; some homes offer before or after kindergarten care for 5-year-olds.

- Maximum group size:** • 7 children. Not more than 5 of the 7 children may be preschool-age (under 5). Of the preschool children, no more than 3 may be under 3 years old. And of the children under 3, only 1 may be under 12 months old.
- Staff qualifications:** • The caregiver must be a responsible adult (at least 19 years old).
• First Aid Certificate required.

4. Out-of-School Care Centres

Out-of-school care centres serve school-age children who require care outside normal school hours. Some provide care both before and after school; others provide care only after school. Centres provide full-day care on days when school is not in session. Most offer a full-day summer program; some programs also offer before and after kindergarten care.

Maximum group size:

- Kindergarten or Grade 1 - 20 children.
- Grade 2 or higher - 25 children.

Staff/child ratio:

- Kindergarten or Grade 1 - 1 staff to 10 children.
- Grade 2 or higher - 1 staff to 15 children.

Staff qualifications:

- Staff must be responsible adults (at least 19 years old).
- First Aid Certificate required.

5. Child Minding Centres

Licensed child minding centres may serve children from 18 months to school entry. Children may attend no more than three hours a day, and no more than two days a week. Many programs provide drop-in care. Others provide a regular twice-a-week program.

Maximum group size:

- Any child under 3 years - 16 children.
- All children over 3 years - 20 children.

Staff/child ratio:

- Any child under 3 years - 1 staff to 4 children.
- All children over 3 years - 1 staff to 8 children.

Staff qualifications:

- Staff must be responsible adults (at least 19 years old).
- First Aid Certificate required.

6. Emergency Child Care Centres

Emergency child care serves children from birth to school entry. Short-term full-day or part-day care may be provided to meet a range of family situations including when regular care is unavailable, a family illness or emergency, medical appointment or job interview. A child may be enrolled in emergency child care no more than 72 hours per calendar month.

Maximum group size:

- Over 36 months - 25 children.
- Under 36 months - 12 children.

Staff/child ratio:

- Over 36 months - 1 Early Childhood Educator to eight children.
- Under 36 months - 1 Infant/Toddler Educator to four children.

Staff qualifications:

- Over 36 months - staff qualified in Early Childhood Education.
- Under 36 months - staff qualified in Early Childhood Education and Infant/Toddler Education.
- First Aid Certificate required.

7. Occasional Child Care at Ski Hill or Resort

Occasional child care at a ski hill or resort is available for children from 18 months to 6 years of age. A child may be enrolled in occasional child care no more than 8 hours a day and no more than 40 hours per calendar month.

Maximum group size:

- Over 36 months - 24 children. Reduced by 2 for every child under 36 months.

Staff/child ratio:

- 1 staff for 1 to 7 places.
- 2 staff for 8 to 16 places.
- 3 staff for 17 to 24 places.

[Note: Children over 36 months occupy 1 place; children under 36 months occupy 2 places.]

Staff qualifications:

- Staff must be responsible adults (at least 19 years old).
- First Aid Certificate required.

Supported Child Care

Some children require extra support to take part in day-to-day activities. Supported Child Care is a way of making sure children who require extra support are able to participate in whatever child care setting their parents think is best for them.

Depending on the community, Supported Child Care may be provided in specialized Supported Child Care facilities or in regular licensed child care settings – group child care centres, preschools, family child care homes, etc. – or both. Programs may be part-day or full-day.

For help in finding Supported Child Care, please contact your local Ministry of Children and Family Development office. See also the end of this booklet for information on the Supported Child Care Funding Program.

Licence-Not-Required Child Care Options

1. LNR Child Care

Licence-not-required child care usually serves up to two children of any age, in the caregiver's own home. (See page 3 for more information.)

2. In-Own-Home Care

In-own-home care is where you arrange for someone to look after your child in your own home. An in-own-home caregiver may be called a nanny, an au pair or a babysitter. Parents may hire an in-own-home caregiver directly or use a "nanny agency."

