



Your Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care



Down East Partnership
for Children

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FINDING the RIGHT PLACE for YOUR CHILD

Studies show that children's earliest experiences have a profound impact on the way their brains develop, and can affect their ability to learn and succeed in school and later in life. Quality Child Care is important to young children's development, including healthy social, emotional and intellectual development. The most important step in your search for a quality early care and education or school-age child care program is to visit at least three programs and look for clues that show each program's quality.

In this booklet, we provide some general tips on finding quality child care—what options are available, information on NC Star Rated License system, steps to choosing quality child care and general information regarding your child's health and development. We hope that the information included in this booklet helps you make the best choice possible!

You Have Child Care Choices

There are three basic types of child care available in this region of North Carolina: child care centers, child care homes, and child care in your own home. This section explains how the State of North Carolina uses a star rated system to regulate child care.

Star Licensing Information

In September 2000, the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education issued star rated licenses to all eligible child care centers and family child care homes. (Note: Religious-sponsored child care programs operate with a Notice of Compliance and do not receive a star rating unless they choose to apply.)

Star rated licenses are issued on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, and the system theoretically works just like star ratings for other services such as hotels, restaurants, etc. Child care facilities are rated in accordance with its **program standards** and **staff education**.

What are program standards?

Program standard points are based on an evaluation of the daily environment at your child's program. This includes:

The Program Environment:

- Sufficient space for activities
- Variety of play materials
- Clean and comfortable play area

The Number of Staff per Child

The Interactions Between:

- Adults and children
- Children with other children
- Children with activities and materials

What do you mean when you talk about staff education?

Studies have shown that the more education and experience a child care center administrator has, the greater the impact on the center because of improved management, lower staff turnover, and better classroom practices. Caregivers with more early childhood education and experience interact better with children and create more enriching classroom experiences. Studies have shown that children whose caregivers had higher qualifications did better both academically and behaviorally at least into early elementary school.

The law requires that, at a minimum, a lead teacher be 18 years old and have either experience or receive in-service training. Once hired, the lead teacher must take community college coursework during the next two years to receive a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential. (There are additional options that are equal to the Credential). To earn higher points in the education component of the rated license child care, staff must complete more formal education and have experience working with preschool children. The number of points a center can earn for staff education is based on:

- The education and experience levels of the administrator
- The number of lead teachers with child care credentials
- The number of lead teachers with more early childhood education and experience
- The number of teachers with formal education and/or experience

If a child care provider has a 1 star or 2 star rating, then the provider meets or slightly exceeds the minimum health and safety standards to obtain a license to care for children.

Providers that have received ratings of 4 - 5 stars are considered to have the highest quality program standards and staff education requirements.



Below is a sample of what you a child care license will look like.

Shows the number of stars earned (shaded) out of the number of stars possible (blank)

Shows the name and physical location of the program

State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child Development

Three Star Child Care License

ABC CHILD CARE CENTER
123 ANYWHERE ST
RALEIGH, NC 27777

In each area rated, this facility earned:
Staff Education: 4 out of 7 points
Program Standards: 4 out of 7 points
Quality Point: 1 out of 1 point
Education Option: 9 out of 15 points
Programmatic Option: 9 out of 15 points

ID Number: 92999999
Type of Facility: Center
Issued to: CHILDCARE, INC.

Age Range: 0-12 years
Capacity: 1st shift: 40; 2nd shift: 0; 3rd shift: 0
Effective Date: July 1, 2007
Restrictions:
Daytime care only
Children in care on ground level only

Shows how many points the program earned in each of the two components

Shows basic licensing information such as number of children allowed, ages allowed and any restrictions

You Have Child Care Options

The following types of child care options may or may not be available in your local community. Down East Partnership for Children has made every effort to locate these services and include them in our database for child care programs in Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Warren, and Wilson counties.

Child Care Centers

A child care center provides care for groups of children by a staff of caregivers. Centers are either operated for profit by individuals or corporations, or operated by non-profit agencies, such as: churches, public schools, private schools, or government agencies.

Centers are usually licensed by the state, but non-profit centers may have different standards than privately owned child care facilities. Licensing as a center is required when six or more preschool children are cared



for in a home, or when three or more children are cared for in a building other than a home. A child care facility with a one star rated license has met minimal health and safety standards.

A child care center may earn a 2-5 star rated license by voluntarily meeting higher standards.

Teacher-Child Ratios are extremely important and part of the star rated licensing standards.

This table is broken down by the child's age to show you the maximum class size and teacher-child ratio regulations:

Age	Teacher-Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size
0 – 12 months	1:5	10
12 – 24 months	1:6	12
2 years old	1:10	20
3 years old	1:15	25
4 Years old	1:20	25
School age	1:25	25

For example, in the 0 – 12 months' room, if there are more than 5 children enrolled, then the class must have a second teacher. The maximum number of children allowed in that room is 10, with two teachers present.

