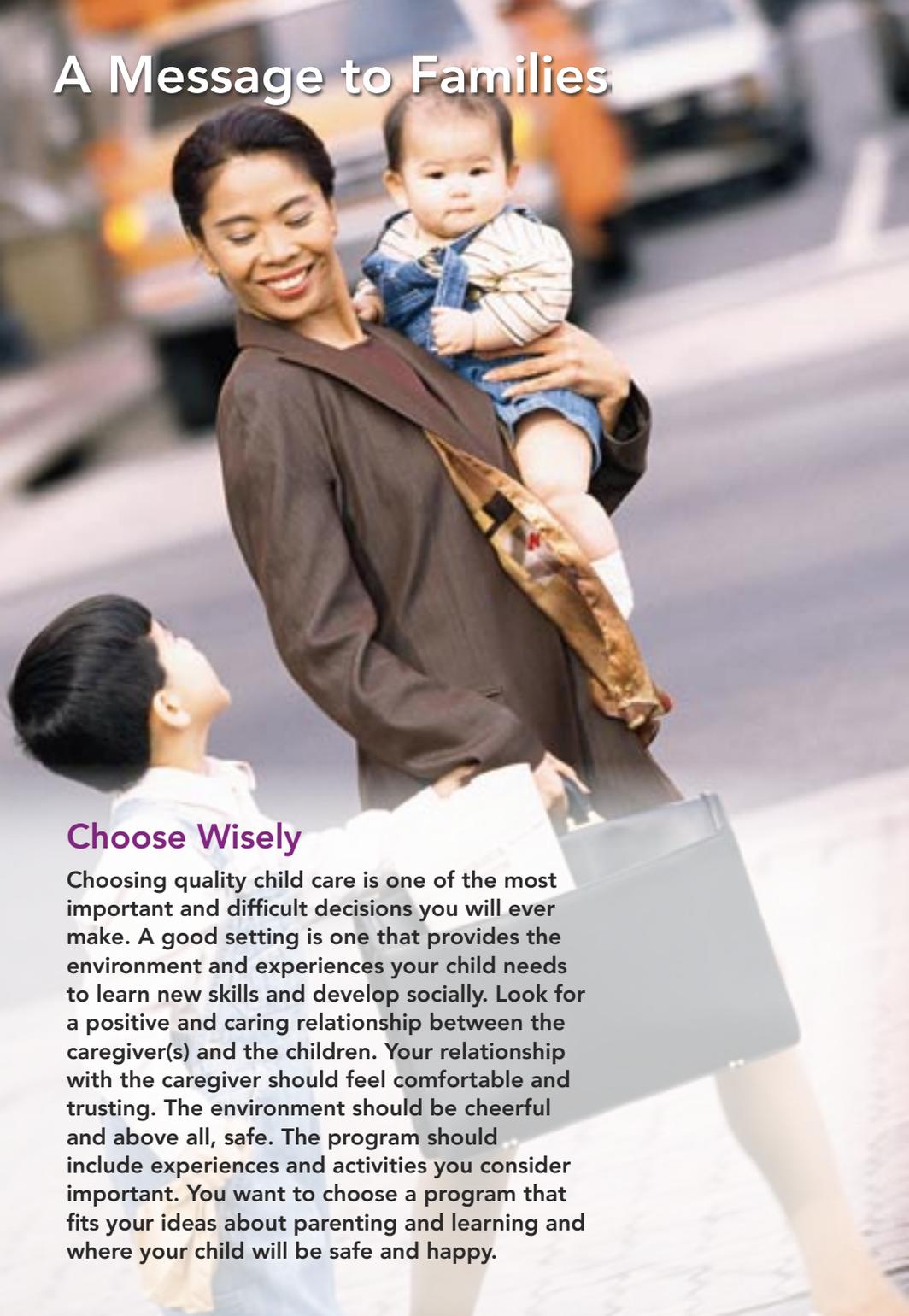


A Family Guide

For Early Education and Child Care Options



A Message to Families

A woman with dark hair, wearing a brown blazer, is smiling and carrying a baby in a blue denim outfit. The baby is wearing a striped shirt. The woman is also holding a brown paper bag. In the foreground, a young boy in a white shirt is looking up at her. She is holding a grey briefcase. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a street or park.

