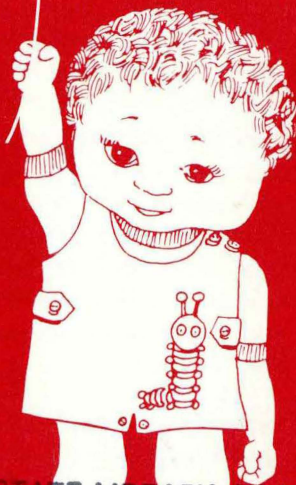


# Choosing Care for Your Children

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## Day Care Centers



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Iowa Department of Human Services  
Iowa Commission for Children, Youth, and Families

Cooperative Extension Service  
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## **What Are Child Day Care Centers?**

Child day care centers care for seven or more children in a facility other than a group care home.

## **Are Day Care Centers Licensed?**

The Iowa Department of Human Services is responsible for licensing all child day care centers. Licenses are valid for one year.

When you are looking for a day care center for your child, check the license, which should be posted. The license will tell you how many children may be cared for at any one time, and if the center has a full or provisional license. A provisional license indicates that the center has met all but one or a few of the licensing requirements and these are expected to be met during the provisional period.

While a license tells you that the facility has been inspected and meets basic licensing requirements, you, the child's parent, must decide whether the program meets your child's particular needs. And, as you visit the facility, you may wish to check to see whether basic licensing requirements continue to be met and, if the license was provisional, what changes have been made.

## **Finding and Choosing a Day Care Center**

Parents can obtain a listing of licensed centers from their local office of the Department of Human Services. In many communities, centers are listed in the yellow pages. Centers care for children of varying ages, with most caring for three to six year olds; some care for infants and toddlers as well, and some for school-agers. After you have found the possible centers, these suggestions may help you with your choice:

- Visit the center at a time when you can observe the children's activities and interview the director.

- Visit the facility at least once with your children. See how they react to the day care setting.
- Observe the children and the staff to see if the children seem happy and if the staff seem to be enjoying their work.
- Determine whether the children receive the kind of individual attention you would like for your own child.
- Discuss whether or not the center encourages parents to visit and to ask questions.

### **Guidelines for Choosing**

The following are questions you may want answers for to help you select and evaluate day care centers. The answers (in *italic*) are the state requirements for licensing.

#### **Staff—Numbers and Qualifications**

**How many staff people are best?** *Staff numbers should be sufficient so that children are never left unattended, whether at nap, during outdoor play, or in the bathroom.*

*Regulations require that the following staff-children ratios must be maintained, with adult supervision in every room:*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of staff</b>	<b>Number of children</b>
Infants (2 wk. to 2 yr.)	1	4
2 years	1	6
3 years	1	8
4 years	1	12
5 to 10 years	1	15
10 years and over	1	20

#### **Program**

##### **What kinds of activities are provided?**

*Regulations require that a variety of quiet and active activities should be provided, geared to the age and developmental levels of the children. Both indoor and outdoor activities are required. There should also be a sufficient variety of play*

material and equipment available to stimulate children's imagination. All equipment must be safe and in good condition.

**Is a nap period required?** Regulations require that the center provide a nap or quiet time for preschool age children who are at the center five or more hours. Most centers recognize the differing needs for children resting. While most children will nap, a few may rest quietly for a short period of time, and may spend some quiet time with a book or other quiet activity while other children are napping.

### **Meals and Snacks**

**Does the center provide lunch?** Centers are required to serve lunch and midmorning and midafternoon snacks. All meals and snacks must meet nutritional requirements and menus must be posted one week in advance. This helps parents know what their children are eating. Licensing requirements also require that staff sit at tables with children during meal times. This helps to make meal time more family like.

### **Safe, Healthy Environment**

**Does the center appear to be a safe place for children?** Regulations require that the center be maintained in a clean, sanitary, and safe manner. The center must be well ventilated and properly lighted. The outdoor area must be fenced if close to busy streets and the outdoor equipment must be safe and in good repair.

**Are there any health requirements for admission?** Regulations require that every child enrolled must have a current immunization record and physical examination report on file at the center.

**How does the center handle medications if children need them?** The center must  
(1) maintain records of all medications given;  
(2) administer only medications labeled with the

*child's name, and the physician's or pharmacist's directions for administration; and (3) keep all medications in locked cabinets or containers that are out of reach of children.*

### **How does the center prepare for emergencies?**

*A center must have a telephone with emergency numbers posted. The center must post emergency plans for fire or tornado, and practice fire drills once a month and tornado drills once every three months.*

**In what other ways does the center provide for the safety of children?** *The center should require that parents complete consent forms for emergency care and field trips and that they identify in writing who is authorized to pick up the children.*

## **Preparing the Family**

Parents and children can benefit from preparation. If this is your first separation from your child on a regular daily basis, it may be difficult for you. Talking to other parents in the same situation can be helpful. Talk to center staff members about their views of your child's adjustment, and talk to and observe your child. If problems arise, discuss them. Talk about the center before you visit, and spend some time with your child in the center. Talk about similarities to things you have done together and provide a small familiar object for the child to bring. The transition to a new environment may be difficult for the child, so any advance preparation you can provide will be helpful. Special attention during the first few weeks will be especially important.

## **Financial Help**

The cost of child care is a major concern for many parents, especially families with more than one child requiring care. There are some forms of financial assistance that may be able to help. Check with the local Department of Human Services to find out if child care subsidies are available and if you are eligible.

Ask the center director if there is a sliding fee scale based on income, if there is a reduced fee for a second child if more than one child is in the program, or if reduced tuition is available in exchange for volunteer services.

Even if you do not qualify for other forms of financial assistance you qualify for Federal and State tax credit. Check Pm-796g in this series, *Child Care Credit on Income Tax*, for more information about the tax credit.

### **If Problems Arise**

Child day care centers are encouraged to welcome involvement of parents in their child's program and to urge parents to let staff know of their concerns. However, there may be situations in which you believe the center is not responding to your concerns and may not be meeting state licensing standards. If this occurs, you can let the Department of Human Services know by completing this form. The Department of Human Services will investigate all complaints.

### **Complaint Form**

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Name of center

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Street address

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City

Zip code

1. What is the specific licensing standard(s) that you believe is not being met (e.g., staffing, nutrition, equipment, play area, etc.)?

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2. What date(s) did you observe the violation(s)?

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3. Did you discuss the violation with the center director?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please describe the response of the center director:

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4. Do you wish your complaint to be kept confidential?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If you wish the Iowa Department of Human Services to send you a written reply to your complaint, please complete the following:

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Your name

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Home address

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City

Zip code

Send complaint form to:

Iowa Department of Human Services  
Child Care Center Licensing Unit  
5th Floor  
Hoover State Office Bldg.  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

## **Other Publications Available in the Series**

Pm-796a *Family Day Care Homes*

Pm-796c *Preschool or Nursery School*

Pm-796d *A Babysitter in Your Home*

Pm-796e *Setting Up Play Groups*

Pm-796f *Babysitting Cooperatives*

Pm-706g *Child Care Credit on Income Tax*

Pm-796h *Parent Checklist for Day Care*

Pm-796i *Identifying Child Abuse*

File: Family Life 2

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