



**Child Care Choices of Boston**

[www.childcarechoicesofboston.org](http://www.childcarechoicesofboston.org)



*Choosing child care for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent or guardian. Take the time to make a good decision. Below is a brief overview of some of the different types of child care available to you. For more information and guidance on how to choose child care, please contact an Information & Referral Specialist at 617-348-6641, Monday – Friday, 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM.*

## **CHILD CARE CENTERS**

---

Child care centers typically care for groups of children in a place specifically designed or adapted for this use, and can provide care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children (depending on their license and/or other guidelines/regulations). Children are cared for in groups according to their age and number of adult caregivers. Children have the opportunity to interact with a larger number of children and adults, and the equipment and organized activities tend to provide a learning environment. Center schedules tend to be less flexible in terms of the hours and days care is available, but generally is more dependable.

Most centers are licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). All staff must have a criminal background check and meet minimum health, safety, education and training requirements.

Licensed programs may also be accredited. This means that the program has met even higher standards set by a national organization.

## **FAMILY CHILD CARE**

---

Family Child Care (FCC) Providers are licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to care for children in their own home. Typically they are licensed to care for up to 6 children, including their own. A “Large” FCC provider may care for up to 10 children and must employ at least one approved assistant. A provider with a FCC “Plus” license may care for up to 6 children (under the age of 6) plus 2 additional school aged children. Generally, FCC providers do not care for more than 2 children younger than 15 months at any given time. These providers may be more flexible in terms of hours than a center based program. Children, particularly very young children may feel more secure and benefit from the home-like environment and small group setting.

Family Child Care Providers are all self-employed, but they may be *independent* or *subcontracted* with a *Family Child Care System agency*. A system agency represents FCC providers, oversees business and administration, training and continuing education, and evaluates the quality of care of subcontracted providers

## **SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE**

---

School Age Child Care (SACC) is center based programs serving children 6-13 years of age during out of school time. Typically, school age programs offer care on a regular basis where children are enrolled in a before school, after school, or on vacation for a number of hours each day and week. They are usually grouped according to age and interests, and follow a general curriculum.

Many SACC programs are licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Some may be exempt from licensing by meeting other criteria (usually when they operate as part of the public school).

## **HEAD START PROGRAMS**

---

Head Starts are center based programs.

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

Families must meet income guidelines (based on official poverty line) to qualify for enrollment.

## **NURSERY SCHOOLS**

---

Nursery Schools are center based programs.

Nursery Schools generally offer half-day programs for children 2 years 9 months to 5 years of age. Sessions tend to be part day and/or part week.

## **INFORMAL CHILD CARE**

---

Informal Child Care (ICC) Providers are individuals who are not licensed through the State of Massachusetts to provide child care, i.e. a friend, neighbor or relative. Parents obtaining a voucher for child care may use an Informal Child Care provider under certain provisions\*.

*\*Please note that due to limited funding from the State, as of January 1, 2010 CCCB is not able to issue child care vouchers for ICC Providers.*

## **IN-HOME CAREGIVERS/NANNIES**

---

The State of Massachusetts does not regulate nannies, but nanny placement agencies are regulated by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development Division of Occupational Safety. The recruitment and/or placement of nannies in Massachusetts requires an Employment Agency License. Au pair agencies are regulated by the U.S. Department of State. For more information, please see [www.state.ma.us/dos/](http://www.state.ma.us/dos/).

## ***Visit and Ask Questions***

*Make sure you visit the child care options you are considering.*

*Find out about these key indicators of quality:*

- **Adult to Child Ratio**

The ratio is the number of children there are for each adult. The fewer the children for each adult, the better it is for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. In Massachusetts, babies need an adult to child ratio of no more than 1:3 (one adult for three infants), while four-year-olds can do well with a ratio of 1:10 (one adult for ten children).

- **Group Size**

How many children are in the group? The smaller the group, the better. Imagine a group of 25 two-year olds with five adults, compared to a group of 10 with two adults. Both groups have the same adult to child ratio. Which would be calmer and safer? Which would be more like a family?

- **Caregiver Qualifications**

Ask about the caregivers' training and education. Caregivers with degrees and/or special training in working with children may be better able to help your child learn. Are the caregivers involved in activities to improve their skills? Do they attend classes and workshops?

- **Turnover**

Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It's best if children stay with the same caregiver at least a year. Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child. Getting used to new caregivers takes time and energy that could be spent on learning new things.

- **Accreditation**

Find out if the child care provider has been accredited by a national organization. Providers that are accredited have met voluntary standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) are the two largest organizations that accredit child care programs.

- **Health and Safety**

All adults and children should wash their hands frequently, especially before and after meals and before and after using the bathroom. All areas should be cleaned daily, especially bathrooms. Rugs, cushions and toys should be cleaned regularly. The space should be child-proofed and supplies should be stored out of children's reach or in locked cabinets. There should be smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and a second exit.

- **Family Involvement**

You want a caregiver who talks to you and makes you feel comfortable and welcome. You should be able to visit the home or classroom as well as ask the provider questions. Likewise, the provider should talk to you about your child's needs and progress.

*Please use the additional checklists provided to help you decide if a program meets yours and your child's needs.*