



YOU HAVE A CHOICE!



WASHINGTON STATE

A Guide to Finding Quality Child Care



Washington State Department of
Early Learning



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We at the Department of Early Learning know choosing child care is a big decision for families. With so many choices and things to think about—such as cost and availability—it’s no wonder many families don’t know where to start.

As a parent, you are your child’s first and most important teacher, and you know what your family needs in a child care setting. This booklet is designed to help you find the child care arrangement that’s best for your family.

As you begin your search, you’ll probably have plenty of questions. This booklet will help you find answers to many of those questions. A common question for many parents is: How will I know if the child care arrangement I’ve chosen is the right one? Ask yourself:

Will my child have fun?

Will my child be in a safe and healthy environment?

Will my child develop a love of learning?

If you can answer “yes” to those three questions, chances are you have found a place where your child can thrive!



Washington State Department of
Early Learning

GETTING STARTED

Try to plan ahead. Searching for child care can take some time and thought, and many child care providers have waiting lists. Try to give yourself at least two months to visit child care settings and make a choice.

Who licenses child care providers?

The Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) licenses more than 7,400 licensed child care providers in Washington. There are three types of licensed child care: child care centers, those who offer care in their home (family home child care providers) and school-age programs. Each follows their own set of state licensing rules, including minimum standards for health and safety.

Licensed child care providers must post their licenses. Ask the provider to show you the license, which will show the ages and number of children for whom the provider is licensed to care. To find out if a child care home or center is licensed, and to get a complaint history, visit DEL's online Licensed Child Care Information System at www.del.wa.gov or call **1.866.482.4325**.

Who does not need a child care license?

Certain types of care do not need a license, including:

- › Nannies providing care in a family's home
- › Informal parent cooperatives
- › Play groups
- › Educational preschools that operate for less than four hours per day
- › Parks and recreation programs
- › Family, friends and neighbors who provide occasional care

Why should I choose licensed child care?

The latest brain research has given us a much clearer picture of how children learn and grow in their early years. During the early years of life, the brain is forming connections that help determine a lifetime of skills and potential. High-quality child care helps ensure healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development.

The benefits of licensed child care include:

- › Health and safety checks on the facilities. DEL staff visit child care centers at least once a year, and visit family home child care providers at least once every 18 months
- › Child development training
- › First aid training
- › CPR training
- › Criminal background checks on the provider and staff (and household members ages 16 and older of family home providers)

To ensure they meet state minimum health and safety standards, licensed child care providers follow specific rules about:

- › The skills and training providers must have
- › Who may be a child care provider
- › How providers interact with children
- › Child care staff to child ratios
- › What children learn
- › Safe food handling and preparation
- › Safe storage of medicine, cleaning supplies and other toxins
- › Safe indoor and outdoor play areas





"HOMES THAT MEET LICENSING REQUIREMENTS PROVIDE A SAFE AND SECURE ATMOSPHERE."

CORRINA
LICENSED CHILD CARE PROVIDER

How do I find licensed child care?

Begin your search by listing the things that are important to you and your child. Then collect the names of potential child care providers from friends, family, co-workers and from the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network: **1.800.446.1114**.

Next, call several providers and ask about:

- > Ability to meet your child's individual needs
- > When they'll be able to offer your child a space
- > Hours of operation, vacation coverage
- > Fees and any financial help available
- > Location and transportation
- > Meals and snacks
- > Anything else that is important to you

What if I need to find child care immediately?

If you need to find child care quickly, your local child care resource and referral agency can help. Call the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network at **1.800.446.1114** or visit **www.childcarenet.org**.

Once you've called several sites, make appointments to visit three or more. It's important to check them out in person. Use the checklist in this booklet during your visit. Talk with parents with children in the program and check DEL's Licensed Child Care Information System for information on the provider's licensing history: **www.del.wa.gov** or **1.866.482.4325**.

Take your child to visit and, if possible, let your child help choose. Trust your feelings about what you see during the visit. No setting is perfect, so you'll need to decide which place will best meet your family's needs.

Finally, read the provider's written policies and procedures. Be sure to sign a contract or agreement form and make clear your expectations about fees, holidays, vacations and refunds.

LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTERS

HOW MANY STAFF MEMBERS WILL BE WITH MY CHILD?

Age of children	Ratio of staff to children	Maximum size of group
Babies 1 months through 11 months	1:4	8
Toddlers 12 months through 29 months	1:7	14
Preschoolers 30 months through 5 years	1:10	20
School-aged children 5 years through age 12	1:15	30

Family child care homes:

This varies based on providers' licensed capacity and whether they have assistants. Maximum home licensed capacity is 12 children ages birth through 11 years. Check providers' licenses for specific details about their licensed capacity.

