



South Dakota  
Department of  
**Social Services**



# CHOOSING CHILD CARE

IN SOUTH DAKOTA





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Step 1: Getting Started	2
Step 2: Call the Provider to Schedule a Phone Interview	3
Step 3: Call References	5
Step 4: Schedule an Appointment to Visit the Child Care Program Site	8
Building a Positive Relationship with a Child Care Provider	16
Understanding Your Child's Needs	17
Additional Information	20
Map	21

# INTRODUCTION

Choosing quality child care is one of the most important decisions you will make for your child and it may be one of the most frustrating and challenging decisions. As a parent, you are the main influence in the lives of your children, but the provider you choose will also have a major impact.

How do you know your children are being well cared for?

How do you find the right place for your children, a place where they can learn and grow?

This booklet will guide you through the decisions and choices of choosing child care and is intended to make the search a little easier. The color code is designed to assist you in determining the quality of child care. As you answer the questions, check the box that best describes the child care situation you are considering. When making your decision, look at the checked boxes as you would a stop light.



The majority of green boxes checked indicates the provider has met minimal standards of quality. If there are a majority of red boxes checked, you may want to reconsider the provider and check into some others.

When you have found a provider that meets the needs of your family and children, stay involved, ask questions, and talk with your provider each day about your child.

# STEP 1: Getting Started

- ✓ Determine the type of child care that best fits your needs by visiting [dss.sd.gov/childcare/licensing/](https://dss.sd.gov/childcare/licensing/)
- ✓ Conduct a search of child care providers in your area and view inspection reports for state registered and licensed providers by visiting [apps.sd.gov/ss45provinfo/search.aspx](https://apps.sd.gov/ss45provinfo/search.aspx)
- ✓ For support in choosing a child care program, contact your regional Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) Program (See pages 18-19 for additional information). Dial 211 to reach the Child Care Helpline for resources and referrals. By calling 211, emailing [childcare@helplinecenter.org](mailto:childcare@helplinecenter.org) or visiting the Helpline Center's website [helplinecenter.org/support-programs/child-care-resources/](https://helplinecenter.org/support-programs/child-care-resources/) and searching the Helpline Center Child Care database, you can receive provider referrals that list child care options that are customized to meet your needs.
- ✓ Ask your friends and co-workers whose opinions you respect.
- ✓ Check with your community organizations, schools, and churches.

Start looking for care as far in advance as possible. Finding quality child care of any type, whether it is a child care center, a family daycare, care for infants, toddlers, or school age can take some time. Some providers may have waiting lists, so try to give yourself several months to make this decision.

# STEP 2: Call the Provider to Schedule a Phone Interview

Name of Provider:

---

Phone Number:

---

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Is this a convenient time to visit, if not, when can I call you back?

---

How many children do you care for? What are the ages of the children you care for?

---

What are your fees?

---

What hours are you open?

---

What days are you open?

---

Are you open year-round?

---

Do you have any openings? If not, do you anticipate having any in the future?

---

Do you have a waiting list?

---

Are you state registered or licensed?

Yes

No

What training/education do you have?

Bachelors or Masters Degree in Early Childhood or Early Elementary Education

Associate Degree in Early Childhood

Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)

College credits in early childhood or school-age education

Supervised work experience in child care, a preschool setting, or an early elementary classroom

At least 6 hours of annual training relating to the care of the children

Infant-Child CPR

First Aid

None

How long have you been in the profession?



5 years or more



1-4 years



Less than 1 year

How long do you plan to continue this profession?



This is my career



Not sure



Other

Can you provide two references from parents of children in the program now or in the past?

\*\*\*If the provider is just starting their child care business, ask for references from past employers\*\*\*

Reference 1:

---

Contact Information:

---

---

Reference 2:

---

Contact Information:

---

---

Reference 3:

---

Contact Information:

---

---



# STEP 3: Call References



GO



STOP

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS



Were you satisfied with the group size and number of adults available to care for the children?



Were you satisfied with the quality of care provided?



Were you satisfied with the meals and snacks?



Were you satisfied with the activities planned for the children?



Were you satisfied with the type of discipline used?



Were you satisfied with the overall management of the program (i.e. policies, hours of operation, staff, etc.)?

How long did you or have you used this provider?

---

What do you feel were the provider's strengths/weaknesses?

