



Child Care in North Carolina

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CCR&R Council
North Carolina Child Care Resource & Referral Council





Choosing a child care program is one of the most important early decisions you'll make for your child.

The quality of the program you choose matters! Research indicates that children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development are positively impacted by high quality and negatively impacted by poor quality.

Child care that provides a safe, stable, and stimulating environment helps to nurture your child's healthy development, better prepares him or her for kindergarten, and makes it possible for you to work or attend school.

Child Care Licensing

Child care programs are licensed and/or regulated by the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE).

A child care program is required to be licensed if it serves:

- three or more unrelated children under the age of 13;
- on a regular basis (at least one day per week);
- for more than four but less than 24 hours per day.

Child care requirements are designed to protect the health, safety and well-being of your child while he or she is in child care. Basic requirements that must be met address staff qualifications and training, staff/child ratios, health and safety, space and equipment, curriculum, transportation, program records, and discipline and behavior management. All regulated child care programs must maintain at least a 75% compliance rate with these requirements. Child care centers and family child care homes are visited at least once a year by DCDEE for program monitoring.

Types of Care

Your family can choose from among many different types of programs including both programs that are regulated by DCDEE and programs that are license-exempt/legally operating. Learning about the types of child care that are available can help you find the right fit for your child and family.

Regulated child care in North Carolina includes:

Licensed Child Care Centers (CCC) are programs where 6 to 12 children (or 15 children if school-age only) are cared for in a home (Center in a Residence) or where three or more children are cared for in a building other than a home, including stand-alone buildings, schools, churches, synagogues, and mosques. Children are usually grouped in classrooms by age. As they grow, children typically move to the next age group with a different classroom teacher.

Licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) are smaller programs offered in a provider's home for more than two children not related to the provider. These programs offer a home-like setting and opportunity for siblings to be cared for together. A FCCH may care for up to eight children, with no more than five preschool children in care at any given time, including the provider's own preschool-age children.

Developmental Day Centers are licensed programs that serve children ages birth through 21 who are diagnosed with developmental delays, developmental disabilities, or have been identified with a diagnosed physical or cognitive condition which has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay. These programs are designed to meet the individualized needs of children in areas of self-help, physical (gross/fine motor), language and speech, and cognitive and psychosocial skills.

Religious-sponsored child care facilities (GS 110-106) are child care programs operated by a church, synagogue, mosque or school of religious charter that are regulated, but not licensed. These programs operate with a Notice of Compliance from DCDEE and must meet required NC health and safety standards but are exempt from requirements related to staff qualifications, corporal punishment, and child activities.

Programs that are not required to be regulated, but may choose to do so, include, but are not limited to:

Part-Day Preschools serving children birth to age 5 that operate for up to 4 hours/day;

School-Age Child Care serving children ages 5 to 13 before and/or after school hours up to 4 hours/day, and during school holidays and vacations;

Drop-in or short-term care provided while parents participate in activities that are not employment related, and where the parents are

on the premises or otherwise easily accessible; **Recreational programs** operated for less than four consecutive months in a year (e.g. summer camps);

Legally Exempt Family Child Care Homes may serve up to two non-related children (in addition to the provider's own children) without being licensed by DCDEE.

Please visit DCDEE's website for a full list of license-exempt programs:

www.ncchildcare.nc.gov/parents/pr_sn2_ov_lr.asp

Contact your local child care resource & referral (CCR&R) agency (see back pages) for more information and help finding a child care program that meets your family's needs.

Star Rated License

Education of staff caring for children and the daily program environment are two of the most important parts of high quality child care. NC has a star rated license system which awards programs one to five stars based on state-defined standards related to staff education and program quality. This system was designed to help parents more easily differentiate the quality of child care programs.

One star means a program meets minimum licensing requirements. Two to five stars means a program has voluntarily met progressively higher standards in staff education and program quality.

Staff Education reflects the education and experience of a program's staff (which positively impacts program quality).

Program Standards reflects the quality of care children receive, and assesses child/adult interactions, classroom materials and indoor/outdoor equipment available for children, indoor/outdoor space per child, and staff-to-child ratios.

Child care programs can earn up to seven points in each of these areas. One extra "quality point" may be earned by meeting additional education or program criteria not previously addressed

under the Staff Education or Program Standards components such as further reducing staff-child ratios, using an approved curriculum, or obtaining higher education certification, credentials, or additional training hours. The chart below shows how many points programs can earn for staff-child ratios.

