

# A Guide to Choosing **QUALITY** **CHILD CARE**

More than  
"just"  
babysitting





Whether you work full-time, a few hours a week or have other outside commitments, choosing child care is an important decision. We all want our children to be happy and well cared for while away from us.

Quality child care is more than just babysitting. Whereas babysitters are child minders, quality care givers do more to help your child develop. Quality child caregivers are able to tailor games and activities to the ages of children in their care. They are able to recognize behavior that indicates a child needs help, while building the self-esteem of each child through warm and loving guidance. They work with you, the parent, to understand your child's interests and needs. Most importantly, quality caregivers give you peace of mind while you are away because you know your child is in a safe, nurturing environment.

To support parents in their search for the best possible care for their child, Strathcona County created this booklet as a tool to help guide parents toward quality child care.

To find more information on child care options in Strathcona County refer to the Strathcona County Child Care Information Bank at

**[www.strathcona.ca/childcare](http://www.strathcona.ca/childcare)** or by calling 780-464-4044.



The Strathcona County RCMP fully supports initiatives that promote the safety and well-being of our children and youth. The creation of this booklet is an excellent example of agencies working together to keep Strathcona County one of the safest communities to raise your family in. The information provided within will serve as an excellent resource and guide to you as you make that difficult decision on a child care provider. It truly does take a "Community to Raise a Child" and we are proud to be associated with this project.



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### Disclaimer

This Guide is not intended to serve as a legal document but only provides general information about Choosing Child Care. It is not a replacement for consulting the Child Care Licensing Act nor should it be considered to be a fully authoritative or a comprehensive guide to obtaining child care. Strathcona County assumes no responsibility to any person or persons for relying on the information contained in this publication, nor shall the County be held liable for any damage caused to any person, whether negligently or otherwise.

# QUALITY CHILD CARE: MORE THAN BABYSITTING

Quality child care provides a program that addresses the physical, social, intellectual, creative and emotional needs of the children in care. In a quality child care setting, children receive individual attention, learn how to get along with others and feel good about themselves. It is clean, safe and comfortable. There is quiet space for rest, or sleep, as well as both indoor and outdoor play spaces. There is also a range of toys and equipment for play and learning. Both the child care provider and the environment help make a child's experience positive.

## Keys to quality child care:

### The child care provider

They are the individuals who will interact with your child, plan the activities to support play and learning and communicate with you about your child's daily activities.

The provider should:

- Know how children grow and learn.
- Be kind, responsive, open and informed.
- Offer a stable and stimulating setting.
- Seek out community resources and support.
- Work on common goals with parents.
- Take part in workshops, training and networking.
- Be inclusive of all children.

### The environment

It includes the actual play spaces, the equipment and the daily activities. All of these need to be considered when looking for quality child care.

The child care environment should:

- Be clean, safe and secure.
- Provide a nurturing learning environment.
- Provide space for quiet and active times, indoor and outdoor play.
- Offer a variety of easily available toys and equipment that are cleaned often.
- Be flexible, yet offer a regular daily routine.
- Provide nutritious meals and snacks.



## CHILD CARE OPTIONS

Legislation in Alberta supports several types of child care. The type of child care arrangement you choose depends upon your needs, the type of child care you prefer, your child's needs and the options available. Regardless of the type of child care you choose, it is reasonable to expect quality care. There are two types of child care:

### **Licensed and Approved care**

This care is monitored through provincial regulations with regular checks occurring to ensure the child care offered meets the standards. The added benefit with this choice is that parents may be eligible to receive a subsidy to off-set the cost of child care.

### **Unlicensed care**

This care is provided by family, friends, neighbors, nanny-services or other in-home care. The maximum number of children in care is legislated under Alberta's Child Care Licensing Act. With this option, parents assume all responsibility for ensuring their child is placed in a safe environment.

Refer to the next few pages for a closer look at options within these categories.

