

An Important Choice

During the first few years of life, a child learns many of the social skills and basic tools that are used throughout life - and finding a child care to promote this development is one of the most important decisions a parent can make. Many options are available, from home care with just a few children, to large child care centers and early learning programs. The factors that a parent has to consider include availability, cost, location, and the personality of your child. This brochure is intended to help parents choose a child care that will provide a *safe, healthy, and nurturing* environment for their child.

Call the Child Care Resource & Referral office (CCR&R)

Local CCR&R offices keep a current list of licensed child care providers. They can also tell parents which programs are accepting new children. In Snohomish County, call Volunteers of America CCR&R at (425) 259-2973.

Find out if there are licensing concerns

Child cares in Washington State are licensed by the Department of Early Learning. By having a license, providers are expected to follow very basic health and safety standards, such as handwashing, written policies, ratios, and background checks. Visit www.del.wa.gov or call 1-866-482-4325 to find out if there is a serious licensing concern or a history of complaints.

Spend time at the child care

Sit in the provider's home or in the center classroom where your child would spend most of the day. Plan to spend 2 to 3 hours watching without interfering. Also, talk with the providers. This should give you a good sense of how the teachers and children interact and conduct their daily routines.

The following checklist is a guide for parents who are looking for child care. Many of the items are considered to be 'best practice' guidelines in child care meaning these items go above and beyond basic licensing requirements. These guidelines were chosen because they are indicators of a program that promotes health and well-being, not just a place for children to wait until parents or guardians come back. No child care will meet *all* of the best practice guidelines. But you can be assured that if providers are following many of these recommendations, then the program is committed to providing quality care and dedicated to promoting the growth and development of your child.

The Communicable Disease Outreach program staff offers consultations and STARS training to child care providers in Snohomish County. We encourage child care providers to take advantage of these services to improve the health and safety of children in their care.



Choosing a Healthy Child Care

Parent Information

PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER SNOHOMISH COUNTY

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A Parent's Checklist for Choosing a *HEALTHY* Child Care



- ❑ Children are greeted by the staff upon arrival. Staff take time to assess the child for obvious signs of sickness.
- ❑ Children are reminded to wash hands before snack/lunch, after toileting, and after playing outside. Providers supervise handwashing. Children can reach the sink, soap, and paper towels by themselves.
- ❑ Diapering is done in a separate area, away from eating areas. Providers wash the hands of toddlers and older infants at the sink after a diaper change.
- ❑ There are lots of toys within a child's easy reach. Toys are clean and age appropriate. Children help with toy clean-up.
- ❑ Toys that children put in their mouths are removed and sanitized before another child plays with the same toy.
- ❑ Many books are available and within reach for children to read throughout the day. The room has a quiet corner with cozy objects where children can read or work quietly. Lighting levels are adequate for reading.

- ❑ Classrooms and playgrounds include a variety of play zones such as quiet corners, dramatic play, gardens, active play, and fine motor areas.
- ❑ Playground has protective surfacing under all climbing equipment, even climbers that are close to the ground. Climbers are 6 feet away from all objects. The equipment is age-appropriate and not too tall.
- ❑ Staff plays with the children on the floor or at the child's level. Providers interact with the children on the playground.
- ❑ Staff uses a range of emotional support techniques such as ignoring negative behaviors, appropriate consequences, cool-off, and re-direction. Emphasis is placed on teaching self-discipline and enhancing self-esteem. Food is never used as a reward or punishment. Staff help children work through conflicts together.
- ❑ Staff use games or songs when transitioning the group to a new activity. Enough time is allowed to finish activities and children are given detailed information about the next activity. Children follow a regular routine when getting ready for lunch and nap time.
- ❑ Staff sit, eat, and converse with the children during meals/snacks, in a family style setting. Staff talk positively about the meal. Children are encouraged to make their own food choices among the foods offered. Children help with meal set-up and clean-up.

- ❑ The 3-week menu cycle includes a variety of fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables. Servings of food and beverages that are high in saturated fat, trans fats, sodium, or added sugar are limited. Juice is limited to once a day.
- ❑ The program promotes physical activity. The day's schedule has at least one hour of unstructured activity and at least thirty minutes of structured physical activity each day. Ideally, TV is never used at the child care.



- ❑ The program promotes good oral health by teaching kids about the dentist, providing dental information to parents, and supporting tooth brushing.
- ❑ Providers encourage and support mothers who breast feed their babies. A comfortable and private space is provided for mothers to nurse.
- ❑ Sound levels in the classroom create a peaceful and pleasant environment. Music is age-appropriate and kept to a low level.

- ❑ The rooms are well-ventilated and don't feel stuffy. Providers do not use chemical air fresheners to cover-up bad smells, but try to bring fresh air in to the rooms by opening windows or using fans.
- ❑ To prevent possible lead exposure, the inside and outside of the building has no chipping paint.
- ❑ The program has a complete disaster plan that includes plans for many different situations. Staff conduct regular fire and earthquake drills. A three-day supply of food and water is stored on-site.
- ❑ Child care staff have a plan in place for helping new children adjust to the child care.
- ❑ Parents need to inform child care staff if their child has a special health or behavior need. Child care providers should have a plan to address these special needs, including referrals for further assessment.



- ❑ The children in the program seem happy. The providers appear to enjoy working with the children and have a caring relationship