Child Care Homes

A child care home provides care for a small group of children in a caregiver's home. Homes are registered or licensed.

A family child care home is licensed to care for five or fewer preschool age children, including preschoolers living in that home. In addition, three school-age children may be enrolled. The provider's own school-age children are not counted for the purposes of licensure.

A family child care home with a one star rated license has met minimal health and safety standards. A family child care home may earn a 2 – 5 star rated license by voluntarily meeting higher standards.

Child Care in Your Own Home

This type of care takes place within your home. The caregiver may be a baby-sitter, a professional "nanny" trained to care for young children, a student "au pair" who lives in your home, or another caregiver who has some experience with young children. Parents need to ask for and thoroughly check references carefully.

Before and After School Care

There may be various options for before and after school care in your community. Programs in your community may be operated by child care centers, recreation centers, churches, and youth organizations. Check with your local school system to see if these services are provided at your child's school through one of the mentioned organizations.

Vacation and Summer Programs

Vacation and summer programs are usually for school-age children, although some communities may have programs that provide care for preschool children. These programs provide a variety of activities such as art and crafts, swimming, drama, and organized sports. Vacation or summer programs are usually operated by local parks and recreation departments, community organizations, private schools, and child care centers.

Part-day Preschool and Nursery Programs

Part-day preschool programs and nursery schools are group child care programs which operate less than a full day. These programs are located in a variety of settings, including churches, public schools, private schools and child care centers. State licensing regulations may be different for programs operating less than a full-day schedule. This type of care, generally for children two and a half to five years of age, provides an opportunity for interaction with other children of similar ages. These programs usually follow the same academic year and holiday schedules as the public schools.

5 Steps to Choosing Quality Childcare

Preparing to send your child to child care can be an exciting time, but can also stir up some anxious feelings for both you and your child. Following are some helpful tips for you to use as you plan for this important transition in your child's life.

1. Get Organized Early

Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering, a child care center or care in someone else's home-finding the right child care option can take some time.

2. Conduct an Interview

Save time and energy by using the phone to narrow your search. To get the best response avoid calling at busy times such as arrival, departure, or lunch time.

3. Visit and Ask Questions

Make sure you visit the child care options you are considering. Be prepared to spend some time observing and asking questions.

4. **Make a Choice**

Think about what you saw at each visit, review your notes, and make the best choice for your child and family.

5. **Stay Involved**

The work isn't over when you find good care for your child. You and your child's caregiver are partners. Visiting and participating in events at your child's provider sends a strong positive message. It lets your child know that you are interested in what happens during his/her day, and it lets the caregiver know that you value the relationship that she has with your child.

Here are some ways to be involved:

- Have parent-caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions
- Offer to volunteer: participate in clean up days, fix broken toys, or hang artwork
- Be there for your child's birthday party
- Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud
- Join in special events like field trips, career days, or other holiday activities

**Included in your packet is the Quality Child Care Checklist. It may be helpful for you to take this checklist with you when you are visiting potential child care sites.

Benefits of visiting before you make any decisions

- The questions you ask will help you learn about the child care setting, the staff who will be working with your child, and the experiences of other families.
- What you learn from these visits will help you make the child care choice that is best for your family. It is a good idea to visit more than once.
- On your first visit, talk one-on-one with your provider and become familiar with the facility.
- A second visit might include stopping by with your child. This may give you an idea of how your child will fit into a particular setting. It also gives the provider an opportunity to meet your child prior to starting care.
- Finally you may want to stop by for an unannounced visit.

Your potential provider should have an open door policy. You should be able to stop by and check in on your child at any time. Drop in visits will give you the chance to observe caregiver and child interactions.



Some important questions to ask

- Does the child care provider have a substitute in case of illness or vacation?
- Do the hours of operation and holiday schedule meet your needs?
- What is the provider's sick policy?
- How often are toys washed? What do you use to clean them?
- How do you handle potty training?
- What is your process for introducing new foods to the children?
- How will children use large motor skills on a rainy day?
- Are background checks done on all staff (ex: teachers, center director, cooks, bus drivers etc. . .)
- Is the facility reimbursed by a food program for breakfast and lunch?

Nutritional Activities

- Water must be easily accessible for children who can drink by themselves. Children who cannot drink without help must be offered water regularly throughout the day.
- Menus for nutritious meals and snacks must be planned at least one week in advance.
- No child may go more than four hours without a meal or a snack being provided.
- A child's special diet or food allergies must be posted in the food preparation area and the child's eating area.

Physical Activities

- To promote physical activity, use more portable playground equipment, such as balls, hoops, tunnels, and tricycles.
- Limit electronic media such as computers and TV.
- Spend more time in free play while outside on playgrounds or parks.
- If the playground area is small, limit the number of kids playing at once to increase outdoor space.

Danger Signs

The following is a list of "danger signs" or things that you should be aware of when choosing a child care placement for your child.

