

# CHOOSING INFANT CARE



**PARENTS AND PROVIDERS  
PARTNERING FOR QUALITY CARE**

# CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR BRAND NEW BABY!

As a new parent, you and your baby are spending your first few weeks getting to know each other. Every day, you learn more about each other, making connections with every interaction. A baby's brain is rapidly growing and developing. Babies are reacting to sight, sounds and new experiences making millions of connections to the world. They make sounds, facial expressions and body movements that communicate their feelings and needs to those that love and care for them.

As your family returns to the normal routines of working and/or pursuing



an education, your baby needs to be placed in the care of someone who can provide not only comfort and safety but also promote your baby's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

## QUALITY CARE...IT BEGINS WITH RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

As a parent, you will know your baby best. Finding the right program or provider for your family reassures you that your baby's unique style and personality will be considered. A quality program begins with a responsive caregiver who adapts their approach to the temperament and needs of the baby they are caring for. A responsive caregiver is an excellent observer who uses their knowledge and experience to respond to baby's cues. Since babies cannot communicate with words, they convey their needs by crying, cooing and babbling. A responsive caregiver will try to sort out whether a baby is tired, hungry, wet, wants to be held or needs playful interaction. Look for a provider that will support your baby's individuality but ensures that all the children in their care are treated as unique individuals with their own feelings, preferences and needs. A provider offering a quality program creates an environment where babies are learning, growing, exploring and forming healthy relationships with trusted adults.

## WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

First and foremost, plan ahead to give yourself as much time as your search will allow. Start as early as possible to begin your quest. Choosing the right child care arrangement for your family can be so difficult but so important at the same time. Availability, affordability and quality impact the care you seek. Limited care in some areas will determine your options. The first step in developing your child care plan is to make a list of practical considerations that will guide your decisions.

- What types of child care are available in my area?
- How do these programs differ?
- What is the location and hours of operation? Will this conflict with my work or school schedule?
- What ages are served?
- What are the policies and requirements of these programs?
- What are the fees and rates and do they accept payment through an assistance program?
- Do they have a waiting list I can sign up for?

If you need care immediately, consider making some temporary arrangements with friends or family to allow you more time to make careful choices that work best for your family. You may have to expand your search by driving further than originally planned until space becomes available for your child.

Personalities differ. You may find some providers that you connect with more easily than others. Being able to communicate with a provider helps to create a partnership for the best care of your baby.





## YOUR FIRST CONTACT: THE PHONE CALL

You can establish your initial contact by phone. Introduce yourself and indicate your need for baby care. Ask if this is a good time for them to answer a few questions. Be clear about the age of the baby, your schedule and a start date. If you have some flexibility, this would be a good time to share that. They may have an opening at a later date and you might be able to use temporary care until then. Ask if there is a wait list that you can put your name on. Wait lists are more common in centers but all programs have their own ways of doing things. You should also ask if the day care is licensed and how long they have been caring for children. If possible, schedule a visit to see if this arrangement will be a good fit for your baby and you.

**You are a major part of your child's world. Sharing the parenting role is not easy.**

But children need healthy bonds with adults and caregivers to learn how to trust and form relationships. Choosing a child care setting that is warm and nurturing allows you to develop a partnership with the provider. Your child will pick up on the bond you have with your provider and form one as well. It's a priceless gift you can give to your child.

## ABOUT FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

- Most available type of care offered in a provider's home
- License by DCFS is required for more than 3 children (including the provider's)
- Background checks and fingerprinting required for all living in the home over age 13
- Current CPR, First Aid certification required
- Blending of ages in a smaller, family style environment
- Can be more flexible and sometimes offer part time, evening or weekend care
- With an assistant, can increase the number of babies and children in care
- Rates vary and are set by the provider

## VISITING FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

The provider will indicate a good time for you to visit. They may want to meet during naptime or evening so that your visit can be uninterrupted. They may want to answer all your questions and explain their program without taking attention away from the other children. Once you have met with the provider and toured their home and the areas used

for day care, arrange to visit at an additional time when it will be best to observe the interactions between the caregiver, your baby and the other children in their care. Very often, a morning visit will give you a peek at daily routines and activities and let you see first hand the relationships the providers have with all the children in their care.