---

---

---

---

---

Would you choose this provider again? Why or why not?

---

# STEP 4: Schedule an Appointment to Visit the Child Care Provider

## Site Visit

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_



During your site visit, consider the following physical space details and provider actions for Infants and Toddlers, Preschoolers, School-Age and Other Provider Aspects.



Meets ALL Criteria

Meets SOME Criteria

Meets NONE of the Criteria

## Infants and Toddlers



There is a clean area for crawling and exploring.



Toys are clean and free from rough edges.



Open stairways are blocked off by gates.



Children spend the majority of waking time out of cribs, highchairs, swings, play pens, etc.



There is enough age-appropriate equipment and materials for all children.



Music is played at a soft, comforting volume appropriate for infants and toddlers.



Providers hold babies when bottle feeding.



Babies sleep on their backs without blankets.



Providers hold, talk to and play with babies other than at feeding times.



Providers are situated near infants and toddlers to supervise and attend to their needs.

## Preschoolers



Home or center is neat, clean and organized.



There is enough space and bedding for children to nap.



Rooms are cheerful, attractive and appealing to children.



Music is played at a soft volume and appropriate.



Television use is limited and appropriate.



Materials and toys are situated so children can reach them without adult assistance.



Accommodations are made with materials and equipment for children with special needs.



There is enough age-appropriate equipment and materials for all children.



Toys are in good repair with no rough edges.



Providers engage in conversation and interact with all children.



Providers are situated as needed to supervise and assist children.



The outdoor play area is safe and providers are spread out to supervise activities.

## School Age



The physical space is cheerful and temperature is comfortable.



Space is separated for different types of activities and allows enough room for children.



Children have chances to work individually and in groups.



Activities, equipment and materials are age-appropriate and encourage participation in positive learning experiences.



Accommodations are made with materials and equipment for children with special needs.



Providers engage in conversation and interact with all children.



Providers are situated as needed to supervise and assist children.



Supplies and materials are accessible to children without requiring adult assistance.

## Meals

Children are offered a nutritious:



Breakfast



Morning Snack



Lunch



Afternoon Snack



Dinner



Evening Snack



The childcare provider is on the USDA Food Program.



Menus are posted.

## Other Provider Aspects to Consider



Is warm, friendly and responsive to children.



Is energetic, in good health and able to keep up with children.



Provides age-appropriate routine and rules which are easily understood by the children.



Allows parents to visit unannounced at any time during the day.



Enjoys working with children at every age level.



Is caring, understanding and sets a positive example.



Washes hands frequently, especially after changing diapers.



Is accepting of a child's normal developmental behavior such as wetting, soiling, thumb-sucking.



Encourages children to express themselves verbally by listening to them, talking to them and asking them questions.



Encourages infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children to try new activities and master skills.

## Questions to Ask Providers

Are you licensed or registered with the State of South Dakota?

Do you have a handbook describing the rules, fees and policies?

What is your staff turnover rate? How many staff do you have?

What is your billing policy?

What is your policy on discipline?

What is your policy on safety/security?

Where are the fire exits located?

Do you have an emergency preparedness plan?

What is a typical day like?

Are meals included in your fees or are they extra?

If my child needs transportation to and/or from preschool, kindergarten or school, do you provide that? Is there an extra cost?

Do you charge a fee if I am late to pick up my child?

Do I pay when my children are not here because of an illness or vacation?

Do I pay when you are ill or on vacation?

What happens if my child gets sick? If you get sick?

Can I visit my child whenever I would like to?



# BUILDING A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Trusting a person to take care of your children is a big decision. Here are several things you can do to establish and maintain a great relationship with your child care provider:

- ✓ Honor the contract you agreed to follow
- ✓ Pay your provider on time
- ✓ Provide requested items
- ✓ Hand in paperwork on time
- ✓ Speak to your provider for a few minutes every day
- ✓ Set monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss your child
- ✓ Let the provider know if there are any family or life changes or events that could affect your child
- ✓ Let the provider know of any changes in routine, or if someone else will be picking up your child
- ✓ Get involved! Ask your provider how you can get involved with the program

Your provider will appreciate your involvement and interest in the program, as well as being kept informed. Also, let your caregiver know that you appreciate what they are doing! Thank them and let them know when you are pleased with something they have done.