Parents using in-own-home care are considered employers and must make both Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan payments.

If you are interested in in-own-home care, please contact both Revenue Canada and the Worker's Compensation Board to find out more about your obligations as an employer.

Choosing Child Care That's Right for You and Your Child

Gathering Information

You may need child care right now, or some time in the future. You may be flexible in terms of location, hours and fees, or you may have very definite needs. Whatever your particular case, it is always a good idea to begin by developing a list of the things you feel are important to you and your child – such as the type, hours and location of child care, qualifications of caregivers or approach to discipline.

If you have a child who needs extra support, you may also want to identify your child's unique needs, strengths and interests. Include any special concerns you may have about your child's ability to enjoy, participate in and benefit from child care. Also, list any precautions a caregiver may need to know about (what to do if your child has a seizure, for example, or the use of adaptive equipment).

Call a number of child care settings to ask some basic questions and see which meet your basic requirements, then follow up with a visit to the ones that really interest you. You may want to visit more than once and at different times of the day to narrow down your list, then take your child to visit your final choices. Remember to check references and to talk to parents who have children in the child care setting.

In-own-home care

If you are interested in child care provided in your own home, your questions will be different. It is essential that you take some time to learn about the caregivers background, experience with children and approach to child care.

Its a good idea to ask the caregiver for references and proof from the police that she or he does not have a criminal record. Its also a good idea to put together a written agreement, describing the days and hours of work, the caregivers specific terms of employment and your responsibilities as an employer.

The First Call

Begin your call by describing your situation and needs.

Questions you might want to ask in this first phone call include:

- Are you licensed?
 - If you are licensed, is your program currently under investigation by the local health authority?
 - If you are not licensed, are you registered with the local Child Care Resource and Referral program?
- How many children do you care for?
- What ages are the children in your care?
- What are your hours of operation? What days are you closed?
- What are your fees?
- What child care experience and training do you (and any other caregivers) have?
- Do you accept children who require extra support? Why/why not?
- Are you willing to adapt your program to meet the needs of a child who requires extra support?
- Does your program have any special features?
- What do you do with the children over a typical day/week?
- Can you give me at least two references, preferably of parents who have used your child care setting?
- Who supplies diapers/blankets/meals/snacks?
- What are your arrangements for when you (or other caregivers) are ill or on holiday, or in case of emergency?
- Do you encourage parent involvement? Can I visit whenever I wish?
- Does anyone in your child care setting smoke? (Note: Smoking is not permitted in licensed facilities). What is your policy when children are present?

And of course:

- Do you have a space available?

If not:

- Is there a waiting list?
- How long is the waiting list?
- Do you know of any other centres or caregivers with vacancies?

Observing the Child Care Setting: a Checklist

If you come across a child care setting you like from that first phone call, and where a space is available, set a time when you can observe the child care setting and meet with the caregiver. Since there is much to look at and talk about, you may want to use the following checklist to help you remember what you've seen.

[Please note: Parents who apply for a Child Care Subsidy to cover LNR child care will receive a formal checklist to complete with their subsidy application.]

On the following pages, we have provided four columns to help you assess and compare more than one centre.

Name of Child Care Setting:

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The People

The quality of the relationship between children and their caregivers is the most important factor in assessing quality care. When your child is away from you, your child needs people to trust – people who genuinely enjoy children, make them feel secure, give individual attention and provide a rich environment for play and learning.

The caregivers at this child care setting:

- Listen to children when they speak and respond with interest and respect.

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- Accept and value the children's ideas and suggestions.

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- Display a sense of humour.

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- Respond with care and understanding to a child who may be fearful, shy, upset, hurt or angry.

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- Encourage children to cooperate with each other.

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- Promote the development of problem-solving skills and a sense of independence.

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- Set reasonable limits for behaviour and respond to inappropriate behaviour in a fair and consistent manner.

