

# Parent's Guide to Child Care Licensing

Office of the City Clerk, Boise, Idaho

Matching the needs of your child and your own needs with the childcare available is a time-consuming process. It often takes extra time and effort to find high quality care. This section can help you to find high quality care by explaining the role of licensing and accreditation.

## Licensing and Accreditation

One means of determining a child care provider's commitment to quality is whether the provider is licensed and accredited (or working toward accreditation). Licensing indicates that minimum standards have been met, whereas accreditation means that the child care provider has gone beyond the minimum standards and is voluntarily striving to achieve high quality care.

Boise City's child care licensing law is considered to be the leader in Idaho. Often State statutes have used the city's law as its model. Our Child Care Code has many provisions that are more stringent than the State Code. The process that really makes the difference is our continuous and positive code enforcement system.

## Licensing

Anyone not related to a child by blood or marriage and providing care for the child outside of the child's home must be licensed within the City of Boise. Licensing includes an on-site visit to assure that basic minimum requirements (for health, safety, and child/staff ratios) have been met and periodic inspections to monitor continued compliance. This includes inspections by the local health department, the fire department, and the licensing agency.

## Accreditation

Two organizations accredit childcare, one accredits early childhood programs and the other accredits childcare homes. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), through its National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, accredits early childhood programs, childcare centers, pre-schools, kindergartens, and before and after school programs. The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accredits childcare homes. A discussion of each of these organizations follows.

**National Association for the Education of Young Children.** NAEYC is a nonprofit professional organization of more than 90,000 members dedicated to improving the quality of care and education provided to our nation's young children. The Association administers the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a voluntary, national, accreditation system for high-quality early childhood programs.

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The accreditation process examines the total child care program; however, emphasis is placed on the quality of interactions among staff and children and the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum what really happens to the children. Health and safety, staffing, staff qualifications, communication with families, physical environment, administration, and nutrition and food service are all reviewed during accreditation, but primary consideration is given to the nature of the child's experience.

As of fall 1998, over 6,000 programs serving more than a half million children have achieved NAEYC accreditation. For a list of accredited programs, write NAEYC, 1509 16th Street, NW. Washington, DC 20036, phone at (202) 232-8777 or (800) 424-2460 or visit their website at [NAEYC](#).

**The National Association for Family Child Care.** NAFCC accredits family day care homes that offer high quality child care services. Accreditation is granted to those home care providers who not only meet the child care standards defined by State licensing and registration agencies, but also have demonstrated a commitment to reach beyond these minimum requirements to achieve standards of excellence. The dimensions of childcare assessed by NAFCC are safety, health, nutrition, interaction between children and care provider, learning environment, outdoor environment, and professional responsibility. For a list of accredited homes in your State write NAFCC, 525 SW 5th Street, Suite A, Des Moines, IA 50309-4501, phone at (515) 282-8192, or visit their website at [NAFCC](#).

Keep in mind that the accreditation process of the NAEYC process began operation in September 1985 and the NAFCC began in June 1988. Therefore, you may wish to ask whether the child care center/home is accredited.

## Staff/Child Ratios at Child Care Centers

The City of Boise provides the following regulation for staff/child ratios at child care centers. Child care providers must follow these guidelines at all times.

For **infants** (birth-23 months), a group of infants shall be supervised by one teacher for every six infants (1:6); For **toddlers** (24-47 months), a group of toddlers shall be supervised by one teacher for every ten children (1:10); In the **four-to-twelve year old** age bracket, a group of these children shall be supervised by one teacher for every 12 children (1:12). In groups **where the age ranges are mixed** between infant, toddler, and school aged, the group shall be supervised by one teacher for every 10 children (1:10) or using the point system, shall be supervised by one teacher for every 10 points, whichever results in less children. The point system assigns point values to each child supervised as follows: infants - 2 points each, toddlers - 1 point each, and school aged children - 1/2 point each. The point system shall always be used in every mixed group situation to determine if a lower ratio than (1:10) is required because of the ages of the children in the group.