## ABOUT LICENSE EXEMPT CHILD CARE

- Providers caring for fewer than 3 children
- Often is care by a family member, friend or neighbor
- Can be in the parent's home or provider's home or both
- Must be fingerprinted and background checked if state assistance is used for payment

Choosing someone you know may give you a sense of trust and make a child feel secure. Communication is key to making this type of arrangement work. Honest dialogue about expectations can help to establish mutual agreement on care issues such as health and safety, meals, schedules, rates and expectation of payment. Since this is usually an informal arrangement, neither the parent nor provider want to deal with any misunderstandings that might surface because of lack of communication.

## CHILD CARE CHOICES FOR PARENTS

Choosing child care is a very individual decision and should reflect your values and expectations. The more you know about a program, the better able you will be to find an arrangement where your baby will thrive. If possible, visit a minimum of 3 to 5 programs to compare so you feel confident you have made the best decision.



## ABOUT CHILD CARE CENTERS

- A facility used for care where children are grouped by age in classroom settings
- Staffing ratios for infants and toddlers limit the number of slots available
- A license by DCFS for the center is required if care is offered to children under 3
- License regulations include minimal health, safety and staffing requirements
- Personnel must have background checks and fingerprinting
- Broad range of education and experience among staff
- Substitutes provided during staff illness or absences
- Rates vary from center to center, however, typically scaled higher for infant and toddler care

## VISITING CHILD CARE CENTERS

Make an appointment to meet with the director. They will give you a tour of the facility and explain their program. Ask to spend some time in the room where your baby will be. You can meet the teachers and get a feel for the general vibe in the classroom. Plan to stay long enough to see some activities that are planned specifically with infants and toddlers in mind. As you visit, use the checklists included in this guide

to observe the relationship between the teachers and the infants and toddlers. Ask questions to help you evaluate the program. Do you feel the warm and caring atmosphere in the room? Schedule another visit to bring your toddler along to see how well he integrates into the classroom. Remember that babies and toddlers will need some transition time to build trust and feel secure in this new environment.

## WHAT DO YOU SEE?

As you enter a facility or day care home, there are things you can look for that will help guide your decision.

- Are babies and parents greeted warmly as they arrive?
- Does the caregiver/teacher seem to enjoy being with the children and make connections with them? Do they talk to them, soothe and communicate with them reinforcing language skills?
- Are the diapering, sleeping, food preparation and play areas separate?
- Do most babies look and sound happy?
- Is the child care setting clean and the play area inviting?
- Do you see plenty of reachable age-appropriate toys, indestructible books and fun materials for babies and toddlers to explore?
- Are the babies included in children's activities?

## CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP)

### Need help paying for child care?

The State of Illinois offers child care assistance to families who are **income eligible**. Child care assistance is determined by family size and income.

To request an application or more information about eligibility guidelines contact:

#### **West Central Child Care Connection**

510 Maine St., Suite 610 | Quincy, IL 62301  
800-782-7318 | 217-222-2550

## WHAT ABOUT THAT OPEN DOOR POLICY?

### AM I FREE TO VISIT MY CHILD ANYTIME?

You will need to address this concern with each individual provider. Some programs and day care homes have tightened up security measures to keep the children in their care as safe as possible. If you are a nursing mom, you will work out the logistics with the provider.

However, each provider has their own policy on drop in visits. Make sure you are clear on your expectations and the expectations of your provider. Make sure you have the phone number that the provider uses so you can communicate when you need to.