- The facility discourages parental visits or questions
- In a family childcare home, there are a lot of other family members and friends in the home that you and your child do not know
- The facility is dirty or unsafe
- Toys are out of the reach of kids
- Teachers spend more time talking to each other than interacting with the kids

- The teacher seems harsh to children
- There are not enough adults for the number of children in child care
- Your child is still unhappy after a reasonable adjustment period

It is always important to talk with your provider about your concerns. There may be reasonable explanations or solutions. If the problem persists and involves children being physically or emotionally harmed, NC parents can call the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education @ 1-800-859-0829 .

Developmental Milestones in Young Children

Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving “bye bye” are called developmental milestones. Children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, behave, and move (crawling, walking, etc.). Just as every child is unique, the time in which a child reaches these milestones will vary as well. Provided below are some general guidelines of when a child should learn to do certain skills.

Around 2 months

- smiles or coos
- watches a person and follows with their eyes

Around 4 months

- laughs out loud
- lifts head and chest when on stomach
- grasps for objects

Around 6 months

- babbles
- turns head to sound
- rolls over
- controls head while sitting

Around 9 months

- responds to name
- plays peek-a-boo
- sits alone and crawls
- pulls self up to standing

Around 12 months

- waves bye bye, says mama or dada
- walks when holding on
- picks up object with thumb and first finger



Around 18 months

- says three words other than mama or dada
- scribbles
- walks alone
- feeds self with spoon

Around 2 years

- puts two words together
- refers to self by name
- runs well
- walks upstairs without help

Around 3 years

- knows age
- helps button clothing
- washes and dries hands
- throws ball overhead
- rides a tricycle

Around 4 years

- knows first and last name
- tells a story
- counts four objects
- can balance on one foot
- can use children's scissors

Around 5 years

- names four colors
- counts 10 objects
- can hop on one foot
- dresses self



If you feel uneasy that your child has not made any progress toward a skill, and it is past the general appropriate timeline, please contact your pediatrician for an evaluation or discuss this at your child's next Well Check visit. You may also call Down East Partnership for Children for additional information regarding your child's development.

Well Check Visits

An important part of keeping your child healthy is taking him to a pediatrician for a "Well Check" visit. At each visit the doctor will weigh and measure your child to make sure he is growing at a healthy rate, check his eyesight and hearing, and talk to you about his behavior. These visits also give you a chance

to ask any questions you might have about your child's development. A doctor should see your child frequently during the first two years.

The recommended timetable is:

- Within the first month
- Four months old
- Nine months old
- 15 months old
- 24 months old
- Two months old
- Six months old
- 12 months old
- 18 months old

Schedule yearly Well Checks for your child and follow the recommended vaccination schedule for children.

Shots (Immunizations)

Your child will need the following shots during the first 15 months of life:

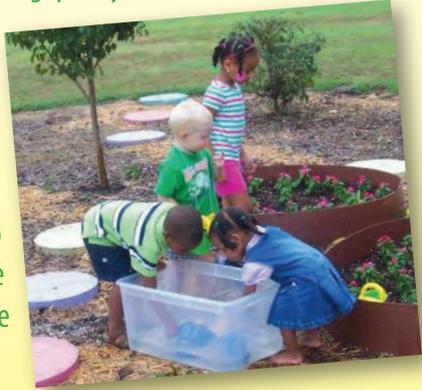
- **Hep B:** Protects against hepatitis B, a serious liver disease
- **DTaP:** Protects against diphtheria, tetanus (lockjaw), and pertussis (whooping cough)
- **Hib:** Protects against haemophilus influenza type b
- **Polio:** Protects against polio. This vaccine is given as a shot (inactivated vaccine called IPV).
- **MMR:** Protects against measles, mumps, and rubella (German measles)
- **Chickenpox:** Varicella zoster vaccine protects against chickenpox

Use the chart as a guide for when your child should get his shots. Shots may not be given if your child has a cold or is sick on the day of the visit. Your doctor will determine a specific schedule for your child and will also let you know when additional vaccinations are needed past 15 months of age.

Age	Shots needed
Birth to two months	Hep B
1 to 4 months	Hep B
2 months	DTaP, Hib, Polio
4 months	DTaP, Hib, Polio
6 months	DTaP, Hib, Hep B
12 months	MMR, Hib, Polio, Chickenpox
15 months	DTaP

All children should be immunized. Immunizations are required to attend child care and school. If you don't have a pediatrician, call your local health department. Public Health providers usually administer shots to children (at no or low cost), or can help you find a clinic that provides shots.

Studies have shown 90% of brain development occurs during the first 3 years of life, so choosing quality child care is one of the most important decisions you will make for your child's future! Whether you need full-time care while you work or go to school, part-time or after school care, or just want a playgroup for your stay at home child, there are many things to consider while choosing quality child care.



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