



Choosing Child Care in South Dakota

**South Dakota Department of Social Services
Division of Child Care Services
1-800-227-3020**

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.



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 phonebooks 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****

#1

Contact Information:

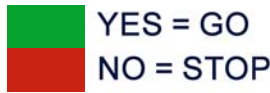
#2

Contact Information:



#3

Contact Information:

STEP #3: CALL REFERENCES





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)?

How long did you or have you used this program?

What do you feel were the programs strengths/weaknesses?

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.
- ✓ Nutritious meals.
- ✓ Cleanliness.
- ✓ A variety of indoor and outdoor activities.
- ✓ Amount and type of interactions between the caregiver and the children.



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 |  Morning Snack |
|  Lunch |  Afternoon Snack |
|  Dinner |  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, thumbsucking.

 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?

STEP #5: MORE 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

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

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

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

SIOUX FALLS 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

YANKTON AREA

CCS Licensing:

605-668-3030 or 1-800-455-5241

ECE Office, Sanford Children's CHILD Services:

605-333-0698 or 1-800-235-5923, ext. 4

Department of Social Services

Division of Child Care Services

700 Governors Drive

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605-773-4766

Toll Free: 1-800-227-3020

Fax: 605-773-7294

Email: CCS@state.sd.us

Website: www.dss.sd.gov/childcare

DEPARTMENT MISSION

To strengthen and support individuals and families by fostering independence and personal responsibility; protecting people; providing opportunities for individuals to achieve their full potential; and promoting healthy families and safe communities by ensuring quality, cost-effective and comprehensive services are provided in cooperation with our partners.



*Printed by the South Dakota Department of Social Services on recycled paper.
10,000 copies / \$0.16 per copy
Midstates Printing, Inc. / September 2010*