# CHECK LIST

## HEALTH & SAFETY

- Are the babies supervised at all times even when sleeping?
- In the sleep area, can the lights be dimmed, is the temperature comfortable and are noises low? Do all infants have their own designated sleep space that is the same every day?
- Is the diapering area sanitized before and after each use?
- Is there ongoing handwashing before and after diapering or food handling? Are good handwashing practices provided for infants and toddlers as well?
- Is there plenty of space for exploration? Are there safe places for babies to crawl and toddlers to practice walking?
- Are infant/toddler toys washed and disinfected regularly?
- Are infants put to sleep on their backs?
- Is there always an adult present who is certified in infant/toddler CPR and First Aid?
- What is the sick child policy?
- Are daily inspections of toys and equipment indoors and outdoors done to keep all children safe?

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The safety and well-being of your infant cannot be understated. Knowing that your day care program has policies and procedures in place for any kind of emergency, be it medical or natural disaster, will give you the assurance that your daycare will know what to do in any unforeseeable event. Discuss the following with your provider:

- Are emergency numbers for fire, police, poison control and 911 posted?
- Do they have a written plan in place to address medical emergencies that may occur with either children or adults in the day care? Offer to help in any way.
- Is their CPR/First Aid certification up to date?
- If they need to evacuate children, how will the children be moved and to where? Do they have practice drills so the children will know what to do? Do they teach older children about 911 if they need to get help on the provider's behalf?
- Is their contact information up to date?



## THE CAREGIVER

- Does the provider have experience in caring for babies?
- Does the provider continue ongoing early childhood training?
- Does the provider keep records on diapering, feeding and developmental milestones to share with parents?
- Does the provider hold and touch the babies in a caring manner and respond to an infant's cries to be fed, changed or held?
- Does the provider interact with babies during diaper changes, meal times or other transitions by holding, touching and making eye contact?
- Are babies held while bottle feeding?
- Do the babies and toddlers spend time outdoors?
- Does the provider read books with baby? Do they play interactive games and sing songs to babies?
- Does the provider include the baby in activities that are planned for all the children?
- How does your provider communicate with you? Will there be time at drop off or pick up time to update you on baby's day?
- Is there a back up plan in place in case of illness or family emergency at the day care?
- Is positive reinforcement used in guidance techniques?
- Does your baby respond well to the provider who makes bonding with your baby a priority?

## THE SPACE

- If licensed, is the state license displayed for a parent to see?
- Toys are age appropriate and within reach.
- Cribs, high chairs and other baby equipment are safe, suitable and in good condition.
- Outdoor space is free of waste, protected from traffic and safe for all ages with adequate playthings.
- Indoors there is enough space for a child to move freely and safely but also separate himself for quiet individual play.
- There is a place for an individual baby's belongings and supplies.

## THE PROGRAM

- Are the ratios of caregivers to infants and toddlers within acceptable limits or limits set forth by licensing?
- Is there a schedule that dictates the flow of the day? Does the schedule alternate quiet and active times of the day? Is there flexibility within the program to allow for unplanned visitors or activities?
- Does the program give parents the opportunity for family involvement?
- Are the hours of the program suitable for your needs? What happens if work or traffic causes a late pick up or early drop off?
- Does the day care have clearly written policies? This should include details about rates, fees and payment schedules.

## IS IT TIME TO DECIDE?

Have your list ready with specific questions about your baby's and family's needs. This could include diapering practices, naps, rest time, allergies or special dietary requirements. You know your child best. Your child will pick up on your tone. If you are happy with the care they are receiving, they will (generally) be happy as well.

Check references. Ask for past clients and present ones too.

Trust yourself. Ask enough questions to help you feel at ease with your decision.

## GOING BACK TO WORK

Give yourself adjustment time. This new routine will take some getting used to. Prepare yourself for the transition. This is an emotional time for you and your baby and first good-byes can be difficult. Say good bye directly to your baby and reassure your baby you are coming back to pick him up. Prolonging the process makes the separation more difficult for everyone! Let the provider help in this process.