Staff to Child Ratios for Child Care Centers

Age	Ratio Requirements for the Star Rated License		
	1 Point	2 - 6 Points	7 Points
Infants (Birth to 12 months)	1:5	1:5	1:4
Toddlers (12 to 23 months)	1:6	1:6	1:5
2 years old (24 to 36 months)	1:10	1:9	1:8
3 years old	1:15	1:10	1:9
4 years old	1:20	1:13	1:12
5 years old	1:25	1:15	1:14
6 years and older	1:25	1:20	1:19

Child care licenses must be posted where you can see them. When visiting a program, look for its license. Look at the license to see how many program and staff education points the program has earned. If a program has low points and a low star rating, ask why and find out what their plans are to improve quality. The following sample license shows the star rating and points earned by a program.

Sample License

Shows the number of stars earned (shaded) out of the number of stars possible (blank)

Shows the name and physical location of the program

Shows how many points the program earned in each of the two components

Shows basic licensing information such as number of children allowed, ages allowed and any restrictions

Quality Child Care

High quality child care is consistently shown to have positive benefits for children. When visiting a program you'll want to look for these important signs of quality child care:

- Higher star rating**
 The program license is posted and the program has a higher star rating (if applicable) which means better quality care for your child.
- Few children per staff**
 A small number of children for each staff member allows each child to receive individualized attention and care.
- Small group size**
 Small group size promotes a nurturing, secure setting.
- Developmentally-appropriate curriculum**
 The program uses a plan to encourage learning and involve children in activities that suit their ages and developmental stages.
- Positive interaction**
 Children communicate with and learn from staff and each other.
- Consistent supervision of children**
 Each staff member is responsible for the same children each day.



- **Well-trained, dedicated staff**
Staff has education and training in child development and early education. The program has little staff turnover.
- **Ongoing family-staff communication**
Families are well-informed about their children's activities and progress and are encouraged to be involved in the program.
- **Clean, safe surroundings**
Clean indoor and outdoor areas provide room for children to play and interact safely.
- **Healthy, safe and nutritious habits**
Meeting the health, safety, and nutrition needs of your child allows children to learn and grow.

Steps to finding a child care program and for more information about quality child care

- 1) **Contact your local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agency** (see back pages). Trained CCR&R specialists will ask about your needs, discuss child care options and quality indicators, and provide referrals to child care programs that address the needs you identified. They will also provide information on other resources, including financial aid, that may be available to you and your family.
- 2) **Call child care programs.** Ask if there is space for your child and ask other preliminary questions.
- 3) **Visit at least 3 programs.** Make appointments for your first visits, and then make extra drop in visits. Look at how caregivers interact with children, at other signs of quality child care, and ask questions about what you see that is important to you.
- 4) **Get references.** Other parents who have children in the program can provide valuable information.
- 5) **Check the program's licensing compliance history**
- 6) **Choose the program that feels like the best fit for you and your child.**

REVIEWING LICENSING COMPLIANCE HISTORY, VIOLATIONS, AND/OR PAST COMPLAINTS

You may review the last three years of a child care program's licensing compliance history which includes violations and/or past complaints/ investigations. To review files online, visit www.ncchildcare.nc.gov

Click on 'Search for Child Care' magnifying glass and follow the prompts until you reach Actions Taken and DCDEE Visits, which will tell you if NC DCDEE has taken any actions against the program and the nature of those actions. Paper copies of program files may be requested online, by calling 1-800-859-0829 or by visiting NC DCDEE in person (see www.ncchildcare.nc.gov for address).

REPORTING A CONCERN ABOUT A CHILD CARE PROGRAM

North Carolina law requires DCDEE staff to investigate a licensed child care program when there has been a complaint. If you believe that a child care provider is not meeting licensing requirements; is not providing for a child's health, safety, and well-being; or if you have questions, contact NC DCDEE at (800) 859-0829 or visit www.ncchildcare.nc.gov.

PAYING FOR CHILD CARE

Child care is expensive for most families and you may be one of many families that struggle to pay for it. In fact, child care is often the second highest family expense, after rent or mortgage payments (and costing more than a year of tuition at an in-state college). The good news is that there may be a variety of resources available in your community for child care financial aid or no-cost child care programs such as:

NC's Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program (SCCA Program) is locally administered in each county and uses state and federal funding (including Smart Start funds) to assist low-income families with the cost of child care. In most cases, parents must be working at least 30 hours per week, attending school 20 hours (16 hours for high school students) per week, or doing a combination

of both. Families receive a voucher for child care subsidy and are required to choose a 3-star, 4-star, 5-star or GS110-106 participating program that best meets the needs of the child and family. In many counties there is a waiting list for child care subsidy. If your family is eligible, you are encouraged to put your name on the waiting list for services for when funding becomes available.