# CHILD CARE OPTIONS continued

## Licensed and Approved Child Care

Alberta's licensed and approved child care programs must meet the requirements laid out in the Child Care Licensing Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation. These regulations and standards make sure children's health and safety needs are being met through regular inspections. Child care accreditation is a voluntary process through which licensed child care and approved family day homes can demonstrate that they meet the accreditation standards of excellence which are over and above the provincial regulations and standards. The government acknowledges accredited programs by paying top-up wages to the staff working in these quality settings. As a result, these quality programs are often available for the same cost as unaccredited programs.

## Approved Family Day Homes

Approved Family Day Home programs offer parents the option of choosing child care that is provided in a home setting.



**Alberta  
Approved  
Family  
Day Homes**

**Beware**, private unregulated caregivers who offer care in their homes may call themselves 'day homes', however it is only homes displaying the "smiling red door" logo that are approved, monitored, and supported by government contracted agencies.

Approved family day homes require their providers to meet a minimum standard of training, complete criminal record checks, and have current first aid certificates. The day home agency also assists parents in choosing a home for their child(ren) and ensure that standards of care are met. A maximum of six children, including the provider's own children are permitted. Financial help is available for all qualified families through the Child Care Subsidy program (see page 8). For information on ministry standards for Approved Family Day Homes please visit the website to view the Family Day Homes Standards Manual at [www.child.alberta.ca/childcare](http://www.child.alberta.ca/childcare) and enter Family Day Homes Standards Manual in the search box.

## Day Care Programs

Licensed Day Care programs offer care to infants, pre-school and kindergarten children. Day care occurs in a centre environment with children offered care in groups based on their ages. The Alberta government monitors these settings to ensure appropriate ratios, health and safety, and staff requirements are met. Financial help is available through the Child Care Subsidy Program (see page 8).

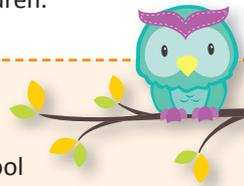
## Out-of-School Care Programs

Licensed out-of-school care programs provide care for kindergarten to school-aged children before and after school, during the lunch hour or when schools are closed. This care is centre-based and monitored by the the Government of Alberta to ensure appropriate ratios, health and safety, and staff requirements are met. Financial help is available to eligible families through the Child Care Subsidy Program (see page 8).

## Unlicensed Child Care

The Alberta Child Care Licensing Act does not require licensing or monitoring of temporary care and supervision of children by an individual other than the child's parent or guardian provided that individual is caring for six or less children under the age of 13 years, not including their own, at any given time. The legislation and regulations do not mandate monitoring, quality or child safety in unlicensed child care settings. For those parents utilizing an unregulated option, the parent assumes responsibility to ensure that the caregiver has the experience, training, insurance, and home environment, including no criminal history, to offer safe child care to their children.

Parents can find information about licensed child care programs and approved family day homes with the Child Care Look-Up Tool. Please visit <http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/ChildCareLookup.cfm> This tool provides information about recent inspection results, the program's accreditation status and service area. If you would like more information or have questions or concerns about the Child Care Licensing Act and the Child Care Licensing Regulation, visit [www.qp.albrta.ca](http://www.qp.albrta.ca) or call 780-427-0444. Child and Family Services also offers support for children with disabilities. To learn more about available supports, please contact your local child and family services at [www.child.alberta.ca/home/local\\_offices.cfm](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/local_offices.cfm).





## SUBSIDY AND FUNDING

Financial help is available for eligible low and middle-income parents to assist with child care costs for children aged 0 to 7, enrolled in an approved family day home, licensed day care centre and out-of-school care.

You can apply for an Alberta Government subsidy if:

- You or your spouse/partner, or the child receiving care, are Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada and live in Alberta.
- You or your spouse/partner are an Alberta resident.
- Your children are 12 years of age or younger and are not yet attending Grade 7.
- You and your spouse/partner are currently working, attending school, looking for work or have special needs; **or** you or your spouse/partner stay-at-home and have your child(ren) enrolled in a licensed pre-school or approved early childhood development program.
- You qualify based on income.

### Extended Hours Child Care Subsidy

Parents who work or attend classes during evenings or weekends may access extended hours subsidy up to \$100 per month per child.

