“A Child’s Early Years Lay The Foundation For All That Is To Come”

Merced County Child Care Resource & Referral
Supporting High Quality Care and Education

A Guide For Choosing Child Care

(209) 381-6793
www.mcoe.org
Dear Parent/Guardian,

Finding quality child care is one of the most important decisions parents will ever make for their child. Simply put, a child’s early years lay the foundation for all that is to come. In recent years, researchers have learned that the human brain develops the vast majority of its neurons, and is at its most receptive to learning, between birth and three years of age. In fact, the intake of new information is critical to the formation of active neural pathways (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The search to find a quality child care setting that meets your child and family needs could be a stressful experience.

However, having the right tools, information and support will ease the situation and help you find the best child care setting for your child. We encourage parents to TAKE THE TIME to carefully interview several different teacher/child care providers and to check references before leaving a child in care. The teachers/child care provider will become an important person in a child’s life and will influence his/her future development.

As your local child care Resource and Referral agency, we are here to help you get all the information needed to make the best child care choice. Our specialists are available free of charge to consult with anyone seeking child care.

This booklet has been designed to assist you in your search for a quality child care setting. For additional information, questions or concerns, please contact Merced County Child Care Resource and Referral (209)381-6793.
Teacher/Child Care Provider Qualifications

Specialized training in child development and early education helps ensure staff understand how children grow and learn.

- Are the teachers/child care providers well-qualified? Do they have sufficient knowledge of child development and how young children learn?
- What is their or the provider's educational background?
- Are the providers involved in continuing education programs?
- Are the teachers/child care providers use positive discipline to help children understand what is expected of them?
- Are the teachers/child care providers responsive to each child's ability needs, language differences and overall development?
- Are the teachers/child care providers engaged in interesting conversations with children?
- Are the teachers/child care providers respectful and understand the values and culture of the child's family?
- Is there a researched based curriculum being used that offers opportunities for children to experience language, science, math, art, music and physical activity every day?
- Are parents encouraged to ask questions and make unannounced visits?

Type of Child Care Settings

**LICENSE-EXEMPT CHILD CARE**

- No licensing requirements.
- Hours of operation are usually flexible.
- Providers include relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles), other relatives, friends & neighbors.
- Care is provided in the providers home or in some cases the home of the child.
- Parents using this option, should consider contacting the Trustline Registry at 800-822-8490, to obtain information or a background check on the potential provider.

**LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME (FCCH)**

- Licensed and regulated by the State of California.
- Large—cares for up to 14 children and requires an assistant.
- Small—cares for up to 8 children.
- Home setting (private home provider) for children of mixed ages.
- Group sizes are smaller allowing for individualized care.
- Staff are CPR/First Aid certified.
- Often flexible schedule including, evening, weekend or overnight care.

**CHILD CARE CENTER**

- Licensed and regulated by the State of California.
- Provide care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and/or school-age children.
- Care is provided in non-home facilities such as churches and schools.
- Group sizes are large allowing for rich social experiences.
- Staff are CPR/First Aid and Health and Safety certified.
- Many staff have educational backgrounds and/or degrees in early childhood education and provide school readiness activities.
Do you need help paying for child care?
Call Merced County Resource & Referral for more information.

State/Federal Funded Programs

Alternative Payment, CalWORKs Stages 1, 2 & 3
Allows parents to choose type of child care setting.

- Services offered: Vary
- Who Qualifies: Children in families with income below 75% of State Median Income (SMI) guidelines or currently receiving or recently received cash assistance.
- Requirements: Parents are required to be working, attending school/training, seeking employment or incapacitated.
- Hours of Operation: Vary by program.
- Ages served: birth to 12 years old.
- Additional services available for families in agriculture/migrant work.

Federally Funded Programs

Early Head Start/Head Start

- Services offered: complete educational experiences, family support, health screenings, and meals.
- Who Qualifies: children in families with incomes below the federal poverty guidelines.
- Requirements: Part-time has no requirement; full-time parents are required to be working, attending school/training, seeking employment or incapacitated.
- Hours of Operation: Full-day (7:00am –5:00pm) or Part-day (morning or afternoon sessions) 3-4 hours.
- Ages served: Early Head Start (0-3 years) Head Start (4-5 years).
- Additional services available for families in agriculture/migrant work.

Think about Positive Discipline

Teachers/Child care providers need to set limits for children. Those limits depend on a child’s age and abilities. Children should be reminded of the limits without an adult hitting or scaring them, hurting their feelings or taking away something important like food or rest. Corporal (physical) punishment is never allowed.

