Choosing Child Care in South Dakota

Department of Social Services

Division of Child Care Services

1.800.227.3020

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INTRODUCTION

Choosing quality child care is one of the most important decisions you will make for your child and it will 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.

Green: Go
Yellow: Caution
Red: Stop

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

When you have found a program 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

Be sure to check ALL available resources

- Determine the types of child care available.
- Check with the Division of Child Care Services for inspection reports for registered or licensed providers.
- Contact your area Early Childhood Enrichment program or an established child care referral service.
- Ask your friends and co-workers whose opinions you respect.
- Check with your community organizations, schools, and churches.
- Look in the phone books and in newspapers.

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 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

YES = GO
NO = 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 program?

_____

What do you feel were the programs strengths/weaknesses?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

STEP 4: Set an Appointment to Visit the Child Care Program Site

Site Visit

Date:_____ Time:_____

Group Size and Staff to Child Ratio

Research shows the staff to child ratio and group size are *two of the most important* areas to be addressed in standards for care. The younger the child, the more critical it is to have a low staff to child ratio. For mixed aged groups, the number of staff required should be based on the youngest child in the group.

Use the following chart to compare the group size and staff to child ratio of the child care program site you are considering.

Group Size and Staff to Child Ratio

Age	National Recommended Group size	National Recommended Staff to Child Ratio
0-12 Months	6	1:3
1-2 Years	8-10	1:4 or 1:5
3 Years	14	1:7
4 and 5 Years	16	1:8
6 Years and Older	20-24	1:10 or 1:12

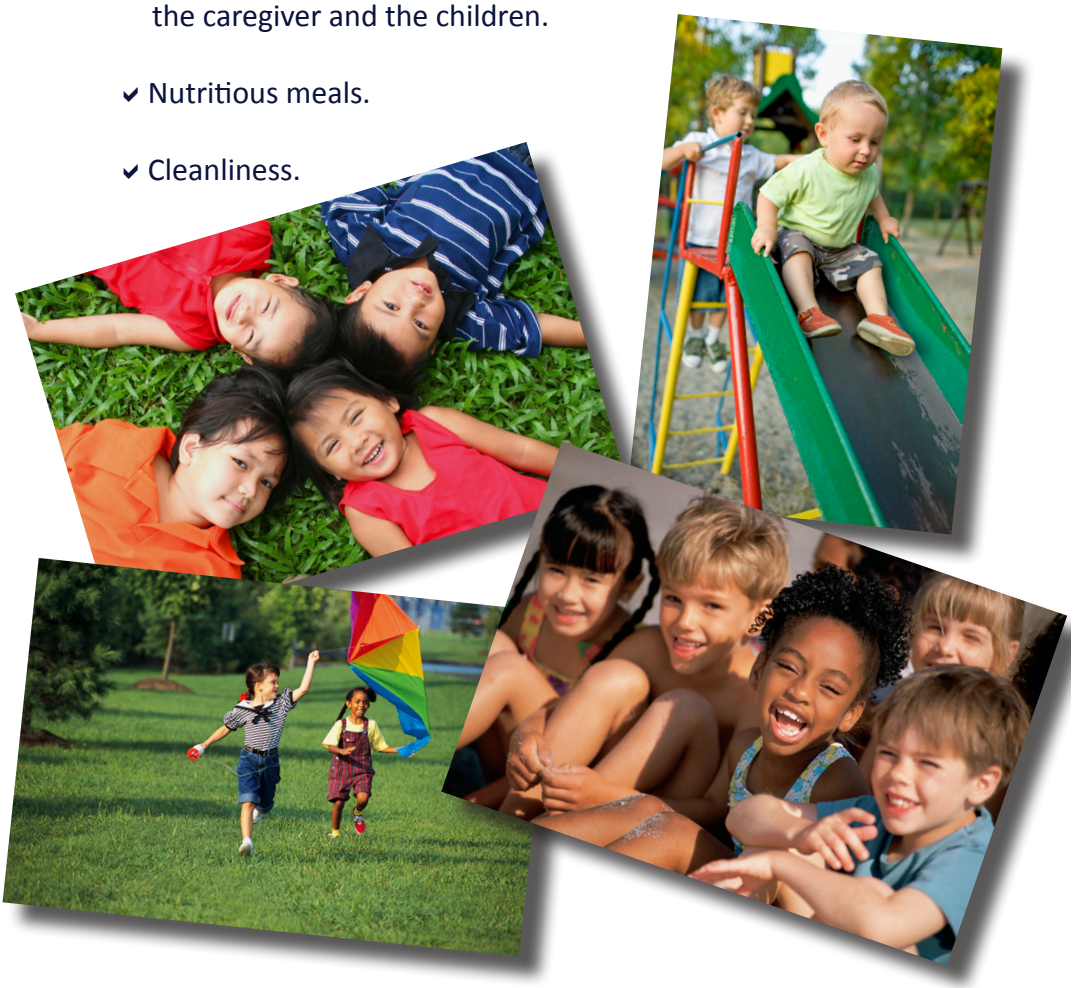
State or city group size and ratio requirements may vary from national recommendations