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## Recommended Staff/Child Ratios Within Single Age Range Group Size.\*

Age of Children	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	30
Infants (birth to 23 mos.)	1:6	2:8	2:10	2:12	3:14	3:16	3:18	4:20	4:22	4:24	5:30
Toddlers (24 to 44 mos.)	1:6	1:8	1:10	2:12	2:14	2:16	2:18	2:20	3:22	3:24	3:30
2-year-olds up to 12 year olds	1:6	1:8	1:10	1:12	2:14	2:16	2:18	2:20	2:22	2:24	3:30

\*Smaller group sizes and lower staff-child ratios have been found to be strong predictors of compliance with indicators of quality such as positive interactions among staff and children and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Variations in group sizes and ratios are acceptable in cases where the program demonstrates a very high level of compliance with criteria for interactions, curriculum, staff qualifications, health and safety, and physical environment.

Choosing childcare arrangements is a very personal decision for parents. It is one of the most important decisions a parent can make since the care children receive influences their future development.

There are three basic types of childcare: childcare centers, childcare homes, and child care in your own home. This section describes these basic types and also outlines some additional child care programs that may be available in your community: before and after school care; vacation and summer programs; sick child/back-up/emergency care; part-day preschool programs and nursery schools; programs for children with special needs; and the Head Start Program.

### Child Care Centers

A childcare center provides care for groups of children by a staff of caregivers. The staff have some type of early childhood education training. Centers are licensed by the City and more centers are earning accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Centers are either privately operated for profit by a chain or individual, or operated by non-profit agencies, such as churches, public schools, government agencies, or non-profit vendors.

### Child Care Homes

A childcare home provides care for a small group of children in the caregiver's home. These homes are licensed by the city. More and more homes are becoming accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC).

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## Before and After School Care

There are child care programs in our community that specialize in providing care for elementary school aged children before and after normal school hours. These programs may be operated by child care centers, recreation centers, churches, and youth organizations, such as Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Boys Clubs of America and the local school district. These programs are also licensed by the City of Boise.

## Vacation and Summer Programs

Vacation and summer programs are usually for school-age children, although in some areas they are also available for preschool children. These programs provide a variety of activities such as arts and crafts, swimming, drama, and organized sports. Vacation or summer programs are often operated by the local parks and recreation departments, community organizations, and child care centers. These programs are also licensed by the City of Boise.

## Sick Child/Back-Up/Emergency Care

All children get sick from time to time. Most childcare centers have policies about sick children and very few allow children with contagious diseases to attend. Some day care centers set aside space to care for mildly ill children. These centers usually have a nurse on staff or on call. The need for such sick child day care centers has produced many centers opened around the country. To find out if there is a center in your area, contact the [National Association of Sick Child Day Care Centers, \(804\) 747-5900](#).

Caregivers also can get sick. Child care centers generally make arrangements for substitutes when a caregiver is ill; however, if you choose a child care home, you will need to ask if the caregiver has plans for someone to care for your child when the caregiver is sick. It is a good idea to plan for back-up care. When looking for back-up care, you may want to consider childcare centers and homes, neighbors, close friends, or local college students. Discuss your needs for back-up care with potential providers beforehand to be sure they will be available when you need them. It is a good idea to complete the necessary documents and decide on any fees before you need the back-up care.

## Programs for Children with Special Needs

Finding quality childcare for children with disabilities can be especially challenging for parents. However, information and assistance is available from national and community organizations and parent groups to make the search easier. One of the organizations that can help parents of special needs children find child care is the [National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities \(NICHCY\)](#).

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It can send you free of charge two very useful publications, [A Parent's Guide: Accessing Programs for Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-schoolers with Disabilities](#) and [A Parent's Guide: Accessing Parent Groups](#). NICHCY can also send you a State Resource Sheet that lists the addresses and phone numbers of the agencies and organizations in your State that can assist parents of children with disabilities, and a National Resource Sheet that lists addresses and phone numbers of the national disabilities organizations and clearinghouses. [NICHCY's toll-free phone number is 1-800-695-0285.](#)

It is also important to note that regardless of your child's specific disability, you may always call the local office of any of the national disabilities organizations, such as United Cerebral Palsy Association, National Down Syndrome Society, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Spina Bifida Association of America, and March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.

The staff of these and other disability organizations generally know about the services provided in their communities and can usually help parents even if their child has a disability different from the one that is the focus of the organization.

