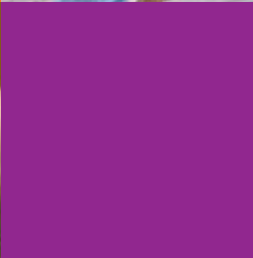


A Family Guide

For Selecting Quality Early Learning Programs





A Message to Families

Choose Wisely

Choosing an early learning program for your child is one of the most important and difficult decisions you will ever make. This brochure is designed to help you make choices about quality programs to find a good match for you and your child. 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 teachers and children. Your communications with the teacher should feel comfortable and trusting. The environment should be cheerful and above all, safe. The program should include experiences and activities you consider important. Ultimately, you want to choose a program that fits your ideas about parenting and learning, where your child will be safe and happy.

Do Your Research

It's a good idea to visit and compare at least three early learning settings. Make appointments with prospective programs and, if possible, take your child with you on the visit. Plan to spend at least 30 minutes visiting each site. If possible, drop by for a second visit on another day. Use the Quality Checklist included with this brochure for guidance on what to look for during your visit. Depending on your particular needs, you will likely have some additional questions of your own.

Be a Smart Shopper

Program staff 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. Beyond these basics, staff should be able to share with you the program philosophy on how children learn and the daily activities children will participate in. This information will help you make decisions on whether a program is a good fit for you and your child. It is important to visit many play areas within the program, not just where your child will first be placed. You want to be sure you will be happy with your child's entire experience within the program.

Make an Informed Decision

Like any parent, your first concerns are for the safety, health and welfare of your child. Every program will have positive features, but you must decide which things are most important for 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 Services

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 learning 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 early learning services in Florida. When your child is in a safe, loving, quality early learning 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 website for local contacts for early learning coalitions and CCR&R services in your community: <http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/ChildCareResourceReferralNetwork.html> or contact the CCR&R Network Office at 1-866-357-3239.



A "Perfect" Match: Your Child and Their Child Care Setting

One of the factors to consider when choosing an early learning program is your child's personal style and how it relates to that of the program. In this section you will find some general guidelines to consider in matching your child's personal style and activity level to locate the best early learning program "fit."

In thinking about your child's temperament, which describes your child most of the time?

Adaptable/outgoing

- Flexible
- At ease in new surroundings/with new people
- Good with transitions

Look for a large group setting that provides social interactions and new experiences.

Cautious/slow to warm up

- Thoughtful
- Cautious in new surroundings/with new people
- Needs time for transitions

Look for a small group setting that is less overwhelming.

Feisty/energetic

- Passionate, exhibits strong emotions
- Has difficulty controlling his/her strong feelings
- Impatient and demanding regarding needs and wants

Look for a program where each child has a primary teacher, someone who knows and understands your child.

How active is your child?

High Activity Level

- Always on the go

Look for an individualized approach, safe exploration opportunities, and increased physical play.

Low Activity Level

- Sits quietly; explores through their eyes and ears

Look for a teacher who engages the child in sensory-rich activities.

How social is your child?

Very Social

- Enjoys meeting new people
- Is happiest when interacting with others

Look for increased opportunities for interactive, group play.

Moderately Social

- Generally shy and reserved around strangers
- Needs extra time to feel comfortable with new people

Look for a program/teacher that allows the child to initiate contact/play with others at their own pace.

How does your child deal with change?

Very Tolerant

- Is not disturbed by changes
- Is highly adaptable
- Copes very well with frustration

Look for a mixed-aged setting that offers frequent challenges and adequate stimulation.

Less Tolerant

- Is very sensitive to change
- Gets upset when daily routine is disrupted
- Is easily frustrated and bothered by change

Look for same-age settings with a consistent routine which encourages child's independent growth and developmental.



Early Learning Centers

Centers may be licensed or exempt and are usually located in spaces adapted for early learning purposes. These include stand-alone centers and those located in businesses, apartment complexes, universities, public schools, hospitals, and faith-based facilities. Prekindergarten programs (both school-based and non school-based), Head Start programs, on-site employee early learning centers and faith-based centers are some of the 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 Prekindergarten programs (1-10)
- School-age children (1:25)

Note: Ratios in parenthesis represent the number of children that one adult may supervise for each age group.

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/teachers
- 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 faith-based 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
- Maintain current certification of CPR and first aid
- 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 mandated by the state.



Family Child Care Home

(Licensed or Registered Homes)

Family child care is regulated care that takes place in a person's home for children from more than one family. Group size may vary according to family child care provider preferences and state/ local regulations. Ages often vary, although some providers 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 provider's own children younger than age 13:

- Birth to 12 months of age (1:4)
- No more than three of the children 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 10 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)

Note: Ratios in parenthesis represent the number of children that one adult may supervise for each group.

