YOUR GUIDE TO LICENSED CHILD CARE

So, you're choosing child care for your child. It's such an important decision, and it may seem hard when you first start. You may choose informal care from a relative or friend, a neighborhood center, or select certified family child care. If you choose licensed care, this summary of child care licensing rules can help. For a complete copy of group center or family child care rules, contact the licensing field office nearest you.

Where to Start

A child care license permits a child care program or provider to operate legally in this state. People who get paid for caring for four or more unrelated children must get a license. Three important parts of licensed care are the Caregiver, the Place and the Program:

1. The Caregiver

The caregiver (sometimes called a teacher, or family child care provider, or assistant teacher) is the most important person in a child care setting. This person should know how to talk with infants and young children and respect them, and you. They should like being with children. They should understand how children grow. They should be able to plan activities that are fun and match the children's interest and learning levels. Above all, you should be able to trust the caregiver.

A licensed caregiver must meet the following state standards:

- **training and experience in child care**
- **child care training updates every year**
- **clear criminal record background check (in family child care, every adult in the household must pass this)**
- **no corporal or any abusive punishment**

Licensed child care programs and providers should:

- **show you a copy of their policies**
- **post the child care license, and the date and results of the last inspection**
- **welcome you to visit at any time**
- **communicate with you regularly**

About Fees

There are no rules about the amount of fees a licensed caregiver may charge. To many families, the cost of child care is very large. Do not simply add up the number of children in a licensed center or home, and assume that the caregiver is making a lot of money because of your fees. It is not unusual for a child care center to spend 75 percent of fee income on staff wages and benefits. It is important to the center to pay good wages, in order to attract caring, trained, competent teachers. Family child care providers spend their fee income on food, toys, changes in their homes to care for children, and training.

Do your part by paying fees on time. Learn about all the tax credits or government subsidies you might get to help you pay for child care. Consider giving bonuses or recognition to the caregivers from time to time. Child care costs are one of the largest family expenses, so you should make sure you are receiving value for your money. You should also understand that caregivers offer this service as an occupation and deserve good pay. Caregivers are your partners helping children grow and develop.

2. The Place

The safety of children in child care is the basic reason for child care licensing. The place should be comfortable and safe. It should be inviting to children and safe. It should welcome children's play and exploration and be safe.

Safety

Licensing rules demand that:

- **play areas be clean and large enough so children can move freely and safely**
- **the playground be supervised by an adult at all times**
- **cleaning fluids, medications, poisons, sharp tools, matches, and firearms are stored away from children**
- **fire drills are practiced**
- **bathrooms are clean and sanitary**
- **the child care place has a fire alarm or smoke detectors**
- **all caregivers report suspected child abuse or neglect right away**

Children need to eat often. Good food and balanced meals help children develop their brains, as well as their bones and muscles. You also know that young children can easily become ill. The place you choose for child care should pay attention to making sure caregivers follow good nutrition and promote healthy habits. When you choose a licensed program or provider, you will need to complete your child's immunizations and fill out health and enrollment forms.

Nutrition and Health

Licensing rules demand that:

- **meals and snacks are served often and are well balanced**
- **the staff and children wash hands before fixing food and eating**
- **areas where food is fixed are clean and sanitary**
- **the staff wash hands before and after diapering or wiping body fluids**
- **there is a policy on ill children (children with certain illnesses may need to stay home)**
- **all staff understand health habits for young children**

Infants and Toddlers

Because infants need loving, responsive care, it is important to find caregivers who truly understand their needs. Infants need cuddling, holding, and attention. They need people to talk with them and look them in the eyes. They need food often. They need safe diapering and sleeping areas. Licensing rules demand that:

- **the child care place is baby-proofed, with gates on stairways, caps on electrical outlets, and safe cribs**
- **infants have a safe, quiet place to sleep**
- **children's diapers are changed on an easily cleanable and disinfected surface**
- **handwashing is done before and after diapering**

School-Age Children

Older children also attend licensed programs, before and after school and in the summer. Sometimes families can find licensed school-age programs, and sometimes families choose a pre-school program that has a special part-time program for older children.

