

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

You will have many questions while screening child care programs. A helpful tool may be the VDSS publication entitled **Choosing Quality Child Care**, which is available on the Department's Web site at www.dss.virginia.gov or by calling (804) 726-7646. Below are some general questions to consider:

Do I trust this person to care for my child?

Will my child be comfortable and happy here?

Does the provider:

- seem to be someone my child will enjoy being with?
- have methods of dealing with behaviors that agree with your own?
- seem to have enough time to look after all the children in care?
- provide a routine and rules that children can understand and follow?

Does it have equipment and materials that are suitable for the ages of the children?

Have safety precautions been implemented, such as:

- adequate supervision at all times?
- enough space indoors and out so all children can move freely and safely?
- a safe outdoor play area and equipment?
- enough furniture, play things, and other equipment for all children to be individually involved?
- a safe, clear area where children can crawl, nap, play, etc.?
- locked storage for medications, poisons, cleaners, guns, weapons, and ammunition?
- working smoke detectors?
- at least two approved exits?

Do activities include:

- transportation (if needed) with appropriate seat belts and car seats?
- washing hands after diapering, toileting, and before preparing and eating food?
- enough caregivers/teachers to give individual attention to all children?
- nutritious meals and snacks?
- a balance of individual and group activities, quiet and active play, age- and stage-appropriate opportunities?
- activities for both indoors and outdoors?

Has my child visited the child care setting and had a successful experience?

Are positive references available?

Have I examined the policies, and do they fit with my needs and the needs of my child?

Have I reviewed the facility inspection reports on the VDSS Web site? (Go to <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/licensed.cgi>).



MORE INFORMATION

Licensed child care programs are encouraged to involve you in their program; you should let staff know of any concerns. However, there may be situations where you believe that the program is not responding to your questions and may not be meeting state licensing standards. If this occurs, please contact the Division of Licensing Programs at 1-800-543-7545 or, in Richmond, at (804) 726-7154. Please provide the following information:

- Name and address of child care program;
- Your name, address, and telephone number; and
- Nature of complaint, e.g., what, where, when it happened, and who was involved.

** You may make an anonymous complaint, if you wish. However, it is a good idea to provide your name so that you may receive information about the complaint.*



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Virginia Department of Social Services

A GUIDE FOR CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE



FINDING THE “RIGHT PLACE”



Finding “the right place” for your child can take time and effort on your part, but it is one of the most important tasks you will ever undertake.

MAKE a list of things that are important to you about the care of your children.

BEGIN your search for child care as early as possible.

GET a list of providers from the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Web site at www.dss.virginia.gov, or call the Virginia Child Care Resource and Referral Network at 1-800-451-1501.

TALK to other parents and people whose opinion you respect.

LOOK UP child care in the yellow pages and note the programs in your neighborhood.

When you’ve narrowed the list, conduct a telephone interview, and visit the child care site with your children more than once. One of the visits should be unannounced. Ask for a written copy of their rates and policies. If licensed, ask to see a copy of their latest inspection report.

The information provided in this brochure can help you decide whether or not the places you are considering meet your requirements and the needs of your children. It may be helpful to take it with you when visiting different child care settings.

The Division of Licensing Programs at the Virginia Department of Social Services can assist you in screening child care programs by providing licensing violations on specific programs, but final responsibility for making the decision must rest with you. You can review inspection violations online at www.dss.virginia.gov.



TYPES OF CHILD CARE IN VIRGINIA



PRIVATE HOMES

A licensed family day home provides care for up to 12 children, in addition to the provider’s own children or children residing in the home, in a private home that is licensed by VDSS home.

A family day system home provides child care to no more than twelve children, in addition to the provider’s own children or children residing in the home, and it is approved and monitored by an agency licensed by the state.

A voluntarily registered family day home can serve up to five children, in addition to the provider’s own children or children residing in the home, and it has registered with VDSS or an organization that is under contract with VDSS.

An unregulated family day home is not inspected by the state or its designee. It can legally provide care for no more than five children, in addition to the provider’s own children or children residing in the home, or no more than four children under the age of two, including the provider’s own children or children residing in the home at any one time. Homes that exceed capacity are operating illegally.



CENTERS

A licensed child day center provides care for two or more children in a setting other than a private home or for 13 or more children at any other location (e.g., private residence, commercial establishment), and it is licensed by VDSS.

An unlicensed child day center provides care for two or more children in a setting other than a private home and is not required by the *Code of Virginia* to be licensed. Religiously exempt programs and certified preschools are two types of unlicensed care. While these programs are not required to be licensed, they must meet specific guidelines, and they are periodically monitored. Other programs such as certain short-term programs (e.g., some camps or recreation programs) do not have any licensing requirements.