



Choose the best child care for your family!

Your step-by-step guide  
to giving your child the  
best start in life through  
Quality Child Care



Family & Community Services

1904 First Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
205 252-1991, ext 317

[www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org)

One of the most important decisions parents make is choosing a child care program. Enrolling your child in a quality program means your child is receiving care from a caring, trained child care provider in a safe, healthy, nurturing and stimulating learning environment. Your child's experience in child care will begin your child's foundation of learning that will last a lifetime!

This brochure will help you:

- select the best quality program for your child
- understand your child care options
- access financial assistance available to help pay for child care

## Selecting Quality Programs

Childcare Resources promotes *quality* care and education of children by providing information, education and assistance to families, providers of child care and the community. *Childcare Resources does not license, endorse or recommend any provider. Only you can determine whether the quality of care is appropriate for your child.* When beginning your child care search:

- Call, go on-line or visit Childcare Resources for a customized listing of child care options.
- Start the process early as some programs may have waiting lists.
- Make appointments and visit several programs.
- Tour the entire center, including the outdoor play area.
- Use the Six Quality Indicators to compare programs.
- After the initial visit, make an unannounced drop-by visit before making a final decision.

# 6 Quality Indicators

## **Teacher to child ratio**

How many children are attended by each caregiver? The fewer the number of children per caregiver the better attention your child will receive.

## **Group size**

How many children will be in your child's group? Smaller groups tend to be calmer and safer environments – more like family settings.

## **Caregiver education and turnover**

Ask about the caregivers' training and education. Do teachers attend classes and workshops? How long have the teachers been teaching in the program? Young children do better when they have a knowledgeable consistent caregiver for a least a year.

## **Health and Safety**

Is the program licensed or exempt from licensure? Why or why not? What is the discipline policy? Is the environment clean and organized?

## **Family Involvement**

Are parents welcome to participate and share ideas with the program? How will the teacher share information with you about your child's day?

## **Accreditation**

Nationally accredited programs are measured by standards of quality that have been established by national child care organizations.

**For more information about national accreditation visit:**

National Association for the Education of Young Children [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

National Association of Child Care Professionals [www.naccp.org](http://www.naccp.org)

National Early Childhood Program Accreditation [www.necpa.net](http://www.necpa.net)

National Association for Family Child Care [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)

National After School Association [www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)

# C hildcare Options

**Child Care Centers** provide care for children in their own buildings, community centers, places of worship or other facilities. Centers may provide care for infants through school-age children – usually separated into same or similar-age groups. In Alabama, legally operating child care centers can be licensed or exempt from licensure. The licensing authority is the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR). The health department, the fire department and the Department of Human Resources inspect child care centers before awarding licenses. Licenses are valid for two years and should be on display in the center. Licensing is intended to set standards for operating a child care program. It is not a guarantee of high quality care. Parents have the right to visit the center at any time during operating hours. Providers exempt from licensure include centers operated by the following: religious or faith-based organizations, state agencies, local governments, military facilities and programs that operate less than 4 hours a day. .

## **Family Day Care Homes and Family Day Care Group Homes**

Family Day Care Homes provide care for no more than 6 unrelated children. Group Homes provide care for no more than 12 unrelated children with two or more caregivers present. Family Day Care Homes provide care for infants through school-age children in a multi-age group setting.

In Alabama, legally operating Family Day/Nighttime Care Homes and Group Day/Nighttime Homes must have a license if they are providing care for one or more unrelated children, with or without compensation, away from the child's home, for more than four hours in a 24-hour period. The licensing authority is the local county Department of Human Resources (DHR). The health department, the fire department and DHR inspect family day care providers before awarding a license. Licenses are valid for two years and should be on display in the homes. Licensing is intended to set standards for operating a child care facility. It is not a guarantee of high quality care. Parents have the right to visit the program anytime during operating hours.

# Childcare Options

**Preschool Programs (Mother's Day Out)** can be located in their own buildings, community centers or places of worship. Preschool Programs usually operate three to four hours a day, a few days a week for children ranging in age from infants through four-year olds.