Choose Wisely

Choosing quality child care is one of the most important and difficult decisions you will ever make. A good setting is one that provides the environment and experiences your child needs to learn new skills and develop socially. Look for a positive and caring relationship between the caregiver(s) and the children. Your relationship with the caregiver should feel comfortable and trusting. The environment should be cheerful and above all, safe. The program should include experiences and activities you consider important. You want to choose a program that fits your ideas about parenting and learning and where your child will be safe and happy.

Do Your Homework

It's a good idea to visit and compare at least three child care settings. Make appointments with prospective caregivers and, if possible, take your child with you to the interview. Plan to spend at least 30-60 minutes visiting at each site. If possible, drop by for a second visit on another day. Use the Quality Checklist included with this brochure for some ideas on what to look for during your visit. Depending on your particular needs, you will probably want to add some questions of your own.

Be a smart shopper

Caregivers should be caring, qualified and well organized. Their facility license should be current and they should provide you with written policies and procedures regarding fees, meals, discipline, illness, communicable diseases, and emergencies.

Make an informed decision

Like any parent, your first concerns are for the safety, health, and welfare of your child. Every facility will have different features, but you must decide which things are most important to you and your child, and prioritize accordingly. Before making a final decision, check the state's child care licensing website www.myflorida.com/childcare for inspection information about any licensed program you are considering choosing.

Using Child Care Resource and Referral

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) is a service provided by your county's Early Learning Coalition. CCR&R is dedicated to helping families find answers to their questions regarding how to identify quality early education programs and how to locate a provider that meets each family's needs. After you read this brochure we suggest that you contact your local CCR&R office. Trained staff can provide you with referrals to programs that are customized to meet your family's needs, as well as referrals to other services in your community.

CCR&R services are free to anyone residing or seeking child care and early education services in Florida. When your child is in a safe, loving, quality child care setting, you will feel more at ease while you are away from your child. We have created this brochure to provide you with important facts about the options available to you and to make it easier to identify and choose the provider that is right for your family's needs.

Local Contact Information

Visit the following websites for local contacts for Early Learning Coalitions and CCR&R services in your community: www.myflorida.com/childcare or www.thechildrensforum.com.

Child Care Centers

(Licensed or Exempt Centers)

CHILD CARE CENTERS

Child care centers may be licensed or exempt and are usually located in spaces adapted for child care purposes. These include stand-alone centers and those located in businesses, apartment complexes, universities, schools, hospitals, churches, etc. Pre Kindergarten programs (both school-based and non school-based), Head Start programs, on-site employee child care centers and faith-based child care centers and homes are some of the examples of the many types of centers that are available.

State Adult to Child Ratios

- Birth-12 months (1:4)
- 12-24 months (1:6)
- 2-year-olds (1:11)
- 3-year-olds (1:15)
- 4/5-year-olds (1:20)
- 4-year-olds in Voluntary Pre-K programs (1:10)
- School-age children (1:25)

Licensed Centers

Must pass an initial inspection to ensure that all standards have been met, and must:

- Meet physical facility requirements
- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records
- Allow parents/guardians access to their children in care at all times
- Comply with three routine inspections per year
- Receive 40 hours of training initially — 10 hours annually
- Submit screening and background checks of all employees/caregivers
- Keep current immunization records of children on file
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs



Religious-Exempt Centers

Are not government inspected, must be an integral part of a church or parochial school, and must:

- Be accredited by a state recognized accrediting body
- Pass federal background check
- Meet city/county health and safety regulations
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records
- Comply with licensing standards of local and state governments
- Maintain current certification of CPR and first aid
- Pass an initial inspection prior to receiving a license
- Comply with two routine inspections per year
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive requirements than those required by the state.

