

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CHILD CARE

Dear Parent:

When you choose licensed child care, you and your family join your child in new experiences and relationships. You, the child-care provider, child care-staff, and other people in the child-care facilities have a responsibility to protect the health, safety, and well-being of your child. This pamphlet gives an overview of what you need to look for when selecting child care for your child.



WHAT IS CHILD-CARE LICENSING?

◆The Licensing Unit of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education was established by law to regulate child-care facilities to help protect the health, safety, and well being of children in care.

◆With the assistance of child-care providers and experts in areas such as child development, early childhood education, fire safety, health, and sanitation, the Licensing Unit develops minimum licensing standards.

◆Licensing staff inspect child care centers, private kindergartens, and day care family homes to be sure that minimum standards are met. The staff also investigate complaints about violations of the minimum licensing standards.

◆Your child care facility is responsible for meeting minimum standards. Many child care programs exceed these requirements. Licensing does not regulate child care fees, collection policies, or the kind of learning program your child care facility offers. Each facility has its own special personality and approach to educating and caring for children. Parents can choose the kind of program that best meets the needs of their child and family.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

Choose your child care facility carefully.

◆When you visit a child care facility, ask to

see the license. The license means that the child care facility meets the minimum licensing standards for such things as fire, sanitation, safety, the number of child care staff required, staff qualifications, and requirements for special services.

A copy of the minimum standards is available for you to review at your child care facility. You can also request a copy of these standards from your local child care licensing office.

ESTABLISH A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD CARE FACILITY

◆Spend time at the child care facility before you enroll your child. Ask questions about the program and observe the activities. Make sure the child care facility has all the information needed about your child and family to provide good care. Work with the staff of the child care facility you choose. Parent involvement is an important part of a successful experience with child care.

◆Read all the material the child care provider gives you. In addition to material required by licensing standards, each facility has its own policies and requirements. It's important that you understand these requirements before you enroll your child. It's equally important, once your child is in care, to read the notices, special requests, notes and other materials the child care provider sends home.

◆ Drop in occasionally during the day to observe how your child interacts with staff and other children, and get a good picture of the day to day activities at the facility. Be careful not to disrupt activities.

◆ Keep your side of the bargain. Pick up your child on time.

◆ Discuss concerns with the child care director or person in charge. Be aware that the teacher's main responsibility is working with the children. Don't be offended if the teacher can't spend much time talking with you when you drop off or pick up your child. If you need more time to talk about your child, set up a conference.

◆ It's important to let the child care facility know about things at home that may affect how your child is doing in care.

WHEN YOUR CHILD STARTS CHILD CARE

◆ Remember that it's normal for a child to have some fears and misgivings about starting child care. Children need time to get used to new situations. Prepare your children for the change as far in advance as possible. Discuss their concerns. If you're enthusiastic, chances are they soon will be too.

◆ Depending on their ages, some children will temporarily "act out" their feelings by clinging to you and refusing to let go, forgetting their toilet training, having bad dreams, sucking their thumbs, or other such behavior. Work with the child care provider on this.

TALK THINGS OVER WITH YOUR CHILD

◆ Make an opportunity each day to gently ask questions when your children are quiet and feeling secure and protected. Share their excitement about new friends, new skills, and new abilities; listen to their concerns;

and give them a chance to talk about what they have done that day.

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

◆ The child care facility must get certain information and records from parents to ensure the child's health and safety, handle emergencies and meet minimum standards. If you don't provide this material, the child care facility will not meet minimum standards.

◆ Complete an enrollment form that includes basic information about your child; telephone numbers where you can be reached during the day; approval for emergency care for you child; and written permission for swimming, other water activities, and transportation services.

◆ Tell the caregiver about any special concerns or needs, including allergies, medical history and current medications.

◆ Give the child care facility a copy of your child immunization record showing immunizations against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, Hemophilus influenza type b, and Hepatitis B. For school-age children, you can sign a statement that these records are on file at school.

◆ Inform the child care facility in writing about who is permitted to take your child from the facility. Generally, the child care facility may only release your child to you or to an adult you name.

◆ The facility may allow a school age child to leave the facility alone or allow an older brother or sister to pick up a child if you request this in writing. The facility is only allowed to do this when all safety considerations have been met.

