

Child Care and You...



How to find and keep quality care



Agency of Human Services

You know how amazing your child is. Between birth and age 3, babies learn to roll, crawl, stand, walk, and run. By the time school starts they have learned to talk, joke, rhyme, and sing. You continue to watch in amazement as the years go by and your baby grows into a young child and then before you know it, a pre-teen. Research, observation and common sense tell us that a child's brain and body develop best within loving relationships, ones in which he can explore, learn, and grow.

No one can ever replace the loving care and attention you give your child. Yet when you cannot be there, you still want your child to be safe and to learn she is a very special person; that she is loved, smart, fun, and capable. This is the very essence of quality in child care — the expertise and skills of the staff and their capacity to build positive relationships with children. This booklet is designed to help you find and select a quality child care program for your child.



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State of Vermont, Agency of Human Services
Original text written by Andrea Van Hoven, Child Care
Resource

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CONTENTS

Starting to Think about Child Care

I need someone to take care of my child.	1
What does my child need? What do I want?.....	1
Who is out there to take care of my child?	2

Finding the Right Care

What will my schedule be? Where do I need the care located?	4
What kind of child care do I want to use?	4
Where do I find care outside my family?	5
What questions should I ask someone who cares for children?	6
How do I decide who to visit?	7
What do I do when I visit a home or center?.....	7

Making Child Care Work for You

How can I make sure my child is being well cared for every day?	11
How can I help my child feel comfortable with his or her new child care?	12
How can I form a partnership with my child care provider?.....	13
I'm concerned about the care my child is getting. What should I do?.....	14
Who can I call if I have a question or a problem with the care my child is receiving?	14
Other sources of help	15

Starting to Think about Child Care

I need someone to take care of my child.

"I want someone I know and can trust."

"A place that is clean and safe."

"I want her to have fun and learn new things."

"I want someone to give my child a lot of attention and love."

"I don't really want to leave my child with someone else."

"I want to be sure my child is not abused."

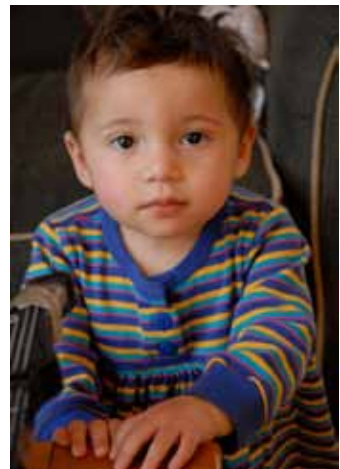
You are not alone in having these feelings. You may feel excited about a new job or training program, but worried about leaving your child for the first time. The more you learn about finding the right person and the right place, the better you will feel. Reading this booklet can help you learn more.

What does my child need? What do I want?

Start by taking a deep breath and close your eyes for a minute. Think about what kind of a person you really want to care for your child. Then think about what kind of a place you would like your child to be in.

You might want:

- A home like yours, with a person just like yourself.
- Your mother, who lives down the street.
- A child care center near work with other children your child's age.
- A Head Start program in the morning and a friend caring for your child in the afternoon.



Now, think about your own child. What does he or she need or like to do?

Does she or he need:

- Warm arms to hold him or feed her?
- Lots of outdoor space to run in with big toys to climb and swing on?
- A quiet space to relax and read a book in?
- Individual attention from the caregiver?
- A chance to have fun playing with children the same age?

Keep these ideas in mind as you look for care for your child.

Who is out there to take care of my child?

Care within your own family.

Many parents turn first to their own family when looking for child care. So, you think of your sister, your mother-in-law, or your cousin down the street. Before you grab the phone and call one of them, take a minute to think about what care you want. Does the kind of care you want match up with someone in your family? If it does, you may want to make that phone call. If using your own family does not make sense or is not possible, there are other people and places to consider.

Care outside of your family.

There are several different types of child care outside of the family. They are:

Family Child Care Homes— Friends, family members, neighbors and others who care for children in their home. Depending on the number of families served, some of these homes are required to be registered. This means the provider must meet Vermont's regulations for quality and safety for registered familychild care.

Center-Based Care - This includes part-day and full-day programs, afterschool programs, and preschools. Depending on where you live in Vermont, some summer day camps, Head Start, and early education programs are also center-based. Most of these center-based programs must be licensed to care for children. This means the center must meet Vermont's regulations for quality and safety for licensed child care.

Legally Exempt Child Care - This is when a person cares for one or two families only. S/he may be a friend, a nanny, a college student, or another parent with his or her own child.