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- Initiate conversations with the children other than instructions, announcements and commands.

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- Take time to be alone with individual children.

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- Allow children a choice in many situations.

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- Make the children feel good about themselves and other people.

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The Daily Program

Children's time in a program is important and contributes greatly to their development.

This child care setting:

- Combines both individual play and group activities.

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- Provides opportunities for children to explore their environment in different ways – (for example) through music and creative movement, fantasy play, construction toys, games, outdoor play and field trips.

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- Offers a balance between free play and organized activities.

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- Is based on a consistent yet flexible schedule.

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- Follows routines for rest, toileting and mealtimes in a relaxed manner.

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- If it uses television, ensures program content and viewing time are limited and monitored.

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- Reflects our multicultural society.

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The Physical Environment

Space that is attractive and thoughtfully organized contributes to an environment which invites activity and promotes a sense of well being in both children and adults. Ask to see the kitchen and eating area, washroom and sleep areas, as well as indoor and outdoor play activity areas.

This child care setting:

- Is clean and safe (for example, cupboards with cleaning agents are locked; kitchen knives are out of reach).

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- Is warm, inviting and appealing.

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- Is well lit and comfortable in temperature.
- Has children’s artwork on display.
- Includes:
 - an area for a child to be alone;
 - areas for both quiet and active play;
 - a safe and easily accessible outdoor play area;
 - a good supply of varied, challenging, and age or developmentally appropriate play materials;
 - toys and materials that are in good repair and easy for children to reach;
 - a variety of safety precautions – such as fire extinguishers, stairway gates, smoke detectors and electrical outlet covers.

For parents of children who need extra support:

- Look closely at the indoor space available at each child care setting, particularly if your child needs more space to move, to manipulate a wheelchair or use adaptive equipment.
- Outdoors, you may want to make sure there is enough space for your child between and around swings, slides, etc. You should also look carefully at the playground surface. A gravel surface, for example, may not be suitable for a child who uses a wheelchair or walker.

Meeting With the Caregiver

Child care involves both a business relationship and a caregiving partnership. In addition to comments and questions regarding what you have (or have not) observed, an open discussion about what you can expect of caregivers and what they can expect from you will help avoid misunderstandings and build the basis for a good relationship in the future. (Some child care settings may provide this information in a parent information package or agreement.)

Every licensed child care setting must have a written statement describing its methods of discipline. The Child Care Licensing Regulation prohibits the use of physical punishment, humiliation, and other discipline methods that undermine a child's self-esteem.

While there are many approaches related to discipline, the goal remains constant: to build children's self-confidence and to encourage socially acceptable behaviour. A booklet called **Guidance and Discipline with Young Children** is available through your local health authority. A video version is available through your local library.

Some questions you may want to ask:

- Why did you become a child care provider?
- Do you have any plans for further child care training?
- Do you have gradual entry and orientation procedures that allow new children to become comfortable in your child care setting?
- How do you handle difficult situations or behaviours – for example, how would you deal with a child who won't stop crying or refuses to eat?
- How do you discipline children who are misbehaving?
- What arrangements do you have for children who do not sleep at rest times?
- Where are medications stored? How are they administered? Do you use a checklist to make sure children receive the proper medications at the proper time?
- Do you encourage parental involvement or assign parental responsibilities? Can I call you or stop by regularly to find out about my child's progress?
- What are your procedures in case of a child falling ill, an accident, fire, earthquake, etc.?
- What are the arrival and departure times?
- Do you charge a fine for late pick-up?
- How much notice do I have to give you if and when I want to withdraw my child?
- Do you have liability insurance?
(Note: Insurance is not required, but strongly recommended.)

Questions specifically for a licence-not-required child care provider:

- Who else lives in the home?
- How old are they, and what is their relationship to you?
- How do your family members feel about you providing child care in the home?
- Will you be present and in charge during all the hours child care is provided?
- Can you provide a written medical reference about your physical, emotional and mental health, and your use of drugs or alcohol?

