

Parent 
Aware



Finding Child Care: **A Guide for Families**



Finding Child Care: A Guide for Families

Parent Aware offers free resources to help you find the quality child care and early education programs your children need to succeed in school and life.

You are the expert when it comes to your child. This guide offers steps for choosing care, questions to ask programs, and things to look for as you visit child care programs. It also has additional information about child care and links to useful resources.

If you want to use our free online search tool or receive personalized search help, **visit [ParentAware.org](https://parentaware.org) or call us at 888.291.9811**. With funding and information support from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, our search tool offers the most accurate information on all licensed child care programs in the state. Our trusted staff has years of child care experience. They can answer your questions, help you narrow down your search, and guide you to other valuable resources.

This guide is available online in Somali, Hmong, and Spanish, and printed copies are available in Spanish.

SPANISH

¿Necesita ayuda para encontrar cuidado infantil? Parent Aware ofrece herramientas y recursos gratuitos para ayudar a las familias a encontrar el cuidado infantil y los programas de educación temprana de calidad que sus hijos necesitan para tener éxito tanto en la escuela como en la vida. Llame a la línea de acceso a idiomas al 888291.9811 para obtener atención personalizada en español.

SOMALI

Ma ugu baahan tahay caawimo helitaan daryeelka ilmaha? Parent Aware ayaa bixiya aalado iyo ilo bilaash ah oo lagaga caawiyo qoysasku inay helaan daryeelka ilmaha iyo barnaamijyada waxbarashada hore ee carruurtoodu ugu baahan inay ku guuleystaan dugsiga iyo noloshaba. Ka wac khadka marinka luqadda telefoonka 888.291.9811 si aad ugu hesho taageero shakhsiyeysan Af-Soomali.

HMONG

Koj puas xav tau kev pab nrhiav neeg zov menyuam? Parent Aware muaj kev pab dawb rau tsev neeg nrhiav chaw zov menyuam thiab qhia ntawv ntsov kom zoo txhij txhua uas kom txhawb menyuam ua zoo rau kev kawm ntawv thiab nws lub neej. Hu rau ntwam tus xov tooj 888.291.9811 yog xav tau ib tug neeg hais lub Hmoob.



About Parent Aware Ratings

Families use **Parent Aware Star Ratings** to find programs using practices that prepare children for school and life.

When a program participates in the Parent Aware Star Rating process, they are letting their stars shine. They volunteer for extra training and professional development to go above and beyond basic health and safety licensing requirements.

Participating programs can earn a **One-, Two-, Three-, or Four-Star Rating**. Parent Aware Ratings are based on demonstrated use of research-based practices that prepare children for school and life. Each Rating level builds on the previous one, helping families easily identify which practices the program is using.

Learn more about Parent Aware Star Ratings at [ParentAware.org/stars-defined](https://parentaware.org/stars-defined).



Types of Care and Education for Children

It's important to pick a program that best fits you and your child. Standards are in place to guide you as you make this important decision. All programs that appear on the Parent Aware website are **licensed or certified by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, or have met standards set by the Minnesota Department of Education**. Licensing and certification help make sure that programs are meeting basic health and safety standards. See [ParentAware.org/health-safety](https://parentaware.org/health-safety).

You can narrow your online search by these categories:

Centers and Preschools, Family Child Care, and Head Start.

Centers and Preschools

These programs provide care and education for children in age-based groups, either full-time or part-time. These programs are often in free-standing buildings, businesses, community centers, or places of worship. This category also includes Public School Prekindergarten programs. These programs are administered by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Public schools, including charter schools, may offer early childhood education, extended day, family literacy, and/or School Readiness programs.

Family Child Care

Family child care providers may care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in their homes. Some family child care programs provide care in commercial spaces or places of worship. Many family child care professionals offer planned play and scheduled activities that help children learn.

Head Start

Early Head Start (prenatal to age 3) and Head Start (age 3 to 5) and their child care partners serve young children from families with low income. Programs may be based in centers, schools, or family child care homes. These programs have comprehensive services that support the mental, social, and emotional development of children from prenatal to age 5. In addition, programs provide early childhood classes and health and social services.

Other types of child care include school-age care programs, drop-in programs, and care provided by family, friends, or neighbors. These programs are not licensed or certified and do not appear in Parent Aware search results.





Resources for Families with Specific Care Needs

Parents of children with special needs, LGBTQ families, and parents of infants and toddlers may have additional concerns about finding child care. These resources can help.

