

3 Steps to choosing **quality** child care



**CHILD CARE
CONNECTIONS**

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consider your choices

there are many types of care available

its important to understand what those options are.

types of child care facilities

Child Care Center

A center serves 13 or more children, with a staff-to-child ratio based on the age of the children. Montana State law requires child-care centers to be licensed by the Department's Child Care Licensing Program. Before-school, drop-in, after-school, and preschool programs are not required to be licensed.

Family Home Care

This type of care is offered in a homelike setting for children ages 0-12. In a family home, a caregiver cares for up to 6 children at a time, with no more than 3 under the age of 2. It must be registered with the Montana's Child Care Licensing Program.

Group Home

This type of care has similar requirements to Family Home Care but with a higher number of children in care. 2 adults provide care for 7-12 children, with a limit of 6 children under the age of 2. It must be registered with the Montana's Child Care Licensing Program.

Legally Certified Provider (LCP)

In this more informal type of care, a parent or legal guardian selects an individual—often a family member, friend, or neighbor—to care for all the children in one family or up to two unrelated children. Children must be eligible to receive the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship.

quality child care indicators

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Child Care Connections sponsors family and group child care homes through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). CACFP supports child care businesses by providing assistance with recipes, menu development, food purchasing, staff training, monthly meal reimbursement, examples of best practice for the feeding of children, and technical assistance for food service operations. Successful food service management improves the overall business. Parents-Look for delicious and nutritious meals, clean kitchens, and pleasant eating areas when choosing child care.



National Accreditation

Since 1985, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has set professional standards for early childhood education programs, and helped families identify high-quality programs for their young children. If you are visiting a child care center, ask if they are NAEYC accredited. Visit their website www.naeyc.org to search for accredited centers in the area. The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) is the organization that facilitates accreditation for family child care homes. Accreditation shows an ongoing commitment to providing the highest quality of care for children.



Best Beginnings Scholarship

The Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB) offers "Best Beginnings" child care scholarships to qualified families with low-income whose child receives care from a licensed child care center, registered group or family child care home, or legally certified child care provider. Each family participates in the cost of that care by making a co-payment based on a sliding fee scale. For more information contact Child Care Connections. The ECSB also facilitates the STARS to quality program that is now in a field test. It is a voluntary quality improvement program for child care facilities.



Child Care Licensing Program

The role of the Child Care Licensing Program within the Quality Assurance Division of Montana's Department of Public Health and Human Services is to regulate and monitor child care facilities. Additionally the Child Care Licensing Bureau is responsible for protecting the health, safety and well-being of the children receiving care in Montana. [Go to www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov) and click on "child care" to search for specific programs and view past licensing visit information.



Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program

The Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program is a voluntary quality rating improvement system that aligns quality indicators with support and incentives for early childhood programs and early childhood professionals. The Early Childhood Services Bureau has enjoyed watching the program grow and develop with the input from the various stakeholders, and has listened carefully to early childhood professionals, parents, and national experts to provide a strong program, desired by many.



what are your options?

identify what is important to you

Structural Elements: Observable and Regulated by State Agencies

- Teacher education
- Group size
- Staff-to-child ratio
- Meals provided
- Transportation
- Safety
- Cleanliness
- DPHHS Licensed
- NAEYC & NAFCC Accredited

Process Elements: Child's Daily Experience

- Teaching philosophy
- Learning environment meets developmental needs (cognitive, physical, communication, social, emotional)
- Access to materials
- Shared values between home and school
- Accommodates special needs

Practical Elements: Needs of the Family

- Proximity to home
- Proximity to work
- Hours of operation
- Flexible scheduling
- Cost
- Scholarships available
- References
- Reputation
- Parent participation encouraged

what are your child's characteristics and needs?

circle the attributes that relate to your child

- Responds well to structure
- Plays well on his/her own
- Enjoys messy and noisy play
- Easy going
- Outgoing
- Shy
- Communicates feelings
- Has intense emotions
- Has difficulty controlling emotions
- Plays quietly
- Always on the go

- Explores quietly
- Enjoys approaching new people
- Happiest interacting with others
- Copes well with frustration
- Easily frustrated and impatient
- Speaks a language other than English
- Overwhelmed by bright lights and noises
- Prefers to be one-on-one with an adult
- Gets upset when the routine is changed

How do the elements important to you match your child's characteristics and needs?

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things to look out for when choosing a **child care provider**

what you should ask over the phone

- What is your availability?
- Do you have a waiting list?
- What are your days and hours of operation?
- Do you have regularly scheduled closures?
- Do you have a current child care license or registration? (any program caring for children under the age of 2 or providing full day childcare must be licensed or registered)
- How long have you been providing care for children? What are your qualifications regarding experience, education and training?
- How many children do you care for currently? What are their ages?
- What does a typical day look like?
- What is your program philosophy and goals?
- Do you provide meals and snacks? Do you participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program?
- How is information communicated between the program and families?
- How do you accommodate children's unique schedules/needs regarding meals, napping, allergies, diapering/toileting and special needs?
- Do you have references? 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 program before enrolling the child.

what you should look for during your visit

- Is the program clean and well maintained?
- Is there adequate caregiving staff for the number of children in care? Are the children ever left unattended?
- Are the caregivers using positive language while engaging with the children, each other and families? Is there an atmosphere of respect?
- Does the provider seem like someone who you can develop a relationship with?
- Are the children's needs attended to in a timely manner?
- Are the children actively involved within the environment, with other children and their caregivers?
- Is there a variety of accessible age appropriate toys/materials? Are there enough for all children?
- Do all children including infants have the time and space for physical movement and exercise?
- Ask the caregiver to see the napping space and materials (cots, cribs, mats etc.)
- Is the outdoor play area fenced? Is there climbing and other play equipment available? (balls, bikes, sandbox etc.)
- Is the TV on?
- Are all cleaning products/chemicals and medications out of the reach of children?

do you need help paying for **quality child care?**

Child Care Connections offers financial assistance, the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship, for families struggling with the cost of child care. Please contact Child Care Connections, 587-7786 for more information or visit our website.

www.bozemanccc.org



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