



Intermediary Toolkit

Helping Parents and Families
Find Child Care

ParentAware.org | 888.291.9811



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Helping Parents and Families Find Child Care

Parent Aware offers free tools and resources to help parents and families find the child care and early education programs their children need to succeed in school and life.

We believe parents are the experts when it comes to their children. However, the search for child care can be stressful. As a trusted partner, you are in a position to help guide parents through the process of finding the child care that will support their child's growth and development. When the process is slowed down, and when parents are given adequate time and the proper tools, they're more able to find and select quality child care and early education programs that fit their family's needs.

This guide will help you support parents and families in their child care search. It includes basic information about early child development and what makes for quality child care. It also discusses financial assistance options, explains Parent Aware Ratings, and reviews the options available for families.

This guide is designed to be used along with "[*Finding Child Care: A Guide for Families.*](#)"

If you or a parent need additional support finding a child care or early education program, our Child Care Information Specialists are available to help. Support is available Monday through Friday by phone at 888.291.9811 or via the online chat function on the Parent Aware website.



Child Care and Early Education Play A Vital Role In Child Development

We know from research that most parents base their child care decision on cost and schedule. These are necessary factors to consider. However, equally important is to find child care options that support the healthy growth and development of children and build on the strengths of a child's family and culture. A building will collapse if it doesn't have a strong foundation to support it. Similarly, children need strong foundations early on in their lives to be healthy and successful later in life.

Early childhood experiences play a large role in how a child's brain develops. Healthy brain development during a child's early years creates stepping stones for educational success and physical and emotional health. Activities as simple as "[serve and return](#)" interactions — in which children babble, gesture and make facial expressions, and adults respond with similar actions — are vital to the development of a child's brain.

Another important factor that affects children's development is exposure to stress. There are positive kinds of stress and negative kinds of stress. Children might experience a [positive stress response](#) when they're meeting someone new for the first time or ask a new classmate to play. This kind of stress is healthy and supports the child's development. But if a child experiences prolonged, excessive amounts of stress, called [toxic stress](#), their growth and development can be hindered. This stress may come from situations such as unsafe environments, racism and discrimination, prolonged poverty, abuse, and neglect. Fortunately, research tells us that nurturing caregiver relationships create [a buffer](#) that protects children from many of the negative effects of toxic stress.



Parents who are searching for child care for the first time may worry about having other people care for their children. However, caring and consistent relationships with both parents and early childhood teachers actually [support a child's growth and development](#), and don't negatively affect the child's relationship with their parents.

It's important that parents and families be given the time and tools they need to choose child care providers who understand the importance of early childhood development. The questions in [*Finding Childcare: A Guide for Families*](#) can guide parents toward early childhood settings that will support children's developing brains.



Financial Support Is Available

Financial aid and tax credits and refunds can help the families you work with pay for child care. Before they search for child care and early education programs, we recommend they check to see if their family qualifies for financial assistance.