◆ Make sure that child care staff know the child has arrived. Make sure that staff are

aware when you come to pick up your child. Don't leave your child at the front door, and never leave your child at the facility before opening or after closing.

◆Other requirements must be met if the child care provider gives medication to your child, if your child is an infant, or if your child needs special care or a special diet.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR CHILD IS ILL OR INJURED?

◆The child care facility is not allowed to admit a child who seems to be sick unless a doctor or nurse gives approval in writing. This may cause problems for parents, but it is necessary to prevent a sick child from infecting other children.

◆If your child has been absent because of a contagious illness, the child care facility must follow guidelines concerning when the child can return to child care.

◆If your child appears seriously sick or injured while at the center, the caregiver must call you immediately. It's important that you pick up your child as soon as possible.

◆If your child needs medical attention at once, the facility must call your child's doctor, take the child to the nearest emergency room or minor emergency clinic, or call for an ambulance. This is why the child care facility must have your authorization for emergency medical care.

TAKE A GOOD LOOK

◆As you become more familiar with the child care program, you will see many strong points. Almost all child care facilities strive to provide a warm, loving, safe and healthy environment for children. Look for these characteristics, but also be aware of warning signals that tell you something is wrong.

FEEL SECURE WHEN YOU SEE THAT:

◆The facility welcomes you to visit any time, and you are invited to observe the class or participate in activities

◆Staff are alert and involved with the children.

◆Staff seems warm and interested in the children. There is a lot of laughter, hugging, and eye to eye contact.

◆Staff are gentle, but firm when necessary.

◆The facility is clean and attractive.

◆Your child is relaxed and happy.

◆Your child seems physically well cared for. Staff informs you of minor accidents and tells you when your child doesn't feel well.

◆Children seem involved with useful activities, and they get individual attention.

BE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED WHEN YOU SEE THAT:

◆Parents are not encouraged to visit the facility.

◆Children are left without direct adult supervision.

◆Adults spend much time scolding, ordering, and yelling at children.

◆Adults are physically rough with children or allow rough play.

◆The building is dirty, or you see unsafe conditions.

◆Your child is unhappy about being left at the facility, and this doesn't improve with t

time. A child comes home bruised or injured, and the facility cannot explain what happened. (The child may not remember minor bruises and scrapes received when playing however).

- ◆ Children seem aimless, bored, angry or frustrated or there are too many children to supervise.

WHEN THINGS AREN'T GOING WELL

- ◆ You may find yourself unhappy about something that has happened at the facility. Talk about these things with the staff. There may be a misunderstanding that can easily be resolved.

- ◆ If the situation isn't resolved and you believe minimum standards are not being met, call the local child care licensing office. They will handle your call discreetly.

- ◆ A licensing worker will investigate your concerns. The licensing worker may need to interview you and your child and may also interview other children at the facility.

- ◆ If the licensing worker finds that a standard has been violated, the facility will be notified and a time set for the facility to correct it.

- ◆ Licensing staff may take away a license if a facility does not meet minimum standards. The department does not take action to take away a license unless children are in immediate danger or the licensee refuses to or is unable to comply with standards.

IF YOU SUSPECT CHILD MALTREATMENT

- ◆ Most child care facilities, like most parents take good care of children. Child abuse is rare, and its very unlikely that anything like this will happen to your child.

- ◆ If you do suspect that your child has been abused, neglected or sexually molested, report the situation immediately. Use the toll-free Child Abuse Hotline number (1-800-482-5964) available 24 hours a day. If you think the abuse occurred in a child care facility, you may also call your child care licensing office. The situation will be investigated immediately and you will be given referrals or recommendations for help for your child and family.

- ◆ Should agency staff interview or examine your child during an abuse investigation, a reasonable effort will be made to notify you within 24 hours after the interview or examination.

- ◆ Parents who suspect or believe that their child has been abused in day care sometimes remove their child from care, but do not report the problem. This leaves other children in danger. State law requires you to report if you think a child has been abused or neglected.

- ◆ Should testimony in court be needed, you may be able to talk on behalf of your child if you were the first person to hear your child's story.