CHECKLIST

You know what is important to you and your family when choosing child care. In addition to thinking about affordability and accessibility, it may help you to take this checklist along when visiting sites.

What will my child do during the day?

Are there planned activities that help my child learn?

- Quiet and active?
- Indoor and outdoor?
- Will my child have time each day for running, catching, climbing and throwing?
- Will my child have free play time?
- Is TV watching and computer games limited and appropriate?
- Is the space comfortable, organized, appealing and child-friendly?

Is rest time individualized for each child?

- Infants sleep on their own schedule
- Quiet activities for non-napping children
- Are there plenty of age-appropriate books?
- Are books available to children in their own language?
- Is there circle time, storytelling or reading every day?
- Will my family's culture be respected in daily activities?
- Can children access toys and activities on their own?

What will my child eat, and when?

- Is there a planned menu?
- Are meals and snacks balanced and healthy?
- Are children's food choices, appetites, and religious or cultural restrictions respected?
- What are the expectations about food brought from home?

Is age-appropriate discipline used?

- Do staff set limits that are reasonable, clear, consistent and age-appropriate?
- Do staff use calm voices when talking with children?
- Do staff redirect children to other activities if there's a conflict?
- What happens when children hit, bite or bully other children?
- Do I agree with the discipline policy?

Will my child be safe and healthy in this setting?

- Are there enough staff members to give attention to all the children?
- Are the toys and equipment safe and age-appropriate?
- Is a staff member trained in CPR and first aid present at all times?
- Is the licensed space child-proofed (cleaning supplies up high, electrical outlets covered, medicines locked up)?

Do children and providers wash hands:

- after toileting?
- after blowing noses?
- after changing diapers?
- before eating or handling food?
- when coming back from outdoor play?
- Are there regular fire drills?
- Does the outdoor play area feel safe?
- Do I feel secure with the people who will be caring for my child?
- If my child is school-age, is there a plan for getting him/her to and from school safely?
- Are there guidelines regarding illness?
- How often are diapers changed?
- Is there a plan for contacting parents in case of an emergency?
- Is a staff member trained in CPR and first aid present at all times?





How are the child care providers here supported?

- Do staff have opportunities for training and continuing education?
- Do staff have break time?
- Are staff encouraged to share their ideas on activities and program planning?
- Do staff have time to plan activities?

How are parents included in the child care program?

- Am I encouraged to visit at any time?
- Is there a way for me to watch activities?
- Am I encouraged to spend time with my child as a guest for lunch or as a volunteer?
- How will I hear about my child's day?
- Are there provider-parent meetings?
- Are there chances for families to get to know one another and staff?
- Do I feel respected as my child's first and most important teacher?

Will my child thrive here?

- Are different cultures, ethnicities and abilities valued?
- Do staff smile, talk to and listen to children frequently?
- Does this setting encourage creativity and age-appropriate independence?
- Do staff hold and cuddle with infants and toddlers often, including while feeding or changing diapers?
- Will the same people take care of my child regularly?
- Are children comforted when needed?
- Is the atmosphere bright, pleasant and happy?
- What training and education do staff have that prepared them to help my child learn?
- Will my child have FUN here?



GET INVOLVED



How can I be involved in my child's care?

Spend time at the child care site. Being there sends a strong message to both your child and the provider that you want all children there to thrive, learn and have fun!

- › Spend some time reading or playing with your child at the child care site during drop-off and pick-up
- › Meet regularly with your child care provider to ask questions about how your child is doing
- › Offer to volunteer for cleanup days or to help children with activities
- › Join in special events, such as field trips, career day or on dates that are culturally important for your family
- › If your child care facility has a parent board or parent committee, volunteer to serve on it or try to attend meetings

How do I know if my child is thriving in child care?

Put yourself in your child's shoes.

Try to answer these questions as your child would:

- › Am I usually eager to go to child care?
- › Do I have fun there?
- › Do I feel safe and comfortable there?
- › Am I respected there?
- › Am I heard there?



WHERE CAN I FIND HELP PAYING FOR CHILD CARE?

Child care can be expensive. You may qualify for help—here are some resources:

> **Some child care providers offer:** sliding-scale fees, scholarships, vouchers or other tuition breaks. *Ask providers about this when visiting the site.*

> **The Department of Early Learning** oversees the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), a whole-child, family-focused preschool program designed to help low-income and at-risk children and their families succeed in school and life. Four- and three-year-old children and their families that are at 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible. This includes families receiving public assistance, children in the foster care system and parents with limited incomes who are working or in school. Contact the Department of Early Learning's state ECEAP office for more information.