North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) is a state-funded, statewide, voluntary program that helps prepare eligible 4-year-old children for school success by providing them with high quality pre-school experiences. *NC Pre-K* is free, and priority is given to low-income children who have not been in child care, who have special needs, are from a home where little to no English is spoken or have at least one active duty military parent. *NC Pre-K* classrooms operate in centers and school settings for 6 1/2 hours per day, follow the public school calendar, meet a 1:9 staff-to-child ratio, and have no more than 18 children in a classroom.

Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally-funded, community-based program for low-income pregnant women, and families with young children from birth to age 3. *EHS* services are free, promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women and enhance the development of infants and toddlers.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) is a federally-funded program available in participating child care programs in some NC communities. *EHS-CCP* enhances the quality and comprehensiveness of infant-toddler care and provides health and family support services to enrolled low-income birth to three-year-old children and their families, and prepares children for transition into Head Start and preschool.

Head Start (HS) is a federally-funded, free, community-based program for children ages 3 to 5 from low-income families that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children by providing educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services.

For more information, contact your local CCR&R by finding your county in the list below.

Region 1 - Albemarle Alliance for Children and Families:
Counties served: Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans
1-800-262-8314 or <http://albemarleacf.org/what-we-do/for-families/>

- Children & Youth Partnership for Dare County
County served: Dare
252-441-4737 or <http://darekids.org/our-services>

Region 2 - Craven Smart Start, Inc. CCR&R
Counties served: Beaufort, Craven, Hyde, Pamlico, Tyrrell, Washington
Call: 866-262-5300 ext. 23 or <http://www.cravensmartstart.org/child-care/>

Region 3 - ChildLinks / Martin-Pitt Partnership for Children
Counties served: Carteret, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Pitt
1-855-730-5798 or <http://www.mppfc.org/parents/child-care-referral/>

- Onslow County Partnership for Children
County served: Onslow
1-888-378-2470 or <http://www.onslowkids.org>

Region 4 - Puzzles / Southeastern CCR&R
Counties served: Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover, Pender, Sampson
1-800-653-5212 or <https://www.puzzlesregion.com/parents.php>

Region 5 - Partnership for Children of Cumberland County
Counties served: Anson, Cumberland, Hoke, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Scotland
1-877-230-3024 or <https://ccpfc.org/families/child-care-search-and-subsidy/>

Region 6 - Child Care Resources Inc.
Counties served: Cabarrus, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, Union
704-348-2181 or www.findchildcareennc.com

Region 7 - Child Care Connections of Cleveland County, Inc.
Counties served: Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln
704-487-7778 or <http://www.cchildcareconnections.org>

- The Children's Resource Center of Catawba County
County served: Catawba
828-695-6565 or <https://childrensresourcecenter.org/>

Region 8 - Southwestern Child Development Commission
Counties served: Buncombe, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania

1-877-752-5955 or <http://www.swcdcinc.org/family-services/finding-quality-child-care.php>

Region 9 - Child Care Solutions / Iredell County Partnership for Young Children

Counties served: Alexander, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Iredell, McDowell, Mitchell, Watauga, Yancey

877-670-8735 or <http://region9ccrr.org/region9-resource-referral/>

Region 10 – Child Care Resource Center

Counties served: Alleghany, Ashe, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Stokes, Surry, Wilkes, Yadkin

336-245-4900 or <http://www.childcareresourcecenter.org>

Region 11 - Regional CCR&R of Guilford Child Development

Counties served: Guilford, Randolph, Rockingham

1-800-289-5098 or <http://guilfordchilddev.org/parents/care/>

Region 12 - Child Care Services Association

Counties served: Alamance, Caswell, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake

1-855-327-5933 or <http://www.childcareservices.org/fs/finding/>

Region 13 – Chatham Co. Partnership for Children

Counties served: Chatham, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, Wayne

1-855-231-8717 or <http://chathamkids.org/families/findcare/>

Region 14 - Down East Partnership for Children

Counties served: Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Warren, Wilson

1-888-285-0849 or <http://depc.org/searching-for-child-care/>