Environment and Caregiver Actions

The environment should above all else be *safe*.

Check for things such as:

- ✔ Appropriate toys.
- ✔ Age appropriate activities.
- ✔ A variety of indoor and outdoor activities.
- ✔ Amount and type of interactions between the caregiver and the children.
- ✔ Nutritious meals.
- ✔ Cleanliness.



During your site visit, consider the following physical space details and caregiver actions for Infants and Toddlers, Preschoolers, School Age, Meals, and Other Caregiver 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.

Staff hold babies when bottle feeding.

Babies sleep on their backs.

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

Staff 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.
- Staff engage in conversation and interaction with all children.
- Staff are situated as needed to supervise and assist children.
- The outdoor play area is safe and staff 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.
- Staff engage in conversation and interaction with all children.
- Staff 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
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Morning Snack
- Afternoon Snack
- Evening Snack

Meals Continued

- The childcare provider is on the USDA Food Program.
- Menus are posted.

Other Caregiver 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.
- Has a sense of humor.
- 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 program handbook describing the rules, fees and policies of your program?

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?

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 extra 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?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

ABERDEEN AREA
CCS Licensing: 605.626.3160 or 1.866.239.8855
ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:
605.262.8505 or 1.800.982.6404
www.sanfordhealth.org/MedicalServices/CHILDservices

BROOKINGS AREA
CCS Licensing: 605.688.4330 or 1.866.267.5228
ECE Office, Family Resource Network:
605.688.5730 or 1.800.354.8238
www.sdstate.edu/tll/frn

MITCHELL AREA
CCS Licensing: 605.995.8000 or 1.800.231.8346
ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:
605.333.0698 or 1.800.235.5923, ext. 4