- ◆ When people make a report of suspected child abuse in good faith, they are immune from any liability. If a complaint is made with a desire to harm others, there is no liability protection.

- ◆ When the Department investigates a complaint, the identity of the complainant is not revealed. Everyone, including child care providers, is required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately.

IF YOU WANT ASSISTANCE TO HELP PAY YOUR CHILD CARE

Child care assistance is available for low-income families who meet the following criteria:

- ★Child care is provided in a licensed or registered day care center or day care family home. In some cases, an approved relative or in-home provider may provide the care.
- ★Low income (A sliding fee scale is used).
- ★All adults must be employed at least 35 hours per week or be in school or a training program full time. The requirement may also be met by a combination of at least 35 hours of employment and school/training per week.
- ★Child support requirements must be met for any absentee parent.

For further information call 1-800-322-8176. In Pulaski County call 682-8947. The TDD number is 682-1550.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN STATE APPROVED/ACCREDITED CHILD CARE FACILITIES AND AN ADDITIONAL TAX CREDIT

◆Child care programs in Arkansas may choose to meet requirements which are above those set by minimum licensing standards. The State has an approval system and national child care groups offer accreditation for child care programs.

◆If, as a parent, you are interested in selecting child care which has a higher level of quality and has been found to offer developmental and educational activities for young children, you should ask if the program has received STATE APPROVAL/ACCREDITATION.

◆If the program you are using or are considering as a placement for your children is not currently an approved or accredited program, then ask "Why not?" For more information on how a program can become approved or for a listing of the approved/accredited programs in Arkansas call 1-800-445-3316.

◆You may receive a refundable tax credit on your state income taxes if you use an approved child care facility.



CHILD CARE LICENSING OFFICES

Baxter Co. DHS
P.O. Box 408
Mountain Home, AR 72653
870/425-5883

Benton Co. DHS
1206 Southeast "J" Street
Bentonville, AR 72712
501/273-9011

Central Office
P.O. Box 1437, Slot 720
Little Rock, AR 72203
501/682-8590

Cleburne Co. DHS
P.O. Box 1140
Heber Springs, AR 72543
501/362-3298

Conway Co. DHS
P.O. Box 228
Morrilton, AR 72110
501/354-2418

Craighead Co. DHS
2920 McClellan Drive
Jonesboro, AR 72204
870/972-1732

Drew Co. DHS
P.O. Box 1350
Monticello, AR 71655
870/367-6835

Faulkner Co. DHS
P.O. Box 310
Conway, AR 72032
501/730-9900

Garland Co. DHS
115 Market Street
Hot Springs, AR 71901
501/321-2583

Hempstead Co. DHS
P.O. Box 723
Hope, AR 71801
870/777-8656

Jefferson Co. DHS
P.O. Box 5670
Pine Bluff, AR 71611
870/534-4200

Logan Co. DHS
#17 West McKeen
Paris, AR 72855
501/963-2783

Lonoke Co. DHS
P.O. Box 260
Lonoke, AR 72086
501/676-3113

Marion Co. DHS
P.O. Box 447
Yellville, AR 72687-0447
870/449-4058

Mississippi Co. DHS
218 N. First Street
Blytheville, AR 72315
870/763-7093

Ouachita Co. DHS
222 Van Buren
Camden, AR 71701
870/836-8166

Perry Co. DHS
403 Houston Ave.
Perryville, AR 72126
501/889-5105

Scott Co. DHS
P.O. Box 840
Waldron, AR 72958-0848
501/637-4141

Sebastian Co. DHS
616 Garrison Ave.
Fort Smith, AR 72901-7837
501/782-4555

St. Francis Co. DHS
P.O. Box 899
Forrest City, AR 72335
870/633-1242

Washington Co. DHS
4044 Frontage Rd.
Fayetteville, AR 72073
501/521-1270

White Co. DHS
608 Rodgers Dr.
Searcy, AR 72143
501/268-8696

The Arkansas Department of Human Services and
The Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education is here to help you!

101 East Capitol, Suite 106
Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: 501-682-8590/682-4891
Fax: 501-682-2317

Visit our web site at: www.state.ar.us/childcare