Pack your bag the night before. Having everything ready to go helps prevent a frantic struggle in the morning. Discussion with your provider about baby's comfort items will help. Having several sets of pacifiers, blankies, stuffies for home and daycare can be discussed with your provider. Be positive to help your baby establish trust in the person caring for him.

## STAY INVOLVED

Stay tuned to your baby's progress. Spend a couple of minutes each day with your provider to review any concerns or get any updates. They will be working alongside you to help nurture your baby and give them the best care possible.

## BABIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Your baby with special needs should have special considerations. Your decision to return to work or school will be based on what care is available in your area and how specialized your baby's care needs to be. Your pediatrician can be your best guide in determining whether your baby is ready for group care.





## THINGS YOUR PROVIDER SHOULD EXPECT FROM YOU:

**OPEN COMMUNICATION:** By keeping an open dialogue with the provider, the best interests of your child will remain a priority.

**AGREEMENT ON TERMS:** Understand fully the contracts and policies of your day care and know what you are agreeing to. Now is the time for questions and answers about policies. See to it that your provider gets paid on time and that they have all the supplies they have requested you to bring. Pick up your child at the time you have agreed upon and call ahead if you are going to be late.

**HONEST, TRUST AND RESPECT:** Trust yourself that you have chosen the best provider to give your child the care he deserves. Being honest and open will feed that trust. Respect the awesome and demanding responsibility your provider takes on every day. Know that the attachment your child makes to the provider does not diminish the love he has for you.

**ADVANCE NOTICE OF CHANGES:** Sometimes things happen at the last minute of which we have no control. But providers deserve notice as quickly as possible if there is a change in your work hours, if you are planning time off or you are terminating the care.

**DON'T SEND SICK KIDS:** Providers are required to adhere to licensing standards concerning children who are too ill to come to day care. Colds and flu and other communicable diseases spread quickly in day care environments, putting not only other children at risk but jeopardizing the health of the provider and their family as well.



**West Central Child Care Connection** is a referral service only. We do not endorse or recommend any child care provider or center. A listing with our agency is not a guarantee of the quality of the program.

DCFS is the agency that investigates complaints about providers. They operate a day care information line that provides parents with licensing compliance information about licensed programs.

The Day Care Information Line can be reached at 1-877-746-0829 or <http://sunshine.dcf.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/Daycare/Search.aspx>

## HOTLINE INFORMATION

Everyone is alarmed by reports of child abuse in child care programs. Concern about abuse can make some parents feel anxious about using child care at all. Be reassured that child care providers are caring and dedicated people who want your child to be safe and secure.

If you suspect or know of any incident of child abuse, call the 24-hour child abuse hotline:

**1-800-25ABUSE**

# LOVE KIDS?

## WANT TO STAY HOME WITH YOUR OWN BABY AND MAKE A LIVING TOO?

Consider offering child care in your own home. West Central Child Care Connection has the tools and resources to help you explore the possibilities. It could be the right decision for right now.

### The benefits of a Family Child Care business:

- Earn an income while staying at home with your own child.
- Help other families find a solution to their child care needs.
- Allow your baby to grow and socialize with built in playmates.



You can calculate your savings in gas, clothes and food costs but **your time spent with your baby is immeasurable.**

You can determine the length of time you wish to work at home. You might choose to help out another family for a few months as a license exempt provider or become licensed in a new career!



Having a newborn may seem like you are stuck in the cycle of feeding, burping, diapering and cleaning up forever. But seeing your babies grow into little kids is the greatest puzzle of parenting...it moves in slow motion at fast speed all at the same time! Enjoy the moments before they become memories.

—Anonymous



**West Central Child Care Connection** (WCCCC) is a resource and referral agency dedicated to supporting children, families, and the child care community by promoting options in accessibility, affordability, and quality care. As part of the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, WCCCC provides services to parents and providers in the counties of: Adams, Brown, Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Hancock, Jersey, Pike and Schuyler.

## **West Central Child Care Connection**

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