

Review the chart below, and think about what type(s) of child care may best meet your needs.

Child Care Centers

- Often have a class-room-type setting
- Tend to be larger and can enroll more children
- Children are usually cared for with others their same age

Family Child Care Homes

- Typically operated out of the caregiver's home
- 1 or 2 caregivers present
- Able to care for a smaller group of children of different ages
- May offer non-traditional hours such as weekends and nights

Preschool Programs

- Typically offered for children ages 3-5 years old
- Designed to help prepare children for Kindergarten
- Often part-time programs

School-Age Programs

- Provide child care for before- and after-school hours
- May also offer care during school holidays and breaks
- May be offered by a school, community or non-profit organizations, or at a family child care home or child care center

Respite Care

- May occur in the child's own home or in a child care setting
- Provides temporary relief to give parents a break
- Caregivers usually have received specialized training
- Some states may have programs for eligible families that help pay for Respite Care hours

Friend, Family, Neighbor (FFN)

- Care is provided in the child's or caregiver's home by a relative, friend/neighbor, babysitter or nanny
- Schedule may be more flexible
- Typically not regulated or monitored (unless caring for children who receive government child care subsidies)

WHO WE ARE

Child Care Aware® of America is our nation's leading voice for child care. We advance a child care system that effectively serves all children's growth, development and educational advancement and creates positive economic impact for families and communities.

To learn more about our mission, visit childcareaware.org



To see a complete list of regional Child Care Aware staff or to download one of our resources, visit us online

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Choosing Child Care for a Child with Special Needs



Every parent wants to find a safe and quality child care program that will care for and value their child while they work or attend school. If you have a child with special needs, your child care search will not only include finding a safe and quality setting but also ensuring that the caregivers can meet the unique needs of your child. Finding a child care provider that you can trust to meet your child's special needs can feel like a big task, but with the right tools and resources, it can be done!

Why Is Quality Child Care Important?

A child's brain goes through amazing changes and growth during their early years. The experiences that children have during this time will affect how they learn and develop. Quality child care offers positive learning experiences and nurturing relationships with trusted adults who understand child development. A quality child care setting will have caregivers who understand and know how to meet your child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs.

Steps for Your Child Care Search

1. Think About Your Child Care Needs

- **Schedule:** Do you need full- or part-time child care due to your work or school schedule? Are you looking for a part-day program to help with school readiness and development? Do you need care for just a few hours a week to take a break or run errands?
- **Setting:** Are you looking for an inclusive setting where children of all abilities play and learn together? Or would you prefer a program that has a classroom designed specifically for children with special needs?



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2. Get a List of Child Care Programs

After you have learned about the types of care available to you, it's a good time to call your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R). Local CCR&R agencies can help you find child care in your area. They will ask you questions to determine where and when you need care, the age of your child, and specific needs that your family or child may have. Many CCR&Rs will be able to tell you if there are child care programs in their referral database that have education or training to care for children with special needs.

Search for your local CCR&R: <http://childcareaware.org/ccrr-search-form/>

3. Do Your Homework

When you have your list of child care programs, you can learn more about them before you even make the first call. Take time to find out about a program's licensing status, inspection and compliance history, quality rating (if applicable in your state), and national accreditation status. In many states you can find all of this information online.

See what's available in your state: <http://childcareaware.org/resources/map/>

4. Make the Call

Once you've done some research on the child care programs you are considering, call each one to get additional information. Use this time to ask about whether there is space for your child, the weekly or monthly rate for your child, hours of operation, and if there are any discounts or scholarships available for child care.

Your phone call is also a good time to tell the provider more about your child's special needs. Get a feel for whether the provider has worked with children with similar needs before, and whether they seem confident that they could meet your child's needs.

If the program sounds like it may be a good fit, set up a time to take a tour of the program and bring your child. Choose a time when you'll be able to stay for at least an hour.

5. Take a Tour

Your in-person visit will be the most important part of your child care search. It is your opportunity to ask questions, evaluate the environment, and share about your child. We have created checklists for your child care visit to help you know what to ask about and look for in a quality child care program.

Download checklists: <http://childcareaware.org/selecting-child-care-program/>

Ask questions and evaluate the environment: In addition to general questions about quality child care, there are other things that you can ask about and look for that address your child's needs. We've provided an additional checklist for you to use. Be sure to add any questions that are important to you as a parent and to your unique child. (find checklist on the back panel)

Share about your child: It is important to communicate openly about your child's special needs during this process. Be specific about any diagnosis your child may have received, any known behavioral challenges, and physical or other supports they may need. You are the expert on your child's needs. Keep in mind that a quality child care provider will respond positively to differences in children's abilities, interests, and experiences! The most important thing is that your child is with someone that can keep them safe and healthy; being honest and open about all of their needs will help you to ensure that this is the case.

You may find that some providers are hesitant to accept a child with special needs. If you find that is the case, you may want to learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for child care programs here: <https://www.ada.gov/childqanda.htm>

6. Make the Choice

Compare the programs that you visited, and choose a program that is a good fit for your family and child. Once you've made the decision, stay involved! Keep open, two-way communication with your provider, and show your child that you are interested in what they are doing and learning. You and your child care

provider are now partners in your child's growth and development!

Additional Resources

There may be other places to find resources and assistance for a child with special needs. Organizations like Easter Seals and The Arc and programs like Early Intervention may be helpful to your family. Visit our map and click on your state to find resources for children with special needs: <http://childcareaware.org/resources/map/>.

Child Care Checklist for a Child with Special Needs

ASK:

- ✓ Does the provider have experience caring for children with needs similar to your child's? Do they have training and education that will help them to meet your child's needs? How will they work to keep your child healthy and safe?
- ✓ Is the provider up-to-date on health and safety training requirements? Do they have expertise in areas that are important to you and your child, like medication administration or food allergy safety?
- ✓ How will your child's development or health be monitored? How will the provider communicate issues, challenges, or solutions to you?
- ✓ What is the process for adapting the day or the curriculum to meet a child's needs? What is the process for asking for changes if your child needs something different in the program?
- ✓ Has the provider worked with children that receive services through Early Intervention (EI) or the local education agency? Are these services able to be provided on-site, and if so, where? How do program staff participate in working toward the goals set for the child?

LOOK:

- ✓ Do you see children with special needs engaged in all aspects of the program, with the right levels of support? It is good if you see more than the minimum number of staff in a classroom or program, with some children receiving 1:1 support.
- ✓ Are all areas of the program physically accessible to you and your child (entrances, bathrooms, playground, etc.)?
- ✓ Are the toys and books accessible on low shelves so that all children can reach desired items?
- ✓ Can children self-manage their play and choose which activities they'd like to participate in during much of the day?
- ✓ Is there built-in program signage that indicates how many children can play in a particular interest area at one time (to cut down on crowded areas and loud voices from children and staff)?
- ✓ Does the environment meet the developmental needs of your child? For example, a child with developmental delays or sensory issues can thrive with plenty of hands-on activities that they may choose from, such as sand and water tables, easels for painting, soft quiet areas, well-equipped science areas where children can examine natural objects, etc.
- ✓ Do you see any potential sensory challenges for your child? (smells, lighting, noise levels, group size, etc.)
- ✓ Are all children encouraged to celebrate one another's differences and to assist and support each other?
- ✓ Do the adults demonstrate consistently positive interactions with children and other adults? Are they responsive to the needs of the children?