Vermont law requires that those people caring for children from more than two families other than their own be registered or licensed. A person can become registered even if she or he cares for only one child. There are many benefits to becoming registered for the caregiver and the children. Some of these benefits are: training and other supports; payments for offering nutritious meals to young children; and payments for child care provided to families who are eligible for financial assistance.



Finding the Right Care

There are a few steps you can take when looking for child care. These will help you to find the kind of person and place that you really want.

Start by Asking Yourself a Few Questions.

What will my schedule be? Where do I need the care located?

These questions will help you get a good idea of the location and hours/days needed for child care.

- What will your schedule require?
(Add extra time for travel to and from child care.)
- Are there any weekends or evenings required?
- If your child is in school, how will she or he get to and from school?
- Do you have a car or some other reliable form of transportation?
- Are you on a public bus route?
- How far can you walk with your child care?

What kind of child care do I want to use?

Although many parents look first to people in their family to care for their children, it is important to ask yourself some questions about anyone who will care for your child, including a member of your own family.

- Can s/he care for my child when I need it?
- What will s/he do with my child all day?
- Is his or her home the kind of place I want my child to be in?
- Is s/he strong enough to pick up and carry my child?

- Does s/he have the patience and extra love to care for my child?
- What will I do if I don't like something s/he does?
- Am I comfortable talking with him or her about it?
- What does s/he want me to pay for the care?

Next Find Out Who Cares for Children.

Where do I find care outside my family?

In your neighborhood you may already know about several people who take care of children in their home. There might be a nursery school in the local church. But, what if you don't know of any, or don't like the ones you do know about? Maybe you have just moved to a new area.

To find out about care outside your family:

- Ask friends, neighbors and people at work.
- Call your local child care referral agency (*See inside back cover*)
- Look under child care in the yellow pages and local newspapers.
- Check bulletin boards at local stores.
- Check the STARS (STep Ahead Recognition System) program website at www.starsstepahead.org or call the Child Development Division (CDD) for a list of STARS providers at 1-800-649-2642.
- Visit the Child Development Division's website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd> for a list of all regulated child care programs.

Child care referral agencies will help you find information about child care programs that are registered and licensed by the State of Vermont. You can talk to them about your questions and concerns, about how to look for the kind of care you want, and they can give you names of homes or centers in your area that have an opening to care for your child. They

also have information on getting help paying for child care. There may be a fee for this service, but it is free for families who are income eligible.

Ask Questions Over the Phone.

What questions should I ask someone who cares for children?

Asking the following questions over the phone will save you time when looking for child care. You can quickly cross someone off your list, having more time to look closer at others. Pick out from the questions below those that are most important to you. Then add any others you have.

Quick-check questions.

- Is this a good time to talk? When can I call back?
- Can you care for my child on the days and hours I need?
- Where are you located?
- What age children do you care for?
- What size group would my child be in?
- What do you charge for their care?
- Do you accept state child care financial assistance (subsidy) payments?

General questions to ask.

- What is your daily routine?
- Do you serve meals?
Ask to see a menu of the meals and snacks. Are they nutritious and varied?
- What do you and your staff enjoy about caring for children?
Smaller group size and lower numbers of children per each adult are good. The state sets maximum numbers of children for each adult, but some providers choose to take care of fewer children. When a provider takes fewer children, your child will get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is.

- How long have you been caring for children?
Stable relationships between children and adults are important. Hopefully, your child can be with the same caregiver for a year or more.
- Are there other adults or teenagers in the home when the children are being cared for? Do they ever take care of the children?
- Do the children watch TV? How much and what programs?
- What do you do when a parent tells you she or he does not like something you did?
- When my child is being cared for, when can I visit?
Daily communication and participation in the child care program will build your relationship with the caregiver. (Under Vermont State law a parent may visit a home or center any time during the hours his or her child is being cared for.)
- Are you registered with or licensed by the State of Vermont?
- Have you ever had any complaints substantiated by Child Care Licensing? If so, what were the problems and how have you corrected them?
Everyone makes mistakes, but a program that corrects those mistakes and learns may be a safer and healthier environment for your child.
- What are the qualifications of your staff?
Vermont licensing regulations set a minimum number of hours of training a provider needs to take every year. Providers can take more training than is required. Caregivers with degrees and/or special training in working with children may be better able to help your child learn.
- Is your home/center a smoke-free environment?
- Is your program accredited or have you achieved STARS (STep Ahead Recognition System) recognition?
Providers that are accredited or are participating in STARS have met voluntary standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements.