To be eligible for extended hours subsidy:

- You or your spouse/partner, or the child receiving care, are Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada and live in Alberta.
- You or your spouse/partner are Alberta residents.
- Your children are 12 years of age or younger and are not yet attending Grade 7.
- You provide evidence of your extended working or school hours (outside of the time of Monday to Friday 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.).
- You qualify based on income.

## **Kin Child Care Funding Program**

If you would like to pay relatives to care for your children, you may do so through the Kin Child Care program. Funding of up to \$400 per month is available to eligible low- and middle-income families with children under the age of seven and not yet attending Grade 1, and \$200 for school-age children (Grades 1-6). To be eligible for subsidy, you must be working, seeking work, attending post-secondary education, have a special need or have a child with a special need. The relative caregiver must not live in your home.

Eligibility for Kin Child Care funding is also based on:

- Total gross family income
- Reason for child care
- Minimum 50 hours of care required per month for children not yet attending Grade 1, or 25 hours of care for children attending Grades 1 to 6.

## **Stay-at-Home Parents Support Funding**

Eligible families who have one parent who stays at home or works, volunteers or attends school less than 20 hours per week may qualify for a subsidy of up to \$1,200 per year for each pre-school-aged child who attends a licensed pre-school or an approved early childhood development program.

### **To access Subsidy, Kin Care or Stay-At Home Parent Support Funding contact the Alberta Supports Contact Centre at:**

Child Care Subsidy, P.O Box 1641, Edmonton, AB T5J 2N9

Phone: 1-877-644-9992 or in Edmonton 780-644-9992 Fax: 780-422-5692

Email: [hs.childcaresubsidy@gov.ab.ca](mailto:hs.childcaresubsidy@gov.ab.ca) [www.albertasupports.ca](http://www.albertasupports.ca)



# FINDING QUALITY CHILD CARE: GETTING STARTED



## Step 1:

### Think about what kind of care your child needs

- Do you need to find a child care program near your home, work or school?
- How many hours each day, and days each week, will you need child care?
- Will you need help paying for child care?
- If you have more than one child, what type of care do you need for each child and do you want them at the same location?
- Does your child have any special needs that the child care provider has to meet?
- Do you want your child in a day home program or in a day care centre?
- What type of setting would your child be more comfortable in? A home based program or a child care centre?
- Remember your child's needs at one year of age could be different than at 6 years of age.

Once you have a clear idea of your needs and wants for child care, you can start looking at possible options.



## Step 2:

### Compare options

The following options may help guide you in your search.

- The Strathcona County Child Care Information Bank is comprised of a list of local caregivers who voluntarily chose to be on the list and met the eligibility requirements. All listed child care providers have completed criminal record checks on adult members in their household.  
**[www.strathcona.ca/childcare](http://www.strathcona.ca/childcare)** or 780-464-4044.
- The Alberta Government website lists licensed and approved child care options. It also gives the past history of Approved Family Day Home Agencies and child care facilities: [www.child.alberta.ca](http://www.child.alberta.ca) then select “Family and Community” then “Child Care”
- Talk to friends, family, colleagues and neighbours and ask them for names of quality caregivers.

Try to find at least three child care options that would be good for your family. That way you can choose the program that best meets your needs. Just like we get comparisons when buying a car; you need options in order to choose child care that best suits your family’s needs.

## Step 3:

### Interview your selections over the phone

Prior to visiting, call each child care provider you are considering. When you call, have a list of questions ready to ask the child care provider. The answers to these questions can help you choose the places you want to visit.

#### Questions prior to visit

Begin your call by describing your situation and needs. Questions you might want to ask in this first phone call may include:

- Do you have a space available?
- Is there a waiting list? How long is the waiting list?
- How does your program promote quality child care?
- What child care experience/training do you have?
- How many children do you care for and what are their ages?
- What are your hours of operation? What days are you closed?

# FINDING QUALITY CHILD CARE: GETTING STARTED

continued

## Questions prior to visit continued

- What happens when you are ill, on holiday, or in case of emergency?
- What are your fees?
- What is your termination policy?
- Do you accept children who require extra support?
- Are you willing to adapt your program to meet the needs of a child who requires extra support?
- What do you do with the children over a typical day/week?
- Do you encourage parent involvement? Can I visit whenever I wish?
- Is this a non-smoking environment?
- When can I come visit your home? Can I bring my child?

