

# Childcare: Finding the Best Option for Your Family

Finding the best childcare fit for your family is an invaluable part of caring for your children and having peace of mind as you go out to work.

## Types of Childcare:

- **Family Childcare:** Providers care for 12 children or fewer from more than one family in a home setting. Regulations for family childcare providers vary by community within the state of South Dakota. However, family childcare providers statewide can choose to be *state registered*, which means they submit to the same process of evaluation as the larger childcare centers and receive state assistance as the childcare centers do.
- **Group Family Childcare:** Providers care for 13-20 children from more than one family, including the provider's own children under the age of five. A group family childcare home may be located in the provider's own home or in a separate facility. They are mandated by law to be licensed regardless of funding source.
- **Childcare Centers:** Are housed in large buildings and provide care for more than 12 children at a time, from multiple families. They are *state licensed*, which means that they must pass rigorous entry requirements and maintain strict standards of quality and care. They are also able to receive childcare assistance from the South Dakota Department of Social Services.
- **Before and After School Programs:** Provide care and supervision before and after school hours for children who are five years of age or older and enrolled in school. Programs serve only school-age children and may be providing care for either part of a day or full-time during school breaks. They are required to become licensed regardless of the funding source or location of the program. The exemption to this requirement is if the after school program is providing educational or recreational activities for children who come and go at their own discretion.
- **Babysitters/Nannies:** Provide care for one family at a time, usually at the family's residence and at hours agreed upon between the provider and the family. The state does not regulate this type of childcare.

All types of childcare have their advantages; you can find out more by checking out the Helpline Center's [Childcare Guide](#).

## Help With Cost:

The US Department of Health and Human Services recommends that parents spend no more than 10% of their family income on Childcare. In South Dakota, the average annual cost of childcare for a four-year-old is approximately **\$8,348** for a childcare center, and **\$6,689** for a family childcare provider.

- **State Assistance** – Childcare Assistance is available to families who meet income guidelines and minimum work and/or school requirements. Federal Childcare and Development Block Grant funds help low-income families pay for the childcare as they work, attend school or both. Visit <https://dss.sd.gov/childcare/childcareassistance/> for more information.
- **Income-based scholarships** – Some providers offer scholarships for families of low incomes. Call the individual provider to see if any are available.

## Selecting the Best Provider

This section has some helpful tips on deciding what is important for your family in evaluating and choosing a childcare provider. Quality childcare can provide a great environment for little ones to learn and grow; as parents it is your responsibility to find the best care for your budget and needs as a family.

The National Association for The Education of Young Children suggests that a quality childcare provider is one that “provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.” When choosing a provider, the most important things to consider are:

- Supervision & Learning Environment
- Health & Safety
- Training and Qualifications

A quality childcare provider is one that:

- Shows love and respect toward children
- Exhibits genuine enjoyment in interacting with young children
- Provides children with learning experiences that match their ages and interests
- Talks with and reads to children daily
- Positively acknowledges children's accomplishments
- Positively encourages children
- Provides a safe environment in which children can freely explore

### **Evaluating a Childcare Provider:**

It is always a good idea to schedule an interview with a potential provider, whether in an in-home setting or in a daycare center. While there, a good rule of thumb to follow is "Look, Listen, Count":

- **Look:** Is the environment clean and safe? Are there plenty of activities, books and toys to keep little minds and hands busy, and are they well organized? Is there an outdoor space to run and play? Are emergency numbers clearly visible?
- **Listen:** Are the children happy and engaged? Are the teachers engaged and actively promoting learning and positive reinforcement?
- **Count:** Count the number of children compared to the number of caregivers—the ratio varies by age group and type of care; you can find out more information on this by contacting the City of Sioux Falls Health Department (605-367-8760) or the South Dakota Department of Social Services (605-773-3227).

The Helpline Center has provided a useful [Provider Questionnaire](#) that can help you with this step. Or, check out the [Choosing Childcare](#) guide from the Department of Social Services. You should also ask for references. Even though providers are likely to give you their "biggest fans," you can gain a lot of useful information about what each provider's strengths are and how they do things on a day-to-day basis.

### **Building a Relationship with Your Provider:**

So, you've looked at your budget, evaluated your options, gone through the interview process and selected a provider that fits with your needs. Well done! But the process doesn't stop there. Now you need to build a relationship of trust with your provider. S/he will be the home away from home for your little one(s), so you need to keep communication lines open and work together with your provider as a team to make sure your child(ren) is getting the best care. Here are some tips for maintaining a positive relationship with your provider:

- Honor the contract you agreed to follow
- Pay your provider on time
- Provide requested items
- Hand in paperwork on time
- Speak to your provider for a few minutes every day
- Set monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss your child
- Let the provider know if there are any family or life changes or events that could affect your child
- Let the provider know of any changes in routine, or if someone else will be picking up your child
- Get involved! Ask your provider how you can get involved with the program

**Note:** If something doesn't seem right (mood changes in your child(ren), lack of communication from your provider, betrayal of trust, concerns from other parents), listen to your intuition and investigate. If any sign of abuse is occurring, call the Department of Social Services at (877) 244-0864 to report the incident.

For more information, call 211 and ask to speak with our Childcare Specialist or visit [www.helplinecenter.org/childcare](http://www.helplinecenter.org/childcare).

**Sources:**

- South Dakota Department of Social Services/Childcare <https://dss.sd.gov/childcare/default.aspx>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children <https://www.naeyc.org/>

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