Family Child Care Home

(Licensed or Registered Homes)

Family Child Care is regulated care that takes place in a caregiver's home for children from more than one family. Group size may vary according to caregiver preferences and state/local regulations. Ages often vary, although some caregivers service only a specific age group (e.g., infants, toddlers or preschoolers).

State Adult to Child Ratios

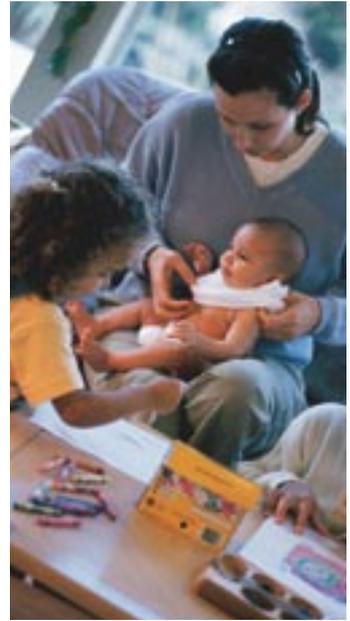
A family child care provider may care for one of the following groups of children, including the caregiver's own children under age 13.

- Birth to 12 months of age (1:4)
- No more than three are under 12 months (1:6)
- At least five of the children are school-age and no more than two are under 12 months of age or all ten can be school-age (1:10)
- Large family child care homes, a maximum of 12 children, no more than four children under 24 months (2:12)

Licensed Homes

Must meet all requirements for registration, and must:

- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records
- Comply with licensing standards of local and state governments
- Maintain current certification of CPR and first aid
- Pass an initial inspection prior to receiving a license
- Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs
- Comply with two routine inspections per year



Registered Homes

Are not required to meet state requirements, except as follows:

- Register annually
- Complete and provide to parents an annual health and safety home inspection checklist
- Provide proof of substitute care
- Proof of screening/background checks of adults in household
- Keep current immunization records of children on file
- Complete a 30-hour family child care course prior to caring for children
- Complete 10 clock hours of training annually

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive ratios than those required by the state.

VPK

Voluntary Prekindergarten

VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN

The Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) legislation was signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush on January 2, 2005. This law created a program to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and build a strong foundation for their continued educational success. The VPK program will provide each child the opportunity to perform better in school and throughout life with quality programs that include high literacy standards, accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors.

Highlights

- VPK begins in the fall of school year 2005
- High quality educational program with an early literacy focus
- FREE for all children 4-years-old by September 1, who live in Florida

VPK Program Options

- School Year Program – 540 instructional hours beginning fall 2005
- Summer Program – 300 instructional hours beginning summer 2006

Early Learning Coalitions

- Your Early Learning Coalition has additional information regarding the status of your application. Your local Early Learning Coalition contact information can be found at www.vpkflorida.org

Providers

- All VPK providers must meet high standards required by Florida law
- Parents have the option of choosing the provider that meets their own family's needs
- Options for parents include: public schools, private child care centers and licensed family child care homes

Instructors

- All VPK instructors must have a minimum of a CDA for the school year program or a Bachelor's degree for the summer program
- Ratios are 1 instructor to 10 children and class size will not exceed 18 children



Curriculum

- Must be developmentally appropriate and focus on early literacy skills
- Must prepare the child to be ready for kindergarten based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education

Transportation

- Parents are responsible for their child's transportation

For additional information or questions, visit the Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning website at www.vpkflorida.org or call toll free at: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)

Information obtained from the Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning Voluntary Prekindergarten brochure.

School-Age Child Care

(Licensed or Exempt)

A School Age Child is one who is at least five years of age by September 1 of the beginning of the school year and who is attending kindergarten through fifth grade. A School-Age Child Care Program refers to before and after school programs that are licensed and serve only school age children by definition. The setting for a School-Age Child Care program may be a school, child care center, family child care home, church, or community/recreation program.



