

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT CHILD CARE OPTIONS?

Montana child care law states that anyone providing child care to three or more children on a regular basis is required by law to be registered or licensed with the state of Montana unless they are established primarily for educational purposes or have been approved to be a legally unregistered provider.

- ❖ **FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES** offer a home-like atmosphere.
 - * may care for up to 6 children including the provider's own under age 6.
 - * can have no more than 3 children under the age of 2.
 - * may apply for an overlap of up to 2 children, over age 3, not to exceed a total of 3 hours per day.
- ❖ **GROUP CHILD CARE HOMES** care is often provided in a private home.
 - * may care for 7 to 12 children including their own under age 6.
 - * can have no more than 6 children under the age of two.
 - * may apply for an overlap of up to 4 children, over the age of 3, not to exceed 3 hours per day.
- ❖ **CHILD CARE CENTERS**
 - * Children birth to 2 = 4 children to 1 caregiver
 - * Children 2 to 3 = 8 children to 1 caregiver
 - * Children 4 to 6 = 10 children to 1 caregiver
 - * Children 6 & up = 14 children to 1 caregiver
- ❖ **PRE-SCHOOLS** are part-day educational programs and currently are not regulated in Montana.
- ❖ **LEGALLY UNREGISTERED PROVIDERS** must apply with Child Care Connections and serve two or less children including the provider's own under the age of two or serve the children only from one family.
 - * Children 2 to 3 = 8 children to 1 caregiver
 - * Children 4 to 6 = 10 children to 1 caregiver
 - * Children 6 & up = 14 children to 1 caregiver



REGULATIONS REGISTERED/LICENSED CHILD CARE PROVIDERS MUST FOLLOW

Child care providers are mandated by the State of Montana to follow rules and regulations when providing care to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Listed below are some of those regulations which you should be aware of:

- ✓ Space requirements:
 - * 35 square feet of usable space per child indoors.
 - * 75 square feet of usable space per child outdoors.
 - * If the home is located on a busy street, near an irrigation ditch, or if infant care is provided, a fenced play area is required.
- ✓ Fire safety:
 - * Smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher with a minimum 2A10BC rating are required on each floor where care is provided.
 - * A fire escape from the second story must be provided if it is used for care.
 - * All exits must be unobstructed at all times.
- ✓ Smoke free environments are mandatory for all child care facilities.
- ✓ Immunizations are required for all children in registered or licensed facilities. Children with a signed statement from their physician due to health factors may be exempt.
- ✓ Infant regulations:
 - * Bottle propping is not allowed.
 - * Diaper-changing surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
 - * Appropriate car seats and/or booster seats must be used properly each time the infant/child is being transported.

These are just some of the child care regulations caregivers must follow. If you have additional questions, please contact us. If you have concerns and need to report violations or check to see whether or not any of the providers you have narrowed your selection down to have any substantiated claims, please contact the local licensing agent at the Quality Assurance Division at 522-2271

NUTRITION IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Your child may have the opportunity to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) while in the care of a registered family or group child care home or in a qualified center. This program provides menu assistance, nutrition training, and reimbursement to providers for meals that meet the USDA meal pattern requirements. The CACFP promotes and encourages healthy eating habits and behaviors which foster lifelong nutrition skills. Therefore, quality child care programs should offer nutritious meals for children. Well-balanced meals are essential to your child's growth and development today and in the future.

Here is what the CACFP has to offer:

Benefits to Parents!

- ~ Spared the expense of providing meals from home
- ~ Not paying higher fees to cover food costs
- ~ Being assured your child is receiving nutritious, balanced meals and snacks
- ~ Knowing your child is being cared for in a state registered home that meets numerous safety and sanitation requirements

Benefits to Children!

- ~ Receive nutritious meals and snacks
- ~ Develop good eating habits
- ~ Develop strong bodies, good teeth, and alert minds
- ~ Learn about nutrition
- ~ Opportunity to participate in nutrition activities

Our CACFP staff visit each participating child care home 3 times per year to lend support and provide information regarding child care skills and nutrition education. Through the CACFP, your provider promotes and supports good eating habits by presenting nutrition education on a child's level.