- Families with children with **special needs** can use our guide to access services and child care to help their children grow and develop. Go to [ParentAware.org/special-needs](https://parentaware.org/special-needs).
- **LGBTQ families** may have additional concerns and considerations in finding child care that is sensitive and respectful. Our resource guide can help. Go to [ParentAware.org/lgbtq-families](https://parentaware.org/lgbtq-families).
- **Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care** (MNTRECC) provides early care and education resources for American Indian children and their families. Go to mntrecc.net/contact.html.
- Parents looking for programs that are **bi-lingual** or operate in **languages other than English** can find language information in a program's Parent Aware listing.



Paying for Child Care

Financial aid and tax relief plans can help you pay for child care.

The cost of care depends on several factors, including your child's age, the type of child care, and the location. There are several programs that can help make child care more affordable. These include:

- **The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)**
- **Early Learning Scholarships**
- **Credits and deductions on your income tax**

You can call **888.291.9811** for help finding the right resources. Or, you can use:

- **Bridge to Benefit's** free financial aid screening tool to see if you might be eligible for help. Go to mn.bridgetobenefits.org/Home2.
- You can use the **Paying for Care Checklist** as a financial aid guide. Go to [ParentAware.org/paying-for-care-checklist](https://parentaware.org/paying-for-care-checklist).
- Free help filing your **tax return** is also available in many communities. Go to revenue.state.mn.us/free-tax-preparation-help.





Choosing Care Checklist

Finding a Program for Your Child

1 Begin Your Search

2 Reach Out

3 Check References and Records

4 Visit Programs

5 Make Your Choice

6 Help Your Child with the Transition

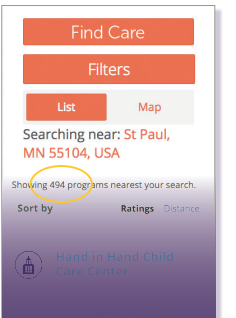
7 Stay Involved

1 Begin Your Search

Use our free online search tool on [ParentAware.org](https://www.parentaware.org) to choose from more than 12,000 licensed child care and early education programs in Minnesota.

- ▶ Adjust criteria like location, hours of operation, and ages served to get customized results.
- ▶ Some programs also share current openings and rates.

Personalized help is available by calling 888.291.9811 or by using the website's chat feature.



2 Reach Out

After you have identified possible programs, call to check for openings and find out if the cost and schedule will meet your needs. This is a great opportunity to introduce yourself and ask questions, especially if your child has specific needs.

- ▶ Do they offer part-time or rotating schedules (if needed)?
- ▶ Do they offer any financial assistance such as scholarships, multi-child discounts, or sliding fee rates?
- ▶ Do they require a deposit?

3 Check References and Records

- ▶ Request references from families who currently use the program or who have used the program in the recent past.
- ▶ Use the state's licensing look-up (licensinglookup.dhs.state.mn.us) to verify the program is licensed or certified and check for any past or current health and safety violations and corrections orders.
- ▶ For licensing information about family child care programs, you can also contact your county's social services office.

(mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/contact-us/counties-and-regional-offices/)

Help with this process is available by calling 888.291.9811.

4 Visit Programs

You may want to first schedule a tour and then make a second visit to introduce your child and see how they interact with the caregiver and other children.

On the following pages are some of the factors you can use to help you compare child care programs.

| Visit Programs | Program 1 | Program 2 | Program 3 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <p>RELATIONSHIPS. Children’s brains develop best when they have caring and consistent relationships with caregivers.</p> <p>Questions: What is the turnover rate for the people who will be caring for my child? How do you deal with difficult behavior?</p> <p>What to Look For: Adults should be consistent, kind, and patient, and know children’s likes and dislikes. They should spend time talking and listening to each child. Early educators should deal with difficult behavior in a positive way, rather than yelling at or punishing children.</p> | | | |
| <p>EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE. Early childhood educators with education and experience in early childhood have a better understanding of the developmental needs of young children.</p> <p>Questions: Do you (and/or your staff) understand child development and have specific education and training? How many years of experience do you/they have?</p> <p>What to Look For: Licensed child care providers are required to complete training annually. Parent Aware Rated programs and those who have national accreditations complete additional training each year. Early childhood educators may also have degrees or credentials in Early Childhood Education or related fields.</p> | | | |
| <p>GROUP SIZE. Children cared for in small groups can receive the attention they need from adults.</p> <p>Questions: How many children will be cared for along with my child? What are your supervision policies for inside and outside activities?</p> <p>What to Look For: Group sizes in licensed child care* are regulated by the State of Minnesota. The number of children that someone can legally care for depends on the age of the children; younger children require more care.</p> | | | |
| <p>HEALTH AND SAFETY. A safe and clean environment supports child health. All licensed programs are required to meet basic health and safety standards.</p> <p>Questions: Have all child care providers had criminal background checks? Is there an emergency plan for situations such as severe weather, fires, and floods? Are there nap spaces for infants that follow safe sleep requirements**?</p> <p>What to Look For: The program space should be clean and appealing, with toys, equipment, and books easily available and in good condition. There should be space for active play, and play equipment should be in good condition and over a soft surface as sand, mulch, or rubber matting.</p> | | | |