Licensed Programs

Must pass an initial inspection to ensure that all standards required by statute have been met, and must:

- Meet physical facility requirements
- Follow health, safety and nutrition guidelines
- Maintain enrollment and attendance records
- Allow parents access to their children in care at all times
- Comply with annual inspection schedules
- Receive 40 hours of training initially, plus a minimum of 10 hours annually thereafter
- Submit screening and background checks of all employees/caregivers
- Comply with a 1:25 adult/child ratio
- Have a supervisor/director holding a Director's Credential (multi-site supervision at school-age child care programs is permitted.)

Licensed-Exempt Programs

The following programs are exempt from school-age care licensure, but must meet city/county health and safety regulations (exempt programs are not government inspected):

- public schools and non-public schools and their integral programs
- summer camps having children in full-time residence
- summer day camps
- programs that are an integral part of a church or parochial school
- Bible school conducted during vacation periods
- operators of transient establishments

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive requirements than those required by the state.

Unregulated Care

No state requirements or inspections

Care that takes place in either the caregivers home or another setting; there are no state requirements or inspections.

Informal Care

Takes place in the caregiver's home where one adult cares for children from only one family. The caregiver is often a relative, neighbor and/or friend. This type of care has no state guidelines or inspections. Informal caregivers may qualify to participate in the School Readiness program after completion of a three hour health and safety course.

After-School Programs Serving School-Age Children

Are not required to be licensed if the program meets one of the following criteria:

1. Programs located on public/non-public school sites, operated and staffed by that school or through a written or formal agreement between the school and a providers to serve school-age children attending the school.
2. Programs that provide activities to all children, regardless of age, which are strictly instructional or tutorial/academic in nature.
3. After school programs that meet all the following criteria:
 - a. Operate for a period not to exceed a total of four hours in any one day; however, may extend to providing services before school, on teacher planning days, holidays and intercessions that occur during the school district's official calendar year
 - b. Allow children to enter and leave the program at any time, without adult supervision
 - c. Do not provide any transportation, directly or through a contract or agreement with an outside entity, for the purpose of field trips, during the hours of operation
 - d. Do not serve or prepare any meals or snacks, however the program may



choose to provide drinks and snacks that do not require refrigeration or vending machine items that do not require refrigeration

4. Programs providing after school care exclusively for children in grades 6 or above.

Summer Camps & Recreational Programs

Operate only during summer breaks from educational institutions. Summer care is provided for children in kindergarten and above; adult/child ratios vary. This type of care requires no state inspections. Personnel other than owners/operators are not required to be fingerprinted but must comply with all other screening requirements.

Membership Organizations

Not-for-profit organization associated/certified with national organizations. These are not considered child care facilities and therefore their personnel are not required to be screened. Examples of these organizations are the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club.

Resort/Hotel Care

Establishments that provide child care solely for guests. All child care staff must be screened.

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive guidelines.



RESOURCES TO ASSIST FAMILIES

Resources to Assist Families

Financial Resources

Dependent Care Tax Credit

This credit enables parents to deduct eligible child care expenses from their annual income tax return. The amount of the credit is deducted from the family's total tax liability and can represent a substantial savings for families. For additional information, request Publication 503 from the Internal Revenue Service.

800-TAX-1040

www.irs.gov

Earned Income Credit (EIC)/ Advanced Earned Income Credit

The EIC is a special tax benefit for working people who earn low or moderate incomes. The advanced EIC allows workers who qualify to receive a portion of their income tax refund in advance in each paycheck throughout the year.

800-TAX-1040

www.irs.gov

Child Care/School Readiness Services

Parents earning low or moderate incomes may qualify for financial assistance to help pay a portion of the costs for a child care or school readiness program. To find out if you qualify or to learn about other scholarships and other financial assistance options, contact your local early learning coalition, the Office of Early Learning and/or your local CCR&R office.