Licensing rules demand that:

- **school-age children have varied activities**
- **activities allow for rest and quiet time**
- **school-age children have freedom to select their own activities**

3. The Program

Child care helps children grow in healthy ways and helps their minds develop. A good child care program offers a balance of adult-directed and child-selected activities. Licensed programs and providers must limit television viewing. Licensing rules tell the provider to:

- **plan activities for different ages and levels of development**
- **plan indoor and outdoor activities**
- **plan for naps and quiet time**
- **let children choose between different activities**

A child care program should demonstrate care and concern for all types of families and children. Look at the pictures on the walls and see if they represent diverse families and children. Can the program tell you about its inclusion of children with disabilities? Do they welcome every child?

Staff-to-Child Ratios

One way to assure the protection, health and safety of young children is to require a certain number of staff/caregivers to children. Research on children's ages and stages shows that the younger the child, the smaller the group should be. So both staff-to-child ratios and group size are important. In licensed family child care, the caregiver may have no more than eight children, including the provider's own children under the age of seven. When only infants or one-year-olds are in care, the provider may not care for more than four children. Licensed group center programs should be able to tell you the exact number of children and the exact number of staff in your child's group at any one time.

Group Child Care Centers
(licensed to care for nine or more children)

Age of Children	Staff/Child Ratio	Group Size
Birth to 2	1:4	8
2 to 2-1/2	1:6	12
2-1/2 to 3	1:8	16
3 to 4	1:10	20
4 to 5	1:13	24
5 to 6	1:17	32
6 and older	1:18	32

Quality

Things that contribute to high quality child care include:

- **training of caregivers**
- **enough caregivers per child**
- **small groups**
- **consistent staff/low staff turnover**

In addition, quality child care programs pay active attention to health and safety, respect all families, are able to serve children of all abilities, and get advanced training. Quality child care programs have a responsible child care organization and offer time for staff development and planning. Some programs and caregivers go beyond the basics of licensing and become accredited by a national group. Accredited caregivers achieve higher standards and work hard to maintain those standards.

If it doesn't work out

Over 170,000 Wisconsin children are in licensed child care settings. Licensing specialists inspect programs and family child care homes, and will respond to complaints from the public if there are alleged violations. Be sure to let someone else know if you have concerns about what you see in a licensed program. You may report concerns without giving your name. Call the nearest licensing field office to report complaints or to learn about the level of complaints or violations in any licensed program.

For more information on choosing child care, call the Wisconsin Child Care Resource & Referral Agency nearest you, toll-free:

1-888-713-KIDS (5437)

or e-mail us at info@wisconsinccrr.org
visit our website at www.wisconsinccrr.org

Prepared by the Wisconsin CCR&R Network, Inc. for the state Office of Child Care.

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For More Information...

Field offices of the Division of Children and Family Services (Child Care Licensing)

Northeastern Office
Green Bay
200 North Jefferson, Suite 411
Green Bay, WI 54301-5191
(920) 448-5312

Northern Office
Rhinelander
1853 North Stevens Street
P.O. Box 697
Rhinelander, WI 54501-0697
(715) 365-2500

Southeastern Office
Waukesha
141 N.W. Barstow St., Room 104
Waukesha, WI 53188-3789
(262) 521-5100

Southern Office
Madison
2917 International Ln., Suite 110
Madison, WI 53704-3153
(608) 243-2400

Western Office
Eau Claire
612 Gibson St., Suite 2
Eau Claire, WI 54701-3687
(715) 836-2157

To order additional copies of this brochure, contact the **Child Care Information Center (CCIC) at 1-800-362-7353.**

State of Wisconsin
Department of Workforce Development

DWSW-11065-P (R. 03/2003)