**School-Age Child Care** generally takes place in child care centers, schools, community centers, YMCA/YWCA's or in conjunction with civic park and recreation programs. Care is typically available before and after school, on school holidays and during the summer. School-age child care programs offer care for children in kindergarten through usually thirteen years of age.

**Relative Child Care** arrangements occur when a family relative – grandparent, aunt, uncle or an adult sibling cares for a related child typically in a residential setting.

**In-Home Child Care** is when parents hire an individual nanny to come into their home to care for their children. As a nanny's employer, parents may be responsible for withholding and remitting payroll taxes, contributing to Social Security, and paying for worker's compensation, insurance and vacation time.

**Head Start and Early Head Start** are federal programs that promote the growth and development of children from low-income families. Parent involvement, health screenings and family support are included in the programs. Children ages 3 to 5 attend Head Start. Early Head Start serves families with children pre-birth to 3 years of age. Head Start and Early Head Start may be provided in centers or a home-based settings. Parents must meet eligibility requirements to enroll. For more information on Head Start and Early Head Start please call Childcare Resources.

**First Class, Alabama's Voluntary State Pre-K program** is managed by the Alabama Office of School Readiness (OSR), a division of the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs. OSR funds programs that provide quality preschool experiences to 4-year old children to prepare them for school. Pre-K sites are located throughout the state. For a complete listing of programs visit [www.children.alabama.gov](http://www.children.alabama.gov).

# F inancial Assistance

## **Child Care Subsidy**

The Office of Child Care Subsidy, a division of the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), administers the subsidized child care program funded through the Child Care and Development Fund. The program provides Alabama's low-income families with equal access to child care as they participate in work, educational or training activities. For information and an application visit [www.dhr.state.al.us](http://www.dhr.state.al.us).

## **Subsidized Child Care Program – Childcare Resources**

Childcare Resources administers a financial aid program for low-income working families who meet all five of the following eligibility requirements:

- Live in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby or Walker Counties
- Work (parent and spouse/partner) at least 35 hours a week
- Not eligible for child care assistance from DHR
- Apply for children up to 5 years of age (until eligible to start 5K)
- Qualify according to the Annual Income Eligibility Scale

For more information and an application visit [www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org) or call 205-252-1991 ext. 307.

## **Military Child Care Assistance**

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), through a partnership with the Department of Defense, offers military families child care assistance. The program subsidizes active duty and/or deployed service member's child care fees if they are unable to access child care on a military base. The program pays a portion of the family's child care fees directly to the child care provider. For eligibility information call Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246 or visit [www.naccrra.org](http://www.naccrra.org).

# Tax Credits

**Child and Dependent Care Credit** is available to people who, in order to work or to look for work, must pay for child care for dependents under the age of 13. The credit is also available to those who pay for the care of a spouse or a dependent of any age who is physically or mentally incapable of self care. The credit is a percentage, based on your adjusted gross income, of the amount of work-related child and dependent care expenses you paid to a care provider.

**Earned Income Tax Credit** is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. To qualify, taxpayers must meet certain requirements and file a tax return, even if they did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a tax return.

**Child Tax Credit** may help to reduce the federal income tax owed by up to \$1,000 for each qualifying child under the age of 17. A qualifying child is one who is claimed as your dependent; was under the age of 17 at the end of the year; is your son, daughter, adopted child, grandchild, stepchild or eligible foster child, your sibling, stepsibling or their descendant and is a U.S. citizen or resident alien. The credit is limited if your modified adjusted gross income is above a certain amount. The amount at which the phase-out begins depends on your filing status.

For more information on these and other tax credits visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

**Free Tax Preparation Service** is available through the United Way of Central Alabama call 1-866-869-4921 or 2-1-1 for more information.