1.866.482.4325
www.del.wa.gov

> **Working Connections Child Care** is a state program that helps families with children pay for child care while they work, look for work or are in state-approved training. Families with incomes under 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level qualify. Parents who receive a subsidy help pay for child care services with a co-payment that depends on family size and income. To find out more about this program, contact your local Community Service Office (listed in your local phone book).

> **Other resources** exist to help families pay for child care and early childhood education programs, including seasonal child care for agricultural workers and homeless child care. Contact your local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency to learn more.

1.800.446.1114
www.childcarenet.org



RESOURCES



For Families

2-1-1

Call this number for information and referrals on many topics, including health care and childcare, housing, job training, education and recreation, retirement, disability and social service information.

End Harm

We all have a shared responsibility to ensure children are safe and healthy in licensed child care. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected in licensed child care, call toll-free: **1.866.ENDHARM**.

Family Help Line

If you have questions or concerns about a child in your life, or need support or someone to listen, call toll-free: **1.800.932HOPE** (4673).

Licensed Child Care Information System

LCCIS offers information about licensed child care providers. Visit DEL's Web site at **www.del.wa.gov** or call toll-free: **1.866.482.4325**.

Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network

For help finding licensed child care and information about subsidy programs, call toll free: **1.800.446.1114** or visit: **www.childcarenet.org**.

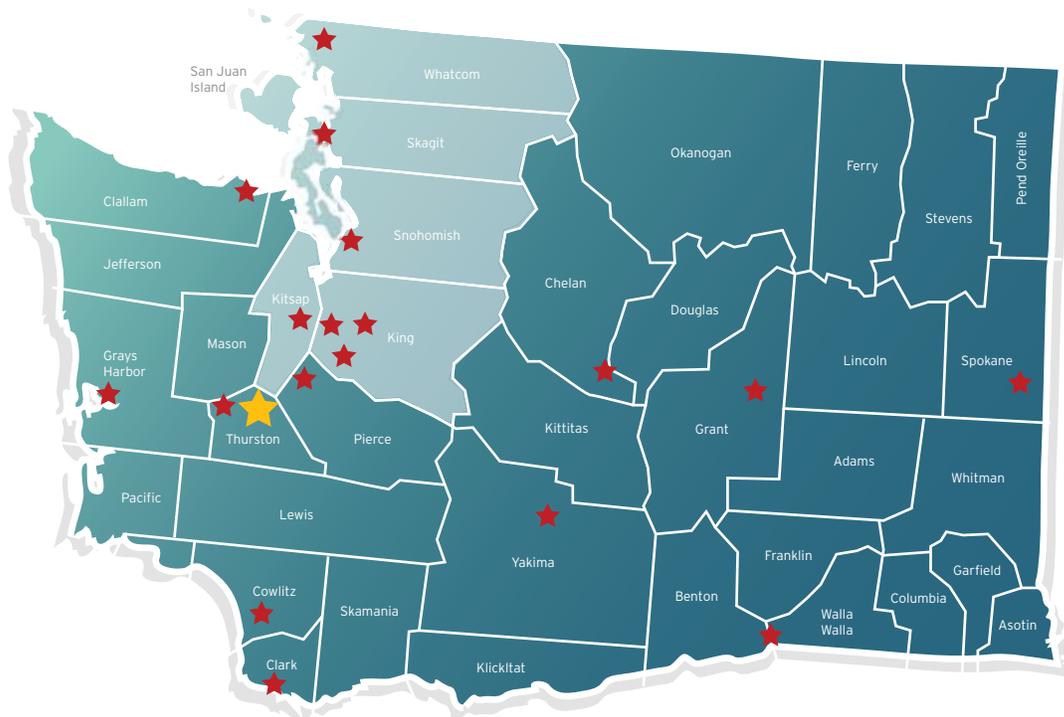


How to contact DEL

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DEL office locations

ABERDEEN	KING SOUTH	TACOMA
BELLEVUE	MOSES LAKE	TRI-CITIES
BELLINGHAM	MOUNT VERNON	TUMWATER
BREMERTON	PORT ANGELES	VANCOUVER
EVERETT	SEATTLE	WENATCHEE
KELSO	SPOKANE	YAKIMA



Answering your questions about child care options

- › How do I get started?
- › How do I choose a child care facility?
- › How do I get more involved in my child's care?
- › Where can I find help paying for child care?
- › Where can I find family resources?
- › Where is my local DEL office?

DEL



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