## Step 4:

### Final selection

After the phone interview, decide which programs you want to visit. It's very important to visit the home or child care centre before you enroll your child. You may want to schedule your visit during the day when you can see the centre in action. You should schedule your visit with the centre ahead of time. You'll want to:

- Talk with the caregivers.
- Watch the children and staff and how they interact.
- Look at the physical setting, including the condition of the building, play equipment available, and indoor and outdoor space.

Child care involves both a business relationship and a caring partnership. In addition to comments and questions regarding what you have (or have not) observed, an open discussion about what you can expect of care providers and what they can expect from you will help avoid misunderstandings and build the basis for a good relationship in the future.

## Questions to ask



- Why did you become a child care provider? What is your training and experience?
- What is the most satisfying part about caring for children?
- How long have you been a child care provider?
- Are you approved? How many children are you approved to care for?
- Do you have first aid training?
- Do you have gradual entry/orientation for new children to become comfortable?
- How do you guide children who misbehave?
- How do you handle difficult behaviours? (e.g. a child who was biting or refuses to eat)
- What arrangements do you have for children who do not sleep at rest time?
- How much television or electronic time are the children allowed?
- Where are medications stored and how are they administered?
- What are your procedures in case of a child falling ill, an accident, fire, etc.?
- How much notice does either party have to give to terminate care?
- Do you have liability insurance?
- Can I get at least two references from parents whose children attend your child care setting?





## REFLECT ON THE QUALITY FIRST IMPRESSIONS CHECKLIST



- Is the location clean and safe?
- Do the children seem happy and interested in what they're doing?
- Are the adults warm, friendly and responsive to the children?
- Is there enough space for the number of children?
- Is there outdoor space for children's activities?
- Is the equipment, play materials and furniture in good condition?
- Are there active and quiet times?
- What are the policies regarding nap time and toilet training?
- Are you aware of the day to day experiences children are involved in?
- Is there a variety of toys, creative play materials and books that are suited to the ages, abilities and interests of the children?
- Are the play materials in good condition and easily accessible to the children?
- Are you satisfied with how discipline issues are handled? How does the caregiver help children resolve conflicts?
- Are providers and staff trained in emergency first aid and CPR appropriate to the age of the children?
- Is there a locked storage place to store medicines, household cleaners, poisons, matches, sharp instruments, and other dangerous items?
- Are you aware of the evacuation policy?
- Are snacks and meals supplied? Are they healthy and nutritious?
- Are menus posted or available for you to take a look at?
- Are you satisfied with hand washing procedures?
- Are there fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors?
- Are there places to store personal belongings?
- Are there pets? If so, are they vaccinated?



## AFTER YOU MAKE YOUR FINAL SELECTION

Regardless of your child care choice, for the safety and well-being of your child, it is important that the child care setting maintain accurate and current records and information. These records should include the child's medical history, any known allergies or health concerns, family emergency contacts, and the names of those authorized to pick up the child.

Licensed and approved child care settings will have an information package to share information about their policies and procedures. They will also have a written child care agreement for you to sign.

Unlicensed child care operators may have these documents as well. If not, it is recommended that you draw up an agreement. It is also suggested that the contract be signed by both parties and outline such items as:

- 
- Start date, hours and days of care.
- Child care fees and when they are to be paid and a refund policy.
- Days the centre is closed.
- Termination of care policy.
- Name and contact information of parents.
- Name and contact information of care provider.
- Name and date of birth of the child/ren.
- What to do if the child is ill.
- Who may pick up the child.
- Arrangements for snacks, meals, and supplies (extra clothes, diapers).
- How the child's behaviour is to be guided.
- What to do in an emergency, including permission to call a doctor or ambulance.

# INTRODUCING YOUR CHILD TO CARE

It can take your child a few days or a few weeks to get used to a new child care arrangement. It will depend on your child's age, personality and stage of development. Ask your child care provider about the best way to transition your child into their new environment.