**Pre-tax Accounts** for child and dependent care may be available through your employer. This option requires you to estimate your annual expenses (up to \$5,000 a year) and draw those funds throughout the year from an account that has been set up using pre-tax dollars from your payroll deductions. Ask your employer if this is available where you work.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Child Care Centers and Nighttime Centers

In Alabama, legally operating child care centers can be licensed or exempt from licensure. The licensing authority is the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR). The health department, the fire department and the Department of Human Resources inspect child care centers before awarding licenses. Licenses are valid for two years and should be on display in the centers. Licensing is intended to set standards for operating a child care program. It is not a guarantee of high quality care. Parents have the right to visit centers at any time during operating hours. Providers exempt from licensure include centers operated by the following: religious or faith-based organizations, state agencies, local governments, military facilities and programs that operate less than 4 hours a day.

## **Child Care Concerns and Complaints**

To report a licensing concern or ask if a center you are considering has had substantiated complaints, please contact DHR Child Care Services Division at 334-242-1425 or 1-866-528-1694. To review the complete DHR Minimum Standards manual for Child Care Centers and Nighttime Centers, please visit [www.dhr.state.al.us](http://www.dhr.state.al.us).

## **Child Care Director Qualifications**

The center director shall be at least 19 years of age and shall have at least 20 clock hours of training in administration and management and at least 4 clock hours of training in quality child care. In addition, the center director shall meet at least one of the following training categories:

120 clock hours of training in child care, a high school diploma or general education diploma (G.E.D.), and at least 12 months of working experience as a child care worker/teacher or as a director/program director in a licensed day care center or a Department approved setting. Training in child care shall include at least 20 clock hours in each of these areas: (a) child development; (b) health, safety and universal precautions; (c) quality child care and licensing; (d) the child care professional and the family; (e) language development; (f) positive discipline and guidance.

**OR**

A child development associate credential (CDA) or a certified child care professional certificate (CCP) from the National Child Care Association Inc. (NCCA) and a high school diploma or general education diploma (G.E.D.), and at least 12 months of working experience as a child care worker/teacher or as a director/program director in a licensed day care center or a Department approved setting.

**OR**

An associate degree in child development or early childhood education from a post-secondary school (technical, vocational, junior college) and at least 9 months of working experience as a child care worker/teacher or as a director/program director in a licensed day care center or a Department approved setting.

**OR**

A bachelor's degree in child development or early childhood education and at least 6 months of working experience as a child care worker/teacher or as a director/program director in a licensed day care center or a Department approved setting.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Child Care Centers and Nighttime Centers

## **Child Care Worker/Teacher Qualifications**

Child care workers/teachers who have primary responsibility for the care of a group of children shall be at least 19 years of age and shall have a high school diploma or general education diploma (G.E.D.). Within 30 days after employment, child care teachers shall have at least 12 clock hours of training in child care and development through participation in workshops, meetings, videotapes, or one-to-one consultation, unless written documentation of prior equivalent training is on file. Training in child care shall include at least 1 hour in each of these areas: (a) child development; (b) health, safety and universal precautions; (c) quality child care and licensing; (d) the child care professional and the family; (e) language development; (f) positive discipline and guidance.

Aides/assistant teachers who assist with groups of children shall be at least 16 years of age and shall have at least an 8th grade education, work under the direct supervision of a person qualified as a child care worker/teacher and shall not be counted in the required staff-child ratio.

## **Health and Safety**

Each child 2 months to lawful school age must have an Alabama Certificate of Immunization or a medical/religious exemption on file in the child care center. No child who appears ill may be admitted to the child care center. The center director must report suspected illness, injury or exposure to contagious disease to the parent/guardian. No medicine may be given to a child without a written and signed authorization from the parent/guardian. All medicine must be in the original container and in locked storage. In accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, all infants under 12 months should be placed on their backs to sleep, unless there is a note from a physician specifying otherwise. There must be a clearly posted list of emergency numbers and plans for care of children in emergency situations. At least one staff member with a current CPR/First Aid Certification must be in the center during operating hours. The center and grounds must be maintained in a clean and safe condition. All administrators, board members, teachers, assistants, substitutes, support staff and volunteers must complete a criminal background check.