Most importantly, communicate openly and honestly. If there is a problem, address it promptly, but never in front of your children. When you address your issues, listen to your provider's response, and be willing to make compromises

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

Knowing your child's strengths and needs will help you in choosing a child care provider. It is important to consider their temperament and development stage:

## Infants

Infants have unique and personal rhythms, strengths, styles and needs:

- ✓ Some infants adapt to change easily, while others are more cautious.
- ✓ Activity levels can vary for infants; some are more energetic, some less.
- ✓ As is true with everyone, babies' social temperaments can vary; some love lots of interaction, while others can be more reserved.
- ✓ Because infants' brains develop rapidly, it is important that caregivers provide a stable, yet flexible routine that offers plenty of personal, thoughtful and caring interaction and affection.

## Toddlers

Because they are mobile, verbal and curious, toddlers' worlds expand rapidly.

Toddlers possess:

- ✓ A desire to be independent, as well as a limited awareness of risk.
- ✓ Developing verbal abilities.
- ✓ Vibrant curiosity about the world around them.
- ✓ Desire to do things themselves, while still depending a great deal on caregivers.

- ✓ Caregivers who understand and enjoy toddlers can work with their independence and help them grow, so that the “terrific twos” can be a time of growth and learning.

## Preschoolers

Enthusiastic, outgoing and eager to try new things, preschoolers:

- ✓ Are curious about the world around them. They question how and why things work, experiment with new words and form new friendships.
- ✓ Play with materials and their friends in order to learn new information and work out normal fears and fantasies.
- ✓ Need routines in their daily schedule to feel comfortable and safe in exploring and learning.
- ✓ Caregivers who provide ample opportunities to learn within a structured environment, with adequate time to adjust to new information, will be a valuable asset in the growth and development of your preschooler.

## School Age

Children in this age group seem to have settled down to a steadier pace of growing and learning:

- ✓ Younger school-aged children are interested in real-life tasks and activities, and teamwork and following rules becomes important.
- ✓ Older school-agers have a deeper sense of self; social acceptance and achievement become priorities. School and community influences become important to them, in addition to home and family priorities.
- ✓ Caregivers who understand the growing social and community awareness and developing sense of self in school-age children will provide stimulating and nurturing environments for them to mature.



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information regarding child care options you can contact any Child Care licensing office or the Early Childhood Enrichment (ECE) program in your area.

## ABERDEEN AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.626.3160 or 866.239.8855  
ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:  
605.226.5675 or 800.982.6404

[www.sanfordhealth.org/MedicalServices/CHILDServices](http://www.sanfordhealth.org/MedicalServices/CHILDServices)

## BROOKINGS AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.688.4330 or 866.267.5228  
ECE Office, Child & Family Resource Network:  
605.688.5730 or 800.354.8238

[www.sdstate.edu/tll/frn](http://www.sdstate.edu/tll/frn)

## MITCHELL AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.995.8000 or 800.231.8346  
ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:  
605.312.8390 or 800.235.5923

[www.sanfordhealth.org/resources/child-services](http://www.sanfordhealth.org/resources/child-services)

## PIERRE AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.773.4766 or 800.227.3020  
ECE Office, The Right Turn:  
605.773.4755 or 866.206.8206

[www.therightturn.net](http://www.therightturn.net)

## RAPID CITY AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.394.2525 or 800.644.2914  
ECE Office, Early Childhood Connections:  
605.342.6464 or 888.999.7759