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
- Provide 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: Standards of care for registered homes participating in the School Readiness program are regulated by local early



learning coalitions.

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.

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



Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK)

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 provides 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.

VPK Highlights

- High quality educational program with an early literacy focus
- FREE for all children who live in Florida and turn four years old by September 1st

Program Options

- VPK School Year Program – 540 instructional hours
 - Part-day from fall to spring;
 - or full-day during fall or spring
- VPK Summer Program – 300 instructional hours during summer

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 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
- Ratio is one teacher to 10 children and class size will not exceed 18 children

Curriculum

- Must be developmentally appropriate and focus on early literacy skills
- Prepare the child to be ready for kindergarten based on standards adopted by the state Department of Education



Transportation

- Parents are responsible for their child's transportation

Early Learning Coalitions (ELC)

Your ELC has additional information including application procedures and dates to apply in your county. Your local ELC contact information can be found at www.vpkflorida.org

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)



School-Age Care

(Licensed or Exempt)

A school-age child is one who is at least five years of age by September 1st and who is attending kindergarten through fifth grade. A school-age program refers to before- and after-school programs that are licensed or licensed exempt and serve only school age children by definition. The setting for a school-age program may be a public or private school, private center, family child care home, faith-based facility 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 inspections 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 an Administrator'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 faith-based school
- Religious education programs conducted during vacation periods
- Operators of temporary establishments (*e.g. hurricane shelters*)

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



Unregulated Care

Care that does not require licensure or regulated inspections by the state.

Informal Care

Takes place in the person's home where one adult cares for children from only one family. The person is often a relative, neighbor and/or friend. This type of care has no state guidelines or inspections. Informal providers may qualify to participate in the School Readiness program (see *Financial Resources under the Resources for Families* tab of this brochure) after completion of a three-hour health and safety course and by meeting early learning coalition requirements.

Au-Pair Care

Au-pairs provide families with intercultural, individualized, live-in child care. Most Au-pairs are a member of an international Au-pair organization which is regulated by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Exchange Visitor Program.

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 early learning 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 care solely for guests; all staff caring for children must be screened.

Note: Some counties may have more restrictive guidelines.



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.

Call IRS toll-free 800-TAX-1040 or visit www.irs.ustreas.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. **Call IRS toll-free 800-TAX-1040 or visit www.irs.ustreas.gov**

School Readiness Services

Parents earning low or moderate incomes may qualify for financial assistance to help in paying a portion of the costs for early learning services. To find out if you qualify for the School Readiness program or to learn about other scholarships and 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 three- and four-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

The Office of Early Learning provides state-level support and direction for early learning professionals and practitioners. By providing guidance, support and oversight to community early learning coalitions, the Early Learning program helps children be successful in school and in life. **Call (850) 921-4200 or 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711) or visit <http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning.html>**

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

General ADA information is available including 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 programs and resources in their local community; maintain links to resource and referral agencies in every state of the US. **Call (800) 424-2246 or visit www.childcareaware.org**

Child Help National Child Abuse Hotline

The Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse. The hotline is staffed 24 hours daily with professional crisis counselors who utilize a database of thousands of resources. **Call 800-4-A-Child or visit www.childhelpusa.org**

Cultural Care Au-Pair

Call 1-800-333-6056 or visit www.culturalcare.com

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. **Call (800) 921-4713 or visit www.myflorida.com/childcare**

To view the licensing inspection report for a provider select "provider search", enter a providers 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. **Call 800-96-ABUSE (800-962-2873) or visit 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. **Call (800) 654-4440 or visit 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.

Call 800-622-KIDS, (800) 622-5437 or visit www.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport/

Florida Kid Care

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.

Call (800) 540-5437 or visit www.floridakidcare.com

MyFlorida.com

Florida's Government Website

Visit www.myflorida.com

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

NACCRRA is the national network of more than 850 child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) located in every state and most communities across the US.

CCR&R agencies help families, child care providers, and communities find, provide, and plan for affordable, quality child care.

Visit www.naccrra.org

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 eight.

Call (800) 424-2460 or visit www.naeyc.org

Parent Anonymous Hotline

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

Call (909) 621-6184

Parents Without Partners

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

(561) 391-8833 or visit www.parentswithoutpartners.org

Voluntary PreK (VPK)

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

Call (866) 357-3239 toll free or visit www.vpkflorida.org

2-1-1

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

Call 211 or visit www.211.org



1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)

BECAUSE CHILDREN ARE COUNTING ON US



Visit our Agency for Workforce Innovation – Office of Early Learning website at www.vpkflorida.org or <http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/index.html> or call toll free at: 1-866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)