How do I decide who to visit?

Review your list and the answers to your questions. Cross off the names of those whose answers you did not like.

Look at those caregivers that are still on your list. Asking questions over the phone will give you some idea of what the person and place are like, but only visiting and watching what goes on can tell you it may be the right care for your child. Pick several to call and make an appointment to visit. Try to visit both a center and a home to compare.

If you have no one left on your list, you need to think about making some compromises. Maybe you can drive a few more miles, or maybe you can pay a little more.

What do I do when I visit a home or center?

Watch, watch, watch.

- What are the children doing?
- Are they always fighting or arguing?
- Are there a variety of kinds of toys—books, dress-up clothes, playdough, dolls, trucks, blocks, paper, crayons?
- Are the toys and play spaces clean and hazard free?
- How do the teachers talk to the children?
- Do the teachers encourage the children and help them work out their problems?
- Ask yourself— “Would I be happy here every day?”

Some things to look for:

- Outdoor play equipment that is sturdy and well anchored on proper surfacing material.
- A staff member who sits with children during meals and snacks.
- Are children supervised at all times?

By watching what goes on in a home or center you can learn more about it than from talking to someone. But ask a few more important questions about the policies of the home or center.

- What days are they closed?
- What happens if your child is sick?
- What happens if the person caring for your child is sick?
- What happens when you or the caregiver is on vacation?
- When do you need to pay?
- What happens if you are late picking up your child? Is there any flexibility?
- How do they help your child when s/he first starts there?
- What do they expect from you as a parent?
- What kind of experience or education do the people who care for the children have? Do they go to trainings during the year? Have they received training for the prevention/identification of child abuse?
- What are the names of three parents you can call to ask about the care being offered?



Then, you should talk to them about your child's history and any concerns you have. Also, ask them to tell you about themselves. If you are at a center, ask to talk with the teacher who will be caring for your child. This may be a different person than the director.

- Are you comfortable talking with the teacher?
- Do you think you could talk to them about concerns that may come up in the future?

If your child has not visited the home or center with you, you may want to make another appointment to come back with your child. Again, watch.

- How is your child reacting to the caregiver?
- How does the caregiver react to your child?
- Are you comfortable with the way s/he talks with your child?
- Does s/he get down on the floor or bend down to talk to children?



Making Child Care Work for You

Building a Partnership with the Person Caring for Your Child.

How can I make sure my child is being well cared for every day?

Finding someone to care for your child is only the beginning of insuring a good child care experience for you and your child. By working together as partners, you and your caregiver can help your child grow and learn. But, it takes understanding, compromise and work to keep that partnership healthy.

Talk with the person caring for your child every day. This is important for both of you. It will keep open the lines of communication. It will help you keep in touch with what your child is doing in child care. Finally, it will also make it easier for both of you to talk about concerns that may come up.

When you drop off your child take time to:

- Tell the caregiver how your child's night was or anything else important that happened since the last time she or he was in care.
- Ask what the plans are for the day.
- Help your child put away his or her things and settle in.

When you pick up your child:

- Get to your child before closing time so you have a chance to talk with the caregiver.
- Ask how the day went.
- Ask what your child did, ate, and when she or he napped.
- Ask your child what was the most fun today.

Remember, this is a partnership that needs to work for everyone involved. The person caring for your child needs to:

- Know about your child.
- Be paid on time for providing care.
- Take care of their own family when the work day is done.

How can I help my child feel comfortable with his or her new child care?

If your child is comfortable and happy in his or her new child care program, you will feel better. You and the caregiver can work together to help make this change easier for your child.

You should:

- Talk with your child ahead of time about his or her new caregiver and the home/center.
- Spend extra time with your child on the first few days.
- Make your child's first day shorter if your schedule allows.

The caregiver should:

- Give your child a special place to put things.
- Show him or her around the new home/center.
- Invite him or her to join in an activity.

Saying good-bye for the first time can be hard for children, but often it is harder for parents! Talk with your caregiver ahead of time to plan out how to make this easier for you and your child.

You should:

- Never sneak out while your child is not looking.
- Always tell your child you are leaving, where you are going and when you will be back.
- Help your child start an activity before you leave.
- Leave once you have said good-bye. Try not to hesitate. Your child may sense your uncertainty and become more upset.

The caregiver can:

- Offer to hold your child to help him or her say good-bye.
- Help your child send you some kisses to put in your pocket.