To participate in the CACFP, a child care provider must:

- * obtain registration from Montana's Quality Assurance Division
- * complete pre-approval training
- * submit CHILD ENROLLMENT FORMS signed by parents for each child participating in the program
- * serve USDA approved meals and snacks and submit monthly menu and attendance records
- * cooperate with annual parent surveys
- * attend annual nutrition related trainings

Reimbursement for meals & snacks served to children participating in the CACFP is based on a 2 tiered system. If your provider is participating under tier 2, you may be asked to supply information about your household income. This information will go directly to CCC and will not be shared with your provider.

STARTING THE PROCESS

It is easier to spend 5 to 10 minutes talking on the phone than it is to observe every child care program. The questions below do not have a right or wrong answer. As a parent, you must determine what needs and desires are for you and your child. Use the sample telephone screen form to ask the initial questions:

Date Contacted:_____	Phone:_____
Provider Name:_____	Number Of Children Caring For:_____
Address:_____	Interview Date & Time:_____
Current Vacancies:_____	Fee Schedule:_____
Additional Comments:_____	

Questions to ask over the phone:

- ✓ Do you have a current child care license or registration?
- ✓ What experience do you have with children?
- ✓ How many children do you care for currently? What are their ages?
- ✓ Do you have children of your own? What are their ages?
- ✓ Do you provide overlap care?
- ✓ What hours and days are you open?
- ✓ What kind of activities do you provide on a typical day?
- ✓ What is your program philosophy and goals?
- ✓ What kind of insurance coverage do you have?
- ✓ How do you discipline children?
- ✓ How do you keep in communication with parents?
- ✓ Do you take sick children?
- ✓ What arrangements are made if you are sick or absent?
- ✓ What kinds of foods do you serve? Do you participate in the CACFP?
- ✓ Do you take children on outings?
- ✓ How long have you been a child care provider? And how long do you plan to continue?
- ✓ Do you have an open door policy? Can I make an unannounced visit?
- ✓ How much do you charge? Per day? Per hour?
- ✓ Do you have a list of references I can call?

If you feel comfortable with the answers given by the caregiver, you should schedule a time to visit the child care program. We strongly recommend that you visit the caregiver and facility before you enroll your child.

VISITING CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Observe, Listen, & Ask:

- ✓ Take the time to observe the caregiver. Does s/he get down to the child's level to talk?
- ✓ How does s/he appear? Face (warm, loving) and voice (calm, soothing, strong, but caring)? Does s/he enjoy being with children?
- ✓ Count the number of children per adult.
- ✓ Does s/he seem to have a sense of humor, patience, and self-control?
- ✓ Does s/he seem to be someone with whom you can develop a relaxed, sharing relationship?
- ✓ Does the provider have previous experience and training in child development?
- ✓ What is her/his motivation for providing care?
- ✓ Does the provider manage and guide children's behavior in a positive, constructive, and non-threatening manner?
- ✓ Are the children's needs quickly met even when things get busy?
- ✓ Is parent involvement welcomed and encouraged?
- ✓ What is the turnover rate of center caregivers?
- ✓ Who else will be in contact with the children?
- ✓ Look to see if the environment is safe and conducive to enriching your child's growth and development.
- ✓ Is the home or center clean and well maintained?
- ✓ Is the outside play area fenced?
- ✓ Is the home child proofed?
- ✓ Is the TV on? What programs do the children watch?
- ✓ What is the noise level? Is it too quiet or too noisy?
- ✓ Is there room to do physical exercise and play on large equipment?
- ✓ Do you see a mix of active and quiet play? Are there a variety of activities for children to choose?
- ✓ Is there a variety of accessible age appropriate materials and are there enough for all children? Evidence of good health practices. Does the caregiver use hand washing procedures?
- ✓ Are nutritious meals and snacks provided?
- ✓ What is the napping arrangement?
- ✓ What happens when sick children are present?
- ✓ Are toys and other common areas sanitized regularly?

