



# Child Care Choices

Choosing child care for your child is one of the most important choices you will ever make as a parent or guardian. Selecting a caregiver for your child means choosing someone you trust who will care for your child well and respond promptly to the child's needs for nurture and development.

Counselors at Quality Care for Children (QCC), a Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, are ready to tell you about various forms of child care. They can refer you to large or small child care centers or to family child care homes, where a provider can care for up to six children of differing ages.

Quality Care for Children believes that making the best choice for your child is a very individual decision for you. Your choice should reflect your values and expectations and also meet your child's personal needs. What you know about your child and what you learn as you visit child care centers and family child care homes will help you choose child care that reflects your values and expectations and also meets the personal needs of your child.

## About Child Care Centers

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) licenses two types of child care centers: day care centers that care for more than 18 children, and group homes that care for 7 to 18 children. Both must meet the minimum standards that the state has set. Pre-kindergartens are licensed by DECAL.

State standards for child care centers help protect children from serious harm, such as fire, accidents, child abuse, or outbreaks of infectious disease. The regulations also concern the growth and development of children. They outline the kinds of supplies, equipment, and activities that should be offered in child care centers and family child care homes. The ratio of staff members to children is one of the standards set by the state.

<b>Child Care Center Child-Staff Ratios from Georgia Licensing Standards</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Maximum Number of Children Allowed per Teacher</b>	<b>Preferred Standard *</b>
Infants	6	3-4
One-Year-Olds (walkers)	8	3-5
Two-Year-Olds	10	4-6
Three-Year-Olds	15	7-10
Four-Year-Olds	18	8-10
Five-Year-Olds	20	8-10
Six Years or Older	25	10-20
* National Association for the Education of Young Children		

## About Family Child Care Homes

The state of Georgia requires that family child care providers, who offer child care in their own homes, register with DECAL. DECAL requires a fingerprint check, training in CPR and First Aid, and an additional 10 "clock" hours of certified training annually. DHR surveyors routinely visit all new providers every year, visit 10 percent of previously registered providers every year, and visit any home immediately if a complaint has been received.

Family child care providers can care for a limited number of children. The total number must be no more than 12 children under the age of 13, which includes the provider's own children, any other children who may live in the home, and any children for whom no compensation is received. In addition, the provider must have an additional person on site (who is at least 16 years old) to help care for the children: (1) whenever more than 3 children under the age of 12 months are present; (2) when more than 6 children under the age of 3 years are present; or (3) when more than 8 children under the age of 5 years are present.

If a family child care provider exceeds these limits or ratios, the state requires the home to be licensed as a group day care home. This process requires a new DECAL inspection to confirm that they meet the more rigid health, safety, and program standards of a group day care home, which Georgia categorized as a center.

### **Develop Your Child Care Plan**

Since choosing child care is such an important decision for you, give yourself plenty of time to look around and develop a plan for you and your child. If you need child care right away, consider making a temporary child care arrangement to allow yourself more time to visit programs and choose carefully.

A first step in developing your child care plan is to make a list of practical considerations that will influence your choice. Include issues like location, hours of operation, holiday and vacation policies, and your family's budget. Begin your search when you are clear about your family's needs and your own needs.

The next step is to call us. Parent counselors with these programs can give you initial answers to your practical questions. After that, call individual providers and ask about hours and whether there are vacancies or a waiting list. You may want to ask center directors how children in the center are divided by age; the number of children cared for by each caregiver; the total group size; and what procedures are necessary for enrolling your child.

From family child care providers, you will want to know the ages of the other children in care, as well as the total number of infants and children. Sometimes you will be able to get fee information over the telephone, but sometimes you will not. After this type of telephone screening, decide which child care programs you want to visit – to see for yourself.

### **Checklist**

When you visit child care centers or family child care homes, use the following checklist as a guide to help you evaluate the program:

#### **Your Feelings**

- Do the children seem to be enjoying themselves?
- Would you want to come here if you were a child?
- Has the visit made you feel good?

#### **Size of Group and Age of Children**

- Is the group size within the limits that the state has set?
- Do you think your child will fit in comfortably with the other children?
- What is the center's licensed capacity?
- What is the total number of children allowed in your child's group? Are there enough caregivers present all the time?

#### **Caregivers**

- Do you like the caregiver?
- Is the caregiver warm and caring with the children?
- Does the caregiver appear to relate comfortably and personally to the children in her care?
- Do you feel satisfied with the way the toilet training, diapering, and discipline is handled in this setting?
- Does the caregiver pay attention to and respond to the emotional and physical needs of each child?
- Are you satisfied with the way the caregiver responds to a hurt or unhappy child?
- Have the children and caregivers been with the center long enough to create a stable environment for your child?
- Do the caregivers attend training courses? Is the training and experience of the center director acceptable to you?
- Does the family child care provider belong to a family child care association?