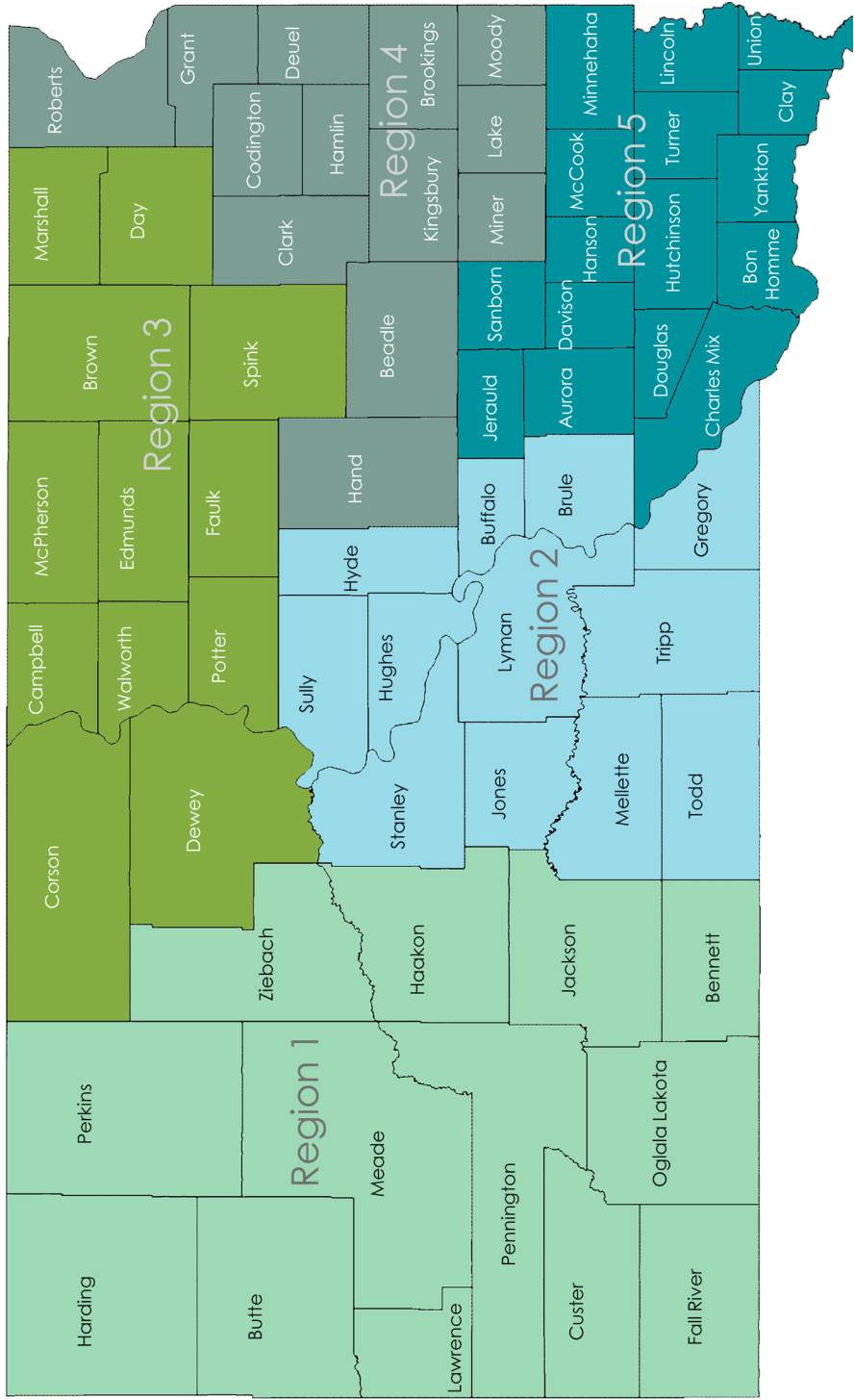
[www.earlychildhoodconnections.com](http://www.earlychildhoodconnections.com)

## SIOUX FALLS AREA

Child Care Licensing: 605.367.5444 or 866.801.5421  
ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:  
605.312.8390 or 800.235.5923

[www.sanfordhealth.org/resources/child-services](http://www.sanfordhealth.org/resources/child-services)

# Regional Early Childhood Enrichment Offices



Region 1: Early Childhood Connections - Rapid City 605.342.6464 or 888.999.7759

Region 2: The Right Turn - Pierre 605.773.4755 or 866.206.8206

Region 3: Sanford Children's CHLD Services - Aberdeen 605.226.5675 or 800.982.6404

Region 4: Child & Family Resource Network - Brookings 605.688.5730 or 800.354.8238

Region 5: Sanford Children's CHLD Services - Sioux Falls 605.312.8390 or 800.235.5923

For additional resources on child development, health and safety and other services to support your child, please visit <https://sdece.org>



South Dakota  
Department of  
**Social Services**

Office of Licensing and Accreditation

910 E Sioux Ave.

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605.773.4766

Toll Free: 800.227.3020

Fax: 605.773.7294

Email: [CCS@state.sd.us](mailto:CCS@state.sd.us)

Website: [dss.sd.gov/childcare](http://dss.sd.gov/childcare)