Picking your child up at the end of the day may also be a difficult time. You, your child and the caregiver are all tired after a long day. Talk with other parents to learn their tricks for unwinding after work. Talk with your caregiver to find ways to make the end-of-the-day routines run smoothly.

How can I form a partnership with my child care provider?

Some ways to be involved:

- Have parent/caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions.
- Offer to volunteer time when needed, like participating in clean-up days, fixing broken toys, or helping with a newsletter.
- Visit your child care and read a book aloud to the children.
- Join in holidays and special events, like field trips.

Participating in events at child care may show your provider that you think what your child is doing is important.



Dealing with Concerns, Serious Problems and Suspected Abuse.

I'm concerned about the care my child is getting. What should I do?

No matter how wonderful the person caring for your child is, at some point he or she may do or say something you do not understand or do not like, or may not be doing something you feel is important. Talk with your caregiver about any concern immediately. Putting off those uncomfortable feelings will only make things worse.

When you talk with the person caring for your child, think about how you would like someone to talk to you about a problem. Try to:

- Say what you like about the care s/he gives your child.
- Ask for an explanation for whatever you are concerned about.
- Explain why you are concerned.
- If possible, offer to work with him or her to change the problem.

Who can I call if I have a question or a problem with the care my child is receiving?

Serious problems might include spanking a child, constantly yelling at the children, too many children being cared for by one person, putting a child in front of the TV all day, or suspected child abuse.

Start by talking with your caregiver. If you feel the problem is not being dealt with, call the Child Care Consumer Line toll-free number, 1-800-649-2642, or visit <http://brightfutures.vermont.gov>

The Child Care Consumer Line also acts as a consumer education clearinghouse for information on regulations and learning about substantiated childcare complaints.

Other Resources

Children’s Integrated Services Program (CIS):

CDD also administers the Children’s Integrated Services Program—a resource for families who have questions or concerns about their child’s development during pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood. For more information dial 2-1-1 to get connected to the Children’s Integrated Services team in your community. Or check it out online at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/cis>.

Child Development Division’s Publications:

Ask your local Community Child Care Agency (see inside back cover) for a copy of the following publications:

- ***Child Care Financial Assistance Program: Helping Families Pay for Child Care***
Describes the program and how you may qualify for help paying for child care.
- ***Children’s Integrated Services Booklet***
Describes the information and services that may be available if you have questions or concerns about your child’s development—during pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood.
- ***Using Regulated Care in Vermont: A Booklet for Parents***
Explains the regulatory expectations of child care providers regulated by CDD.
- ***Specialized Child Care Handbook***
Helps parents and child care providers understand specialized care.

Community Child Care Support Agencies

<p>ADDISON Mary Johnson Children's Center (802) 388-4304</p>	<p>BENNINGTON Bennington County Child Care Association (802) 447-3778</p>
<p>CALEDONIA/ESSEX Kingdom Child Care Connection at Umbrella (802) 748-1992 1-800-916-8645</p>	<p>CHITTENDEN Child Care Resource (802) 863-3367 1-800-339-3367</p>
<p>FRANKLIN/GRAND ISLE Family Center of Northwestern Vermont (802) 524-6554 1-800-427-6574</p>	<p>LAMOILLE Lamoille Family Center (802) 888-5229</p>
<p>ORANGE/WINDSOR (N) The Family Place (802) 649-3268, 1-800-639-0039 Child Care Project (cc referrals) (603) 646-3233, 1-800-323-5446</p>	<p>ORLEANS/ESSEX (N) NEK Community Action Inc (802) 334-4072 1-877-722-6680</p>
<p>RUTLAND Child Care Support Services / Vermont Achievement Center (802) 747-0033 1-800-775-2390</p>	<p>WASHINGTON Family Center of Washington County (802) 262-3292</p>
<p>WINDHAM Windham Child Care Assoc. (802) 254-5332 1-866-254-5332</p>	<p>WINDSOR (SOUTH)/ WINDHAM (NORTH) Springfield Area Parent Child Center (802) 886-5242 1-800-808-4442</p>

The Department for Children and Families,
as part of an integrated Agency of Human Services,
fosters the healthy development, safety,
well-being, and self-sufficiency of Vermonters.

The Child Development Division (CDD)
improves the well-being of Vermont's children
by ensuring safe, accessible child development
services and integrated family support services.

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Child Development Division
103 South Main St.
Waterbury, VT 05671-2901
1-800-649-2642

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