## How to prepare your child

- Tell your child about the child care program and the people there. Talk to them about all the fun they'll have.
- Visit the child care program with your child. Let your child meet the caregivers and the other children there.
- This will be an emotional time for both you and your child. Allow yourself and your child the time you need to adjust.

## On the first day

- Go with your child on the first day of care. If you can't go, arrange for another adult (a friend or relative – someone your child knows) to go with your child.
- Let your child take their favourite toy, like a teddy bear or a blanket, to the child care. Having something familiar is a comfort when everything else is new and strange.
- Say good-bye when you are ready to leave, even if your child is playing happily. Clearly state when you will be back. Your child needs to feel certain that you will return. If you disappear without saying anything, your child may get upset.
- Once you've said good-bye, keep going. Hesitating may confuse your child.
- Make sure you pick up your child at the time you said you would. Your child is counting on you to return when you promised.
- Greet your child warmly. At the end of the day, your child may be tearful or may simply ignore you. This is a normal part of getting used to child care.
- If you can, begin care gradually. For example, on the first day, take your child for an hour or so and then leave together. Over the next few days, stay for several hours. As your child becomes more comfortable, gradually increase the time away until your child is spending the full day in care.

## AT THE END OF THE DAY

Daily reports about the child's day and frequent onsite visits can help you to track progress and reassure you that your child is being nurtured and having fun. Make the most of your time with your child. When you get home at the end of the workday, keep your time free and easy. Give yourselves and your kids time to relax and cuddle. That can be a wonderful interactive time and it reduces stress for the whole family.

However, if your child is not happy and flourishing in child care, reassess the program or individual caregiver. Realize that bad days may happen from time to time; one bad day does not equal a bad child care facility or caregiver. But if problems persist, look for another arrangement as soon as possible. This will help your child boost your child's mental, physical, and social development, trust in other adults, and sense of self-worth.





## WHEN THERE ARE PROBLEMS

It is unrealistic to expect a problem-free child care relationship. Every relationship has challenges. Discuss problems and issues with the provider as soon as possible.

### Red flag Warnings

#### Does your child:

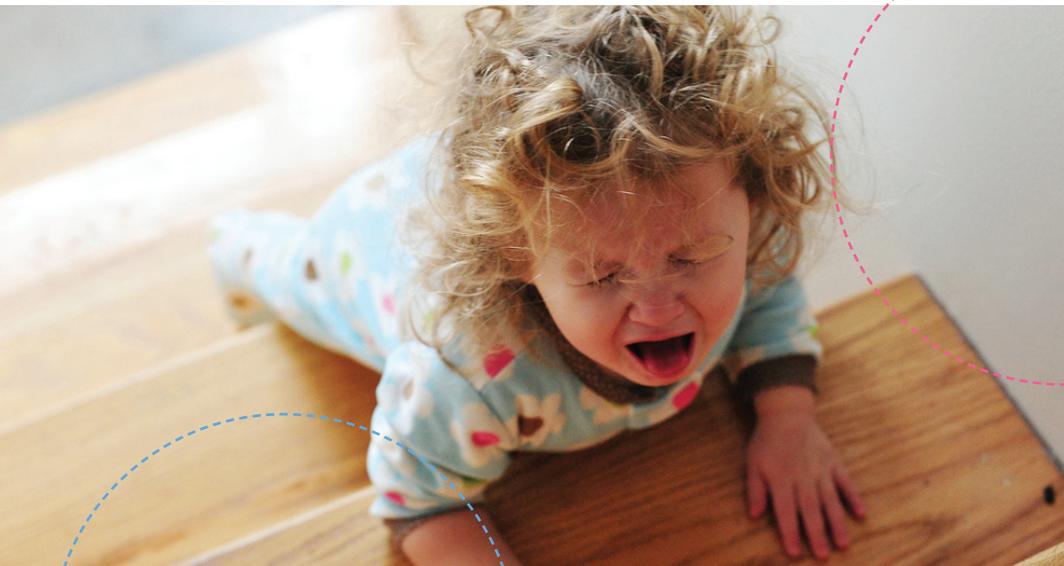
- Show a reluctance or fear (other than the normal behaviour) to go to centre or home even after they have been attending for awhile?
- Have a loss of appetite or a noticeable change in sleep patterns (e.g. trouble falling asleep, sleep more than usual, have nightmares, start wetting the bed again)?
- Seem unusually upset or fearful of the providers and/or other children in the centre or home?
- Physically stay away from or withdraw from the caregiver?
- Get upset easier than usual or cry more than usual? Seem withdrawn, have less energy, or is being more aggressive (more hurtful in action or words) towards other children?