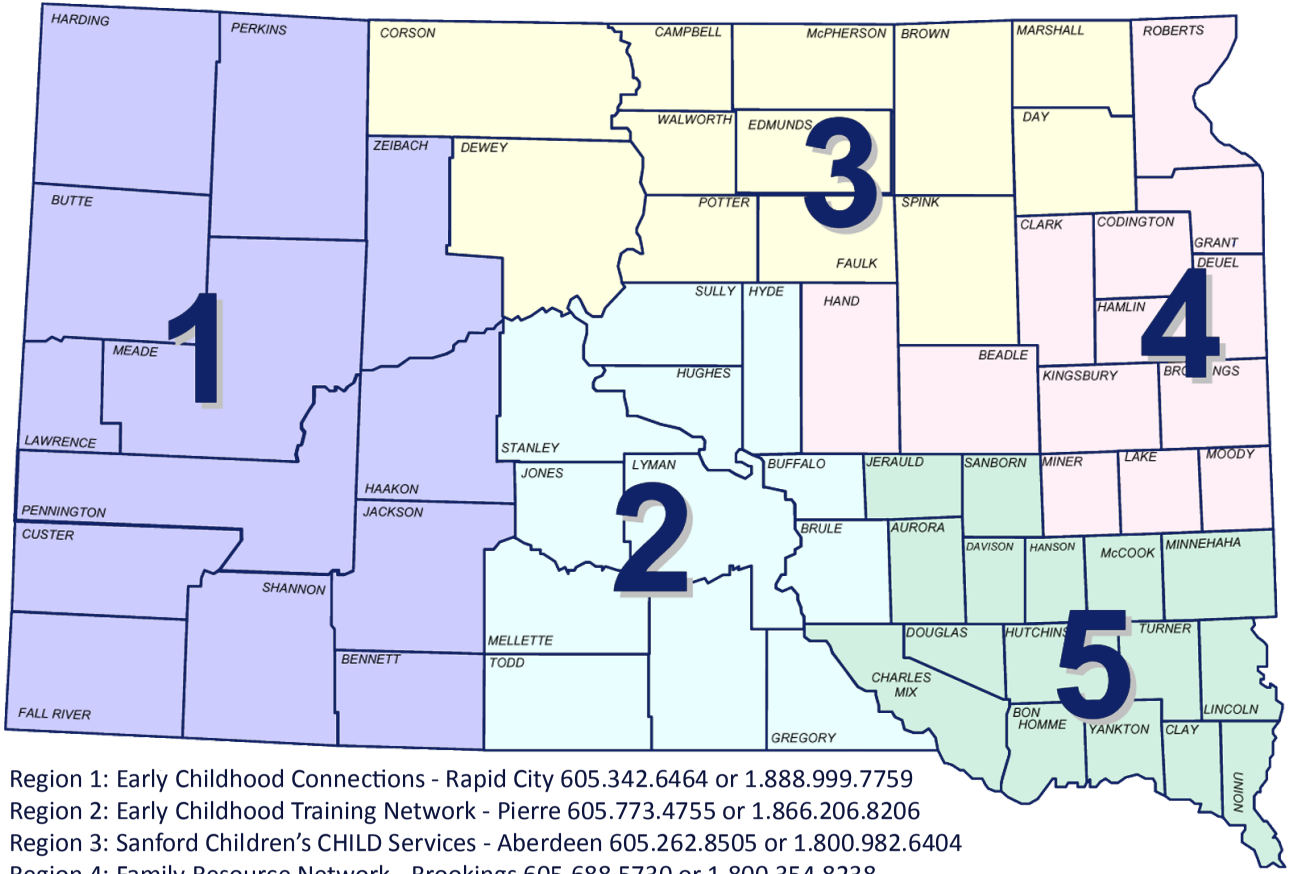
PIERRE AREA
CCS Licensing: 605.773.3612 or 1.800.226.1033
ECE Office, Early Childhood Training Network:
605.773.4755 or 1.866.206.8206
www.earlychildhood2.org

RAPID CITY AREA
CCS Licensing: 605.394.2525 or 1.800.644.2914
ECE Office, Early Childhood Connections:
605.342.6464 or 1.888.999.7759
www.earlychildhoodconnections.com

SIOUX FALLS & YANKTON AREA
CCS Licensing:605.367.5444 or 1.866.801.5421

ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:
605.333.0698 or 1.800.235.5923, ext. 4
www.sanfordhealth.org/MedicalServices/CHILDservices

Regional Early Childhood Enrichment Offices



Region 1: Early Childhood Connections - Rapid City 605.342.6464 or 1.888.999.7759
Region 2: Early Childhood Training Network - Pierre 605.773.4755 or 1.866.206.8206
Region 3: Sanford Children's CHILD Services - Aberdeen 605.262.8505 or 1.800.982.6404
Region 4: Family Resource Network - Brookings 605.688.5730 or 1.800.354.8238
Region 5: Sanford Children's CHILD Services - Sioux Falls 605.333.0698 or 1.800.235.5923

DEPARTMENT MISSION

Strengthening and supporting individuals and families by promoting cost effective and comprehensive services in connections with out partners that foster independent and healthy families.

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DSS

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