[The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) covers childcare centers and family day care homes. Information about the requirements of the ADA, as well as informal guidance in understanding and complying with the ADA, can be obtained by contacting the U.S. Department of Justice, Public Access Section of the Civil Rights Division, P.O. Box 66738, Washington, DC 20035-6738, (202) 514-0301.

## Head Start Program

Head Start is a nationwide Federally funded early childhood program for low-income preschool children, primarily ages three to five. It is designed to provide comprehensive services in preparation for public school. Services include cognitive and language development, medical, dental, mental health, nutritional, and social services. The program places particular emphasis on parental involvement. For information about specific eligibility requirements, contact 344-9187. These programs are also licensed by the City of Boise.

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This section describes steps a parent can take in evaluating childcare centers or homes prior to selecting one. It suggests questions to ask when you phone ahead to child care centers or homes, offers ideas of what to look for when visiting child care centers or homes, and describes how to monitor the quality of care your child receives while in the center or home you have selected. Especially useful is a checklist that can be copied and brought along on the initial visit to the centers or homes. The checklists can then be used in evaluating your choices after visits to several centers or homes.

The first step in finding quality care is to identify several childcare providers in your area. Once you have obtained a list of several centers or homes, you may want to phone them, using the suggested "telephone interview questions" to screen out those you are not interested in, and to begin evaluating those you would like to consider further. You will then want to visit several centers and/or homes to collect information before deciding which is the best situation for your child. Consider the topics covered in the interviews when making a decision or following up.

## **Telephone Interview**

The telephone interview questions provided on the following pages can help you to screen the child care centers/homes. There are separate questions for centers and homes. They can help you determine whether the provider's services meet your needs and your child's needs, and also help you reduce the amount of time spent actually visiting the child care providers. Before beginning your telephone interviews, you may want to make a few copies of these forms and have them available when calling the centers/homes on your list.

## **On-Site Interview**

The on-site visit will allow you to make your final decision. It is best to visit several different child care sites to give you a basis for comparison. Start with the providers who interested you most after your telephone interviews. Be sure to allow enough time for a thorough visit. You may wish to use the following points, as well as the checklist that follows on pages 14-15, to observe and evaluate the child care centers/homes. You may want to make a few copies of the checklist and take them along when visiting the centers/homes.

Schedule a time to visit when the program is "in session" and the children are awake. Avoid the early afternoon hours when most children are napping.

- In two-parent homes, both parents should try to visit.
- Avoid asking questions that tell the provider what you want to hear such as "You always hold babies when you feed them, don't you?" Instead, ask open-ended questions such as "How do you feed the babies?"

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- If you are able to see children arriving for the day or leaving at the end of the day, you can see how other parents and the staff relate to each other. You will also be able to see how other children feel about coming to the center/home and leaving.

## **Follow-up Monitoring**

- Once you select a childcare center or home, you will need to monitor the quality of care your child receives. This can be accomplished when you:
- Involve yourself in your child's program and parent activities.
- Observe your child in the child care setting and discuss any problems as soon as they appear.
- Ask your child what he or she does and how he or she feels about the childcare center and/or home. Listen carefully to the responses. Follow up and ask questions when you have concerns.
- Drop in frequently to observe the number of children and caregivers present, whether there is supervision at all times, the conditions of the facility, and the daily activities.
- Communicate with other parents in the program.

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## Telephone Interview Questions for Child Care Centers

Name of center:

Phone number:

Name of person answering the questions:

Address:

Tell the person answering the phone your name and the age of the child needing care. Ask if he or she has time to answer a few questions. If not, ask when it would be a good time to call back.

**1.** Do you have any openings?

If not, do you anticipate having openings in the near future?

**2.** Is the center licensed?

By whom?

**3.** Is the center accredited?

If not, does the center plan to pursue accreditation?

**4.** What is the cost per week? \$

What does this include? (e.g., snacks, meals, diapers)

**5.** Are there any extra costs?

**6.** Is transportation available?

To and from what locations?

**7.** What days and hours is care available?

**8.** Does the center close for vacations, holidays, staff training, or other reasons?

**9.** Is sick care available?

What are the policies regarding sick children?

