



## **TIP SHEET FOR YOUNG PARENTS: FINDING CARE FOR MY CHILD**

Child care can help you reach your educational and career goals to support your family. It is important to find quality child care that meets your needs, and your child's needs, and to learn about assistance that is available to you. This tip sheet will help you get started.

What should you consider as you evaluate child care options and establish a budget?

### **Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral (CC&R) agency.**

The centralized place for learning about available child care and financial assistance is called a [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CC&R\) agency](#). Your local 211 United Way will be able to identify your local CC&R and provide contact information. When you call and describe your needs, including any special financial needs, you will receive referrals for care providers to contact.

### **What should you know as you begin your search?**

There are many forms of basic child care for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. You have the right to visit any potential care provider and ask questions. Below are some things to ask or consider as you make your decision on what is the best for you and your child.

- Is the care provider licensed?
- Are there any reported complaints against the care provider?
- Does the care provider meet state requirements for specialized training?
- Does my community rate care providers for quality, and what rating does this provider hold?
- Does the care provider's schedule and location meet my needs?
- Is the cost for the care I need within my budget, or is financial assistance available?
- Is the provider prepared to welcome any special needs that I or my child may have?
- Do I and my child feel comfortable with the provider, and with other children and families there?
- Is the care provider a good fit for my parenting philosophy?
- Are parents welcome to visit at any time?
- Are meals, snacks, diapers, etc. provided, or do I need to bring them?
- Are there support services and activities provided for families?
- Visit the care provider to observe:
  - cleanliness, space and safety of the premises
  - materials and activities available for children
  - how the care provider interacts with other care providers, children and parents
- If you encounter other parents, ask them what they like best about the care their child receives (or if they have any concerns).



## Be honest about your financial needs.

Child care is expensive. Always apply for any and all financial assistance available and ask for help if the application process is difficult or confusing. Based on financial need, the following programs provide free care or offer reduced fees:

- **Early Head Start and Head Start:** Early Head Start is for infants and toddlers and Head Start serves preschool-aged children. Early Head Start and Head Start help families access health, dental, mental health, housing, and disabilities services and public assistance. Participation is free for families who qualify due to homelessness, foster care status, or family public assistance status, or who meet low-income eligibility.
- **Child Care Vouchers:** Families who meet a specific income threshold or satisfy criteria for priority services (like needing care for a child with a disability or experiencing homelessness) may be eligible for vouchers that can be used to pay for child care with approved child care providers of the parent's choice. This may include care provided in a child care center, home, by friends, or family. Local communities determine priority families, who the approved care providers will be, and whether they will charge a copay. Typically, a local CCR&R agency accepts applications, issues vouchers, and provides information on how to find approved care providers.
- **Subsidized Community Child Care Centers:** Like child care vouchers, many communities have public community child care programs that receive government or private funds to offer child care for a reduced fee to families who meet a specific income threshold or satisfy criteria for priority services (like needing care for a child with a disability or experiencing homelessness). Your local CCR&R agency can help determine availability and provide contact information.
- **Preschool:** Public preschool is available in most communities and operates according to eligibility criteria set by states and communities. Some serve three- and four-year-old children, while others are limited to four-year-olds only. Many are full-day programs that can provide child care, too. Public preschool programs often prioritize children with service needs or families with low incomes. Preschool programs that are administered by school districts have special provisions for serving children who are experiencing homelessness.
- **Services for Children with Disabilities:** Specialized services are available for children with physical, developmental, learning, and other service needs that can impact learning and readiness for school. Developmental screenings and evaluations are available to upon request to determine if children meet the state's criteria for early intervention or special education. Services can include speech therapy, occupational therapy, learning supports and infant and early childhood mental health services and can be provided at home or in child care settings. You can learn more about services for children with developmental delays or disabilities through [your state's Parent Training and Information Center](#).

## Where do I start?

Child Care Aware has a [CCR&R locator](#) on their website. If you enter your zip code, you will find local CCR&R information, including phone numbers. In addition, you can learn more about child care settings on the [parent resource page](#) of the Administration for Children & Families.