 Discipline

- How do the caregivers discipline children? (Hint: Discipline should be positive, clear, consistent, fair, and never include hitting or any physical punishment.)
- Does the teacher/child care provider understands babies are not Disciplined? All babies must be cared for with a comforting voice and gentle touch.
- Does the caregiver/teacher understand that young children (3-to 5-year-olds) need:
  - Gentle reminders to help them get along with others.
  - Help learning to talk about their feelings.

 Licensing/Requirements

- Is this a licensed facility?
- Is the facility license posted?
- Are all adults fingerprint cleared and have they completed all required criminal and child abuse background checks?
**Think about the Environment**

A quality child care setting that offers a variety of activities and experiences will help children develop skills for school and life readiness. Look for a balance of active, quiet, indoor and outdoor play that is based on the abilities and interests of your child(ren).

**Setting/Environment**

- Is the atmosphere bright, friendly, inviting and pleasant?
- Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment? Can the children be seen on the playground at all times?
- Are there different areas for resting, quiet play and active play? Is there enough space for the children in all of these areas?
- Do children go outdoors everyday unless the weather is bad?
- Does the teacher/child care provider get down on each child’s level to speak with the child?
- Are children greeted when they arrive?

**Activities**

- Is there a daily balance of play time, activity time and nap time?
- Are there planned activities and a lot of time for free play?
- Are there enough toys and learning materials for the number of children?
- Are the activities right (developmentally appropriate) for your child?
- Are toys clean, safe and within reach of the children?
- Visit potential provider sites. Possibly even take your child to visit a potential child care provider to see how your child likes the site.

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**State Funded Programs—Center Based**

**Services offered:** Complete educational experiences, meals and health screenings.

**General Child Care and Development**

- **Who Qualifies:** Children in families with income below 75% of State Median Income (SMI) guidelines.
- **Requirements:** Parents are required to be working, attending school/training, seeking employment or incapacitated.
- **Hours of Operation:** Traditionally to include full day (7:00am-6:00pm).
- **Ages served:** newborn to 12 years.
- **Additional services available for families in agriculture/migrant work.**

**Full Day State Preschool**

- **Who Qualifies:** Children in families with incomes below the 75% SMI guidelines.
- **Requirements:** Parents are required to be working, attending school/training, seeking employment or incapacitated.
- **Hours of Operation:** Include full day (7:00am-6:00pm).
- **Ages served:** 3-4 yrs.

**Part Day State Preschool**

- **Who Qualifies:** Children in families with incomes below the 75% SMI guidelines.
- **Hours of Operation:** 3-4 hour morning or afternoon session.
- **Ages served:** 3-4 yrs.
- **Requirements:** enrollment is prioritized based on income Guidelines.

For more information on these programs contact R&R at 209 381-6793
Think About Supervision

It is important to know what steps the adults take to prevent accidents and what plans are in place in case of emergency.

**Supervision**

- Are children supervised at all times, even when they sleep?
- What policies/procedures are used when dropping off and picking up children?
- What is the adult-to-child ratio? Are they appropriate?
  
  **Hint:** Your child will get more attention if each teacher has fewer children to take care of.
- Is program childproofed to prevent accidents?
  
  **Protections include:**
  - Electrical sockets are covered; child-proof locks on cabinets; hanging cords from blinds are secured; small household objects that may be a choking hazard are out of reach; safety gates on stairs.
  - There are fencing or another sturdy barrier to keep children away from pools, ponds and other bodies of water.

**Toxic Substances**

- Are there working smoke detectors on each floor?
- Has the building been checked for dangerous substances like radon, lead and asbestos?
- Are medicines and cleansers locked up?

**Fire/Emergency Drills**

- Does the program have a plan in case of a disaster like a fire, flood, or earthquake?
- Does the program have a posted emergency evacuation plan?

Think about Health and Safety

To keep children healthy, the adult should encourage good health habits and take steps to prevent the spread of germs.

**Hand washing, Diapering & Sanitizing**

- Do all adults and children wash their hands often, especially before eating & after using the bathroom or changing diapers?
- Do adults clean and sanitize the surface after finishing the changing process?
- Is the child care setting clean? Are toys, furniture and floors washed frequently with a bleach solution?

**Immunizations**

- Does the child care program have up-to-date immunization records for all children attending the program?

**Keeping Children Healthy**

- Are all adults certified in First Aid and CPR?
- Has caregiver/teacher been trained to understand and meet the needs of children of different ages?
- Are all adults, trained on and implementing infant back sleeping and safe sleep policies to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, crib death)?
- Are children comforted when needed?
- Does the program have emergency contact information for each child enrolled?

**Nutrition**

- Are nutritious meals and snacks served?
- Is agency/program enrolled in food program?