*mn.gov/dhs/assets/ratio-and-group-size-standards-for-licensed-child-care_tcm1053-340437.pdf
 ** https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/SafeSleep_tcm1053-340125.pdf

continued

| Visit Programs <i>continued</i> | Program 1 | Program 2 | Program 3 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <p>PLANNED ACTIVITY. Having some planned activities and a daily routine helps children feel secure and supports their development.</p> <p>Questions: What does a typical day look like? Does the program ever take field trips or do enrichment activities? How often will my child be read to?</p> <p>What to Look For: There should be many different activities available for children, such as story time, singing, games, dress-up play, building toys, and outdoor time. Some programs use a curriculum; others may not use a formal curriculum but still support children's kindergarten readiness in many ways.</p> | | | |
| <p>TRACK DEVELOPMENT. Regular assessments of a child's development can help identify their strengths and challenges.</p> <p>Questions: How is child development measured? What happens at parent conferences?</p> <p>What to Look For: The program may be using an assessment tool to direct specific activities for your child. Programs for preschoolers may also have activities to help with the transition to kindergarten.</p> | | | |
| <p>RESPECT FOR ALL FAMILIES. Programs should address bias and support the cultures of all families.</p> <p>Questions: Will my child see their language and culture reflected in program materials, toys, and books? Are there materials available that help children learn about people from different cultures?</p> <p>What to Look For: Early childhood educators should be respectful of each child's unique background. Activities that teach about similarities and differences in realistic, positive ways help children learn to value and respect themselves and others.</p> | | | |
| <p>COMMUNICATION. Parents and early educators should communicate daily about children's well-being. Children are constantly growing and changing, so sharing information is essential.</p> <p>Question: How do you communicate information to parents?</p> <p>What to Look For: Children are constantly growing and changing, so sharing information is essential. Bulletin boards, notes, or a conversation at the end of each day are all ways a program can keep you updated.</p> | | | |

5

Make Your Choice

Be sure to confirm your start date with your chosen program and complete any requested paperwork.

6

Help Your Child with the Transition

Ask the program about steps they would recommend for your child or use the Transition Checklist for ideas. Go to [ParentAware.org/transition-checklist](https://www.parentaware.org/transition-checklist).

7

Stay Involved

You are the best judge of whether a program is working for your child. As children grow, their needs change. Programs may also change over time. This is why it's important to evaluate your choice of care regularly.

Here are some ways to stay involved and informed:

Make unexpected visits

Programs should welcome parent visits at any time, but keep in mind that certain times of the day are very busy.

Take your time

When dropping off or picking up your child, make time to occasionally stay a little longer.

Change times

Picking up your child at the same time every day is a great way to build a routine for your child. However, changing pick-up times occasionally allows you to see different aspects of your child's day.

Volunteer

Helping with special events or field trips is a fun way to bond with your child and is also a chance to interact with your child's caregivers.

Arrange a conference

Setting up a meeting or phone conversation is a chance to talk about your child, ask questions, or express concerns.

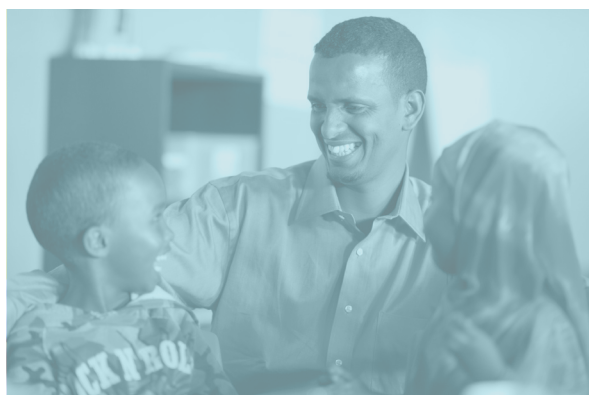
Meet new people

Get to know the child care professionals, staff, or volunteers who may be spending time with your child.

Having Trouble Finding Care?

Finding high-quality, affordable child care is difficult in many communities. Here are a few tips that may help:

- Contact our **Child Care Information Specialists** for more ideas. Call 888.291.9811.
- Look at **different locations** from where you initially considered. Maybe there are options along a different route to work, or further away from home.
- Get on the **waiting list** at every program that you are interested in. Sometimes openings come up unexpectedly.
- **Talk to friends**, neighbors, other parents, and coworkers who have recently searched for child care. What did they do?





ParentAware.org | 888.291.9811

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