## Program Activities

- Does the daily schedule include active and quiet play, rest time, and outdoor play?
- Is there time for caregivers to give individual attention to each child?
- Do you feel comfortable with the amount of television shown and the way TV is used to enhance the program?
- Are there opportunities for the children to listen to music, draw and paint, and tell stories?
- Do the children have time to finish their projects?
- Are the children allowed the time and space for individual play?
- Are there sufficient and appropriate toys and equipment for a variety of play experiences? Are there small and large toys? Are there toys for pretend and group play?
- Do the children have a choice about participating in certain activities?
- Is the level of activity suitable for your child?
- Are field trips part of the program?
- Does the family child care provider take the children out when she runs errands?
- Is the transportation safe?

## Meals

- What meals are served? Is the menu posted?
- Are you comfortable with the kind of food served at each meal? Is the menu balanced?
- Does the child have to eat everything on his or her plate?
- May children have seconds?
- Is meal time pleasant?
- Is food held out as a reward or punishment?
- Is the kitchen clean? Are you comfortable with the food handling procedures? Is there proper supervision for children while meals are being prepared?
- Is the family child care provider a member of a U.S. Department of Agriculture Child Care Food Program in Georgia – which sets standards for the meals served?

## Environment

- Are you comfortable with the cleanliness of the center or home?
- Are diapering and toilet procedures sanitary and safe?
- Are the indoor and outdoor play areas free of hazards?
- Is the setting sanitary, attractive, and well-lit?
- Have sufficient safety measures been taken in the center or home? Are vents and fireplaces screened off? Are unused electrical outlets capped? Are stairs adequately guarded for infants and toddlers? Is there a fire extinguisher, smoke detector, and a fire evacuation plan? Is the outdoor play area safe from traffic and hazards?
- Does the outside area (and any equipment) safely accommodate climbing, sliding, jumping, running, and balancing activities?
- If the family child care provider has no yard, does she have an outside area nearby to take the children to play?
- Are toys in good repair and are they washed frequently?

## Hygiene

- Is the diaper-changing area near running water and away from the food storage or preparation area?
- Do the caregivers wash their hands after diapering each child?
- What procedure is used to disinfect toys and equipment, including toilets and potty chairs?
- Are you comfortable with the health and hygiene policies used at the center or home?
- What is the program's policy on the exclusion of sick children?
- How are parents notified about outbreaks of communicable diseases?

## **Fees, Contracts, and Rules**

- Do you understand the child care provider's rules and policies? Are you clear on issues like absences, fees, schedules, holidays, illnesses, late charges, and the number of days' notice required for termination?
- Does the family child care provider have a caregiver replacement in case of her illness or vacation?

## **Visiting Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes**

For the child care centers you decide to visit, make appointments to meet with the directors. While at the center, spend some time in the room where your child will be, and talk to the specific teachers who will be caring for your child. Spend enough hours at the center to see several different activities. As you visit, use the checklist to help you evaluate the program. Plan to make a drop-in visit at another time as well, and take your child along with you on the second visit.

You may want to schedule your first appointment with the caregiver at a time when children are not present. This way, the provider can spend time with you to answer all your questions without taking her attention away from the children. After seeing the family child care home and talking with the provider, arrange to make a drop-in visit at a later time. Try to arrange your visit at a time of day when you will be able to observe the interactions between the caregiver and the children.

## **Initiating Your New Child Care Plan**

Once you have selected a child care arrangement, prepare yourself and your child to begin child care. During the first few weeks, discuss the transition with your child and the caregiver. Arrange several short visits, if possible, before you leave your child all day. The first good-byes can be difficult for both you and your child, but experienced caregivers know how to help both children and parents through this transition.

## **Parent Responsibility and Supervision of Child Care**

Remember, it is up to you to continue to monitor the child care program you have chosen and to talk with your child's caregivers about how your child is getting along. Caregivers need your support and appreciation for their good work, and children need for parents to constantly evaluate the child care arrangement!

- Stay as close as you can to your arrival and pick-up times. If you are going to be late, call and make the necessary arrangements.
- Get to know other parents whose children are being cared for at your child's center or family child care home. Talk to them about their experiences.
- Drop in frequently and participate in daily activities.
- Ask your child what he or she does during the day. Find out how he or she interacts with the caregiver.

## **Did You Know?**

- Parents have a right to enter all parts of a child care center when their child is in attendance.
- Children in child care are not to be spanked or subjected to an unusual punishment.
- Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) will investigate any report from a parent concerning licensing violation at a child care center or a family child care home. To file a complaint, call (404) 463-0703 or (404) 463-0704.
- QCC has a complaint policy also. If you are dissatisfied with a particular program, please call us to record your complaint or consult with us about what you should do.

For additional information about child care, contact us.

**Metro Atlanta 877-722-2445 · Central Georgia 800-558-4804**

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