### **Does your provider:**

- Let the children scream and fight in the background while talking?
- Speak harshly or negatively to you or the children?
- Stop you from moving into the care area when you drop-off or pick up your child?
- Become angry or make excuses when you calmly ask about your child?
- Speak negatively about other children or adults?
- Seem to avoid you or refuse to tell you about your child's day?
- Refuse to clean the facility or provide typical safety features for children?
- Seem to have lost interest in providing care and early learning experiences for the children?
- Have more children in the home or centre than is allowed?
- Are there unknown people in the home?

### **Do you as a parent:**

- Feel uncomfortable with the caregiver's values, child care methods?
- Always worry about your child when you are at work/school because you feel something is 'not right'?
- Feel that the caregiver is taking advantage of you because you have no one else to care for your child?
- Feel unwelcome and unsupported by the caregiver?





## DISCUSSING CONCERNS

- Schedule time with your caregiver to discuss important things. They are busy at drop-off and pick up times, at meals and at play times.
- Do not discuss your child's behaviour problems or problems with care in front of your child.
- Bring issues to the attention of the provider tactfully.

### Steps to solving problems

- Communicate clearly.
- Identify the problem. What do you want to solve?
- Be clear of your position and share your observations.
- Listen to the caregiver. Avoid being defensive or thinking of how to answer the person while they are talking.
- Come to a solution you both think is the best.
- Work with your provider to create a plan of action that works for everyone.
- Set a time to review if the plan is working.
- If you are unable to reach a resolution with your licensed or approved child care giver you may choose to contact the child care centre director or family day home supervisor.
- If you are unable to reach a resolution in an unlicensed child care home you may want to consider mediation to find a solution.
- If you believe the Child Care Licensing Act is not being followed, contact Child and Family Services at 780 427-0444.

# MAINTAINING A GOOD PARENT/CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIP

- Let your caregiver know how you prefer to communicate (by e-mail, phone, in writing, or through conversation).
- Tell your child care provider about any difficulties your child is having at home, for example, if he isn't sleeping or eating well, or is having any trouble with behaviour. Let caregivers know if there are any changes that might cause your child to feel stressed or worried.
- Voice any concerns right away to keep communication open and your expectations clear.
- Respect your caregiver's illness policy. If your child feels poorly, stay home or make arrangements for alternative care.
- Respect your caregiver's personal time. Don't be late for pick-ups.
- Review all policy manuals and regulations on a regular basis.
- Remember that child care providers are operating a business. They have business expenses that must be paid each month. Pay on time and in full.
- Be sure to let the caregiver know about any important changes in the child's life. A disruption at home increases the chances of a change in behaviour in other areas of the child's life.



Finding the right caregiver for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent, because the caregiver will also have a significant impact on your child's life. You need to choose a caregiver who will work with you as a partner in your child's development and who will nurture and stimulate your child.

Use this booklet and the Strathcona County Child Care Information Bank [www.strathcona.ca/childcare](http://www.strathcona.ca/childcare) as tools to help find quality child care.



# CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Family and Community Services

780-464-4044

[familyandcommunity@strathcona.ca](mailto:familyandcommunity@strathcona.ca)

[www.strathcona.ca/childcare](http://www.strathcona.ca/childcare)

Office location:

#200-501 Festival Avenue

Community Centre, Sherwood Park

### Strathcona County RCMP and Enforcement Services

780-467-7749

[www.strathcona.ca/rcmp](http://www.strathcona.ca/rcmp)

Office location:

911 Bison Way, Sherwood Park



 STRATHCONA  
COUNTY