**10.** How many children in each group?

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11. How many caregivers for each group?
12. What is the total number of caregivers in the center?
13. How many caregivers have left the center during the past year?
14. What are the education and training requirements for the caregivers?
15. What meals are served?
16. Is there a safe outside play area?
17. What are some sample activities that my child would be involved in?
18. How does the center communicate the curriculum to the parents?
19. Is there a weekly and/or daily written plan available to parents?
20. Does the center provide written policies?
21. Are parents permitted to visit their children unannounced at any time during the day?

Add other questions you may have:

If the basic information sounds like it will meet your needs, ask when you can visit. Be sure to make your appointment for a time the children will be present.

- Sounds O.K.
- Maybe
- Not for me
- Date and time for visit
- Directions

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## Telephone Interview Questions for Child Care Homes

Name of caregiver:

Phone number:

Address:

Tell the caregiver your name and the age of the child needing care. Ask if he or she has time to answer a few questions. If not, ask when it would be a good time to call back.

**1.** Do you have any openings?

If not, do you anticipate having openings in the near future?

**2.** Is your home licensed?

By whom?

**3.** Is your home accredited?

If not, do you plan to pursue accreditation?

**4.** What is the cost?

What does this include? (e.g., snacks, meals, diapers)

Are there any extra costs?

**5.** What days and hours is care available?

**6.** If you are sick or on vacation, are there provisions for backup care?

**7.** What do you do when a child is sick?

**8.** How many other children are cared for in your home?

(See page 6 for recommended staff/child ratios)

**9.** What meals are served?

**10.** Is there a safe outside play area?

**11.** What are some sample activities that my child would be involved in?

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12. Are parents permitted to visit unannounced any time during the day?

Add other questions you may have:

If the basic information sounds like it will meet your needs, ask when you can visit. Be sure to make your appointment for a time the children will be present.

- Sounds O.K.
- Maybe
- Not for me
- Date and time for visit Directions

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## On-Site Interview Checklist

Center/Home provider:

Phone number:

Address:

### How does it LOOK?

1. Is it clean, colorful, and in good repair?

2. Is there a safe outside place to play?

3. Is it "child proof"?

Medicines and cleaning supplies are out of reach.

The fire evacuation plan is satisfactory.

Electrical outlets are covered or above children's reach.

4. Are there different areas for each activity and are you satisfied with the amount of space for each?

5. Are there at least 35 square feet per child of usable playroom floor space

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inside and at least 75 square feet per child of outside play space?

6. Are there sufficient numbers and a variety of toys that will appeal to your child and that are in good condition?

7. Are the meals nutritious? Do they include foods your child will eat? (Ask to see a weekly menu.)

## **How does it SOUND?**

1. Do the children's voices sound happy and are they at a reasonable noise level?

2. Are the caregivers' voices calm and caring?

3. Is there children's music or singing at some time during the day?

## **The STAFF:**

1. Are the caregivers actively involved with the children, not talking to each other, doing paperwork, or "chores"?

2. Are good health habits followed (hand washing, diaper changing)?

3. Are the parents encouraged to make unscheduled visits?

4. Do the caregivers establish rules that children can follow?

5. Do the caregivers spend time holding and talking to the children?

6. Are the caregivers warm and friendly toward the children?

7. Do the caregivers treat each child as an individual?

8. Is there a schedule of activities posted?

9. Is the discipline fair and consistent without yelling or hitting?

10. Are the children supervised at all times?

11. Do the caregivers talk to the children frequently, pleasantly, and in a way the children can understand?

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## **The CHILDREN:**

1. Do the children seem to be comfortable, happy, and enjoying themselves?
2. Are the children encouraged to be independent, allowed to "do it myself"?
3. Is there a balanced schedule that includes active and quiet times, group and individual times, and indoor and outdoor play?
4. Are the children comforted when needed?
5. Are the children actively engaged in a variety of "hands-on" activities appropriate to their age and interests?
6. Are the children allowed to make choices among a variety of activities and learning opportunities?

## **How do YOU Feel?**

1. Do you feel your child will be well cared for?
2. Do you feel the home/center is safe and cheerful?
3. Do you feel your child can learn here?
4. Would you feel comfortable leaving your child here?
5. Would you feel comfortable calling or visiting unannounced at any time?
6. Would you feel comfortable talking and working with the caregivers?

If, after the visit, you are considering sending your child to this center or home, ask for several references, preferably parents of children already participating. You will want to contact these parents and ask them about their experiences with the center/home.