See Agency for Workforce Innovation-Office of Early Learning

Head Start

This comprehensive program provides preschool, health, nutrition and family support services for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds prior to kindergarten. It is funded by the federal government; there are no costs to families who meet the eligibility criteria. **Contact your local early learning coalition, the Head Start program, the Office of Early Learning and/or your local CCR&R office.**



Family Resources

Agency for Workforce Innovation- Office of Early Learning

Vision: All of Florida's children are eager to learn and ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten. Mission: To establish a unified approach and specific strategies for systemic change — through local Early Learning coalitions and interagency partnerships to ensure that all children are emotionally, physically, socially and intellectually ready to enter school and ready to learn, fully recognizing the crucial role of parents as their child's first teacher.

(850) 922-4200

www.floridajobs.gov/earlylearning.html

Americans with Disabilities Act

For general ADA information, answers to specific technical questions, free ADA materials, or information about filing a complaint, call:

800-514-0301 (voice)

800-514-0383 (TTY)

www.ada.gov

Child Care Aware

Child Care Aware is a non-profit initiative committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their local community; maintain links to resource and referral agencies in every state of the U.S.

800-424-2246

www.childcareaware.org

ChildHelp

National Child Abuse Hotline

The Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse. Serving the United States, Canada, U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam, the hotline is staffed 24 hours daily with professional crisis counselors who utilize a database of thousands of resources.

800-4-A-Child

www.childhelpusa.org

Department of Children & Families (DCF) Licensing Website

The Department of Children and Families is statutorily responsible for the administration of child care licensing and training throughout Florida. This program regulates licensed child care facilities, licensed family child care homes, and licensed mildly ill facilities in 60 of the 67 counties in Florida.

850-921-4713

www.myflorida.com/childcare

To view the licensing inspection report for a provider select "provider search," enter a provider's name and county then click on search. When provider information appears, select "inspection reports."

Florida Abuse Hotline

Provides a full spectrum of services, from parenting classes and respite care to transportation and child care; the goal of the department is to keep children safe in their own families when possible.

800-96-ABUSE

800-96-2283

www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse

Florida's Central Directory of Early Childhood Services

The Central Directory provides information and referral on disabilities and special health care needs for families, service coordinators and other professionals that work with children with special needs. The Central Directory can also refer you to the local Early Steps or FDLRS ChildFind in your area if you suspect your child may have a disability.

800-654-4440

www.centraldirectory.org

Florida Child Support Enforcement

Child support services that include locating missing parents, establishing legal paternity, and establishing, enforcing, and modifying support orders.

800-622-KIDS or 800-622-5437

www.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport/

Florida KidCare

Florida KidCare is the children's health insurance program for uninsured children younger than age 19. It is made up of four parts: MediKids, Healthy Kids, Children's Medical Services (CMS) Network for children with special health care needs and Medicaid for children. The Florida KidCare program assesses eligibility based on age and family income.

888-540-5437

www.floridakidcare.com

MyFlorida.com

Florida's government website -

www.myflorida.com

National Association for the Education of Young Children

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8.

800-424-2460

www.naeyc.org

Parent Anonymous Hotline

A community of parents, organizations and volunteers committed to: Strengthening Families to Build Strong Communities.

909-621-6184

Parents Without Partners

Provides help to single parents by way of discussions, professional speakers, study groups, publications and social activities for families and adults.

561-391-8833

www.parentswithoutpartners.org

The Children's Forum

The Children's Forum promotes quality child care and early learning, engages parents, conducts research, and supports excellence in teaching and care giving through training and technical assistance services. The Forum's goal is to ensure that children develop the strong foundations they need beginning at birth and arrive at school ready to succeed. The Forum coordinates services with community-based early learning coalitions, child care resource and referral agencies and other organizations statewide.

888-352-4453

www.thechildrensforum.com

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

A free voluntary program designed to prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success.

866-357-3239

www.vpkflorida.org

211

National information and referral service that provides information and referrals to human services such as crisis intervention services, support groups, financial assistance, job training, etc.

Dial 211

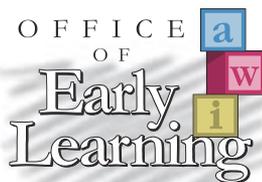
www.211.org

A Family Guide

For Early Education and Child Care Options



www.thechildrensforum.com



www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning.html