Making Your Decision

Once you've visited several child care settings, it's time to consider how each meets your family's needs and values.

- Review the information you gathered.
- Trust your own initial feelings about the physical environment, the program and the people. If the setting felt right to you, it will probably be good for your child.
- Finally, contact the setting you've selected to confirm your decision and the date your child will start.

Signing an Agreement

Most licensed facilities – and some licence-not-required caregivers – will have a policy and procedures document and a written agreement for you to sign. If they do not, you will need to draw up an agreement – to be signed by both you and the caregiver – setting out the terms you have discussed.

Important!

For the safety and wellbeing of your child, it is essential that the child care setting maintain accurate and current records. These records should include the child's medical history, family and emergency contact information, and the names of those authorized to pick up the child.

This agreement may include such items as:

- hours and days of care;
- child care fees and when they are to be paid;
- what to do if the child is ill;
- arrangements for snacks, meals, extra clothes;

- how the child is to be disciplined; and
- what to do in an emergency.

Monitoring the Child Care Setting

You will want to make sure that the child care setting you have chosen continues to be good. It is very important that you visit the child care setting regularly to see for yourself how your child is getting along.

While licensing officers are responsible for monitoring standards of care within licensed settings, they cannot visit these settings as often as parents. And in the case of LNR settings – particularly those not registered with the local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program – parents may be the only people keeping an eye on their child’s care.

Leave yourself time to talk to the caregiver both when you drop your child off and when you pick your child up. If you have any concerns or questions, talk to the caregiver and try to arrive at a solution that works for both of you.

Talk to your child about how the day went and listen to your child’s feelings. It will of course take some time for a child to adjust to a new situation, but this should not last long. Be alert for warning signs – such as changes in your child’s usual behaviour – that could indicate something is wrong with your child care arrangement.

If you are worried about the possible abuse of your child or any child in a child care setting, you **must** report your fears immediately to your local Ministry for Children and Families office, or – if the facility is licensed – to the Medical Health Officer through your local health unit. You can also call the Helpline for Children, toll-free. Dial 310-1234 (no area code needed).

If your child:

- is unusually fearful of going to the child care,
- has unexplained bruises or other signs of physical abuse, or
- talks about inappropriate actions on the part of adults or other children at the child care setting,

you may want to consider making other child care arrangements.

Financial Support

Child Care Subsidy

The child care subsidy is a government program that helps low- and moderate income families pay for child care. Payments, called subsidies, are available for both full-day and part-day services, in either licensed or licence-not-required child care settings.

You may be eligible for a subsidy if you have a low or moderate income *and*:

- you are working;
- you are going to school or participating in a training or rehabilitative program;
- you are actively looking for work;
- you are undergoing medical treatment;
- you would like your child to attend a licensed preschool program; *or*
- you have a child who requires extra support.

The subsidy amount is based on the number of people in your family and their total net income. An income test is used to calculate whether your family is eligible for a full or partial subsidy, or not eligible for any subsidy. Parents are responsible for paying the difference between the subsidy amount and the child care fee.

To apply for a subsidy, please contact your local Ministry of Children and Family Development office.

Supported Child Care Support Payment

If you have a child with special needs, you may be eligible for additional support through Support Child Care funding. (This assistance is in addition to the basic child care subsidy.) There are two forms of Supported Child Care funding:

- i) The Supported Child Care Support Payment, which helps cover the costs of the child care space, and which is income-tested and,
- ii) The Supported Child Care Range Payment, which helps with additional supports in the child care setting, and which is not income-tested. Supports may include training, consultation, and/or staffing.

To find out more, please contact your local Ministry for Children and Family Development office. Staff there will refer you to a social worker, who will determine if your child is eligible for extra support and provide you with an application for Support Child Care funding.



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