## **Care of Children**

The parent/guardian must sign each child in upon arrival and out upon departure every day. The parent/guardian must provide written authorization before the center may release the child to anyone else. Children must be supervised at all times. Feeding and napping schedules of infants shall be planned with the parent/guardian. Breakfast or a morning snack, a mid-day meal and one afternoon snack must be provided each day. The menus should be posted. Children should spend time outdoors each day when weather permits. There should be a posted schedule and a variety of age appropriate indoor and outdoor activities for preschool and school-age children. A variety of age appropriate toys, games and play equipment should be available to the children. Corporal/physical punishment, verbal abuse and physical restraint are prohibited.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Child Care Centers and Nighttime Centers

## Staff to Child Ratio - Centers Providing Daytime Care

### Required Staff to Child Ratios in Child Care Centers (maintained at all times)

0 up to 18 months	1 teacher to 5 children
18 months up to 2-1/2 years	1 teacher to 7 children
24 months up to 36 months	1 teacher to 8 children
2-1/2 years up to 4 years	1 teacher to 11 children
4 years up to school age*	1 teacher to 18 children
School age* up to 8 years	1 teacher to 21 children
8 years and older	1 teacher to 22 children

*\*The term "school age" in this context refers to children of lawful school age who are enrolled in public or private school.*

### Required Staff to Child Ratios during Napping/Resting

0 up to 12 months	1 teacher to 5 children
18 months up to 2-1/2 years	1 teacher to 14 children
2-1/2 years and older	1 teacher to 36 children

*At least one person who meets child care worker qualifications shall be present in each room where children are napping/resting. Staff shall be able to see all the children in the room.*

## Staff to Child Ratio - Centers Providing Nighttime Care

Required staff to child ratios and groupings for day care centers shall be maintained while children are awake. Children shall be supervised at all times.

### Staff to Child Ratio for Sleeping Children in Nighttime Child Care

0 up to 18 months	1 teacher to 5 children
18 months up to 2-1/2 years	1 teacher to 14 children
2-1/2 years up to 4 years	1 teacher to 18 children
4 years and older	1 teacher to 25 children

*At least one person shall be present in each room of sleeping children. Staff shall be able to see children at all times.*

At least one person who is at least 19 years of age, who meets child care worker qualifications and has current Infant-Child CPR, shall be present at the center. All staff on duty shall be awake and alert to the needs of the children. There shall be at least two staff persons age 19 or older available in the center building or on the premises whenever children are present. The nighttime schedule shall be posted. Outdoor time shall be available to children during daylight hours. Any child who goes directly to school from the center shall be served breakfast unless breakfast is eaten at school. An evening meal shall be served to children. If a child is bathed, clean water, individual bar of soap, towel and washcloth shall be provided for each child. Each child should be bathed separately and be supervised while bathing.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Child Care Centers and Nighttime Centers

## Documents you should see posted in the center

- Most recent license, permit or approval from DHR
- Public notice form
- Most recent licensing evaluation form
- Most recent deficiency report, if applicable
- Corrective or adverse action notices, if applicable
- Most recent fire inspection report
- Most recent health department inspection report and food permit or written permission from health department to cater food
- Menu for meals and snacks
- Emergency names and telephone numbers for fire department, law enforcement, medical assistance, poison control center and substitute help
- Emergency procedures

## Questions you should ask when visiting a Child Care Center

- Are you licensed or exempt from licensure?
- How many children will be in my child's group?
- How long has the teacher who will take care of my child worked at the center?
- What training requirements do you have for your teachers?
- How will you help my child adjust to your center?
- How will you let me know about my child's day?
- How do you handle medical, fire and weather emergencies?
- May I drop in and visit at any time?
- What happens when my child's teacher is sick or on vacation?
- What safety precautions do you take when children go on field trips or are transported by bus or van?
- What fees do you charge and when are they due?

## Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

Alabama law is clear on reporting abuse and neglect of children under the age of 18. If you are someone who comes in regular contact with children – physician, teacher, social worker, nurse, child care worker – you should be aware of your legal obligation to report such incidents of suspected or obvious child abuse or neglect. If you are a concerned citizen, neighbor, friend or family member who is aware of such incidents, you should make a report to those who can take action. All Childcare Resources employees are mandated reporters. To report suspected child abuse and neglect please call:

Blount County	205-274-5200
Jefferson County	205-918-5100
Shelby County	205-669-3000
Walker County	205-387-5400

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Family Day Care and Group Day Care Homes

In Alabama, legally operating Family Day Care Homes, Family Nighttime Homes, Group Day Care Homes and Group Nighttime Homes must have a license if they are providing care for one or more unrelated children; with or without compensation; away from the child's home; for more than four hours in a 24-hour period. The licensing authority in Alabama is the local county Department of Human Resources (DHR). The health department, the fire department and DHR inspect the home before awarding a license. Licenses are valid for 2 years and should be on display in the home. Licensing is intended to set standards for operating a child care facility. It is not a guarantee of high quality care. Parents have the right to visit the program anytime during operating hours.

## Child Care Concerns and Complaints

To report a licensing concern or ask if a home you are considering has had substantiated complaints, please contact the local county Department of Human Resources in which the day care home is located.

Blount County	205-274-5200	Jefferson County	866-528-1694
Shelby County	205-669-3007	Walker County	205-387-5400

To review the complete DHR Minimum Standards for Family Day Care Homes, Family Nighttime Homes, Group Day Care Homes and Group Nighttime Homes please visit [www.dhr.state.al.us](http://www.dhr.state.al.us) or call 1-866-528-1694.

## Licensee Qualifications

The licensee shall be at least 19 years of age, must have a high school diploma or G.E.D., have current CPR/First Aid training and have at least 24 hours of clock training in child care and development prior to being licensed with at least 4 hours in each of the following areas:

(a) child development; (b) health, safety and universal precautions; (c) quality child care and licensing; (d) the child care professional and the family; (e) language development; (f) positive discipline and guidance.

Thereafter, the licensee shall have at least 20 clock hours of training related to child care each year.

## Assistant Caregiver Qualifications

The assistant caregiver must be at least 19 years of age, have a high school diploma or G.E.D., current CPR/First Aid training and have 12 clock hours of training in child care and development within the first 30 days of employment and at least 12 clock hours annually.

## Substitute Qualifications

Substitutes shall care for the children in the licensee's home. Substitutes shall be at least 19 years of age and have a high school diploma or G.E.D. and CPR/First Aid training.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Family Day Care and Group Day Care Homes

## **Health and Safety**

Each child 2 months to lawful school age must have an Alabama Certificate of Immunization or a medical/religious exemption on file in the child care center. No child who appears ill may be admitted to the day care home. The family day care operator must report suspected illness, injury or exposure to contagious disease to the parent/guardian. No medicine may be given to a child without a written and signed authorization from the parent/guardian. All medicine must be in the original container and maintained in a locked storage. In accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, all infants under 12 months should be placed on their back to sleep, unless the infant has a note from a physician specifying otherwise. There must be a clearly posted list of emergency numbers and plans for care of children in emergency situations. The family day care operator, assistant and substitute must have a current CPR/First Aid Certification. The home and grounds must be maintained in a clean and safe condition. The outdoor play area must be enclosed by a fence or a wall. The licensee, assistants, substitute and all adult members of the household must complete a criminal background check.

## **Care of Children**

A Family Day Care Home may care for no more than 6 unrelated children. A Group Day Care Home may care for 7 to 12 unrelated children. Whenever 7 or more children are present, at least 2 adult caregivers shall be present. If a substitute is used, either the licensee or the assistant caregiver shall be present supervising the children. The parent/guardian must sign each child in upon arrival and out upon departure every day. The parent/guardian must provide written authorization before the licensee may release the child to anyone else. Children must be supervised at all times. Feeding of infants shall be planned with the parent/guardian. Breakfast or a morning snack, a mid-day meal and one afternoon snack must be provided each day. Children should spend time outdoors each day when weather permits. A variety of age appropriate toys, games and play equipment should be available to the children. No child shall sleep or nap on the floor, upper bunk bed or water bed. Corporal/physical punishment, verbal abuse and physical restraint are prohibited.

## **Nighttime Care**

A Family Day Care or Group Day Care Home providing care 7:00 p.m. or later is considered to offer nighttime care and shall have a nighttime license. An evening meal shall be served to a child who is continuing in attendance from the day time program. If a child is bathed, clean water, individual bar of soap, towel and washcloth shall be provided for each child. Each child should be bathed separately and be supervised while bathing. A child under 18 months of age who receives his regular nights sleep at the Nighttime Home shall sleep alone in a crib. Each child 18 months or older shall sleep in a bed. In accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, all infants under 12 months should be placed on their back to sleep, unless the infant has a note from a physician specifying otherwise. Breakfast shall be served to each child who goes directly to school, unless breakfast is provided by the school or parent.

# Alabama Licensing Regulations for Family Day Care and Group Day Care Homes

## **Questions you should ask when visiting a Family Day Care Provider**

How long have you been operating a Family/Group Child Care Home?

How many children do you have enrolled?

What training have you taken this year?

How will you help my child adjust to your home?

What activities will you plan for my child?

How will you let me know about my child's day?

How do you handle behavior problems?

How do you handle medical, fire and weather emergencies?

May I drop in and visit anytime?

What happens when you are sick or on vacation?

What safety precautions do you take when children go on field trips or are transported by car or van?

What fees do you charge and when are they due?

# Child Care Concerns and Complaints



If you need to report a licensing concern or want to know if a Child Care Center or Family Day Care or Group Home you are considering has had a substantiated complaint, please contact DHR.

For information on child care centers, call the Child Care Services Division at 334-242-1425 or 1-866-528-1694.

For information on Family Day Care providers, call the local county DHR office in which the home is located:

Blount County	205-274-5200
Jefferson County	866-528-1694
Shelby County	205-669-3007
Walker County	205-387-5400

For questions about licensing standards call DHR or to review the complete DHR Minimum Standards visit [www.dhr.state.al.us](http://www.dhr.state.al.us).

# Quality Indicators

Look, Listen, Count, Ask and Be Informed!

*The following questions can be useful as you search for a quality child care provider for your child. Feel free to take notes and compare several programs before making a final decision.*

## **Teacher to child ratio and group size**

What is the teacher to child ratio for your child's age group?

What is the teacher to child ratio when children are napping?

If children are transported, what is the teacher to child ratio on the bus or van?

## **Caregiver qualifications**

Are the caregivers trained and experienced in child development?

Is the caregiver certified in CPR and first aid?

How long has the caregiver been teaching in the program?

Does the caregiver welcome children of all abilities and backgrounds?

Does the caregiver seem to really enjoy children?

Are children greeted when they arrive?

Is the caregiver someone your child will enjoy?

Does the caregiver talk with and listen to the children and treat them with patience?

## **Health and Safety**

Is the program licensed or exempt from licensure? Why or why not?

Are there plenty of age appropriate, safe and clean books, toys and materials?

Are children involved in a variety of activities with a balance of quiet and busy times?

Is the outside play area fenced and does it have safe equipment?

Can you visit your child at the program at any time, unannounced?

What is the discipline policy and do you agree with it?

Is the environment clean and orderly?

Are emergency plans and numbers clearly posted?

Is the program licensed or exempt from licensure?

Are children closely supervised at all times?

## **Family Involvement**

Are parents encouraged to share ideas and get involved in the program?

How will you be informed about your child's day?

Are parent-teacher meetings held during the year?

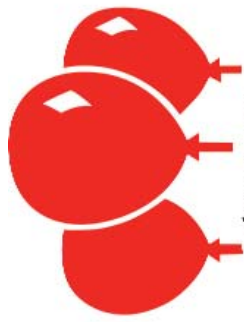
Is the classroom schedule posted?

Is there a newsletter to inform you of upcoming events?

## **Accreditation**

Is the program nationally accredited? Why or why not?

Is the accreditation credential posted?



We make quality child care happen.

# childcare resources

Community & Family Services

1904 First Avenue North  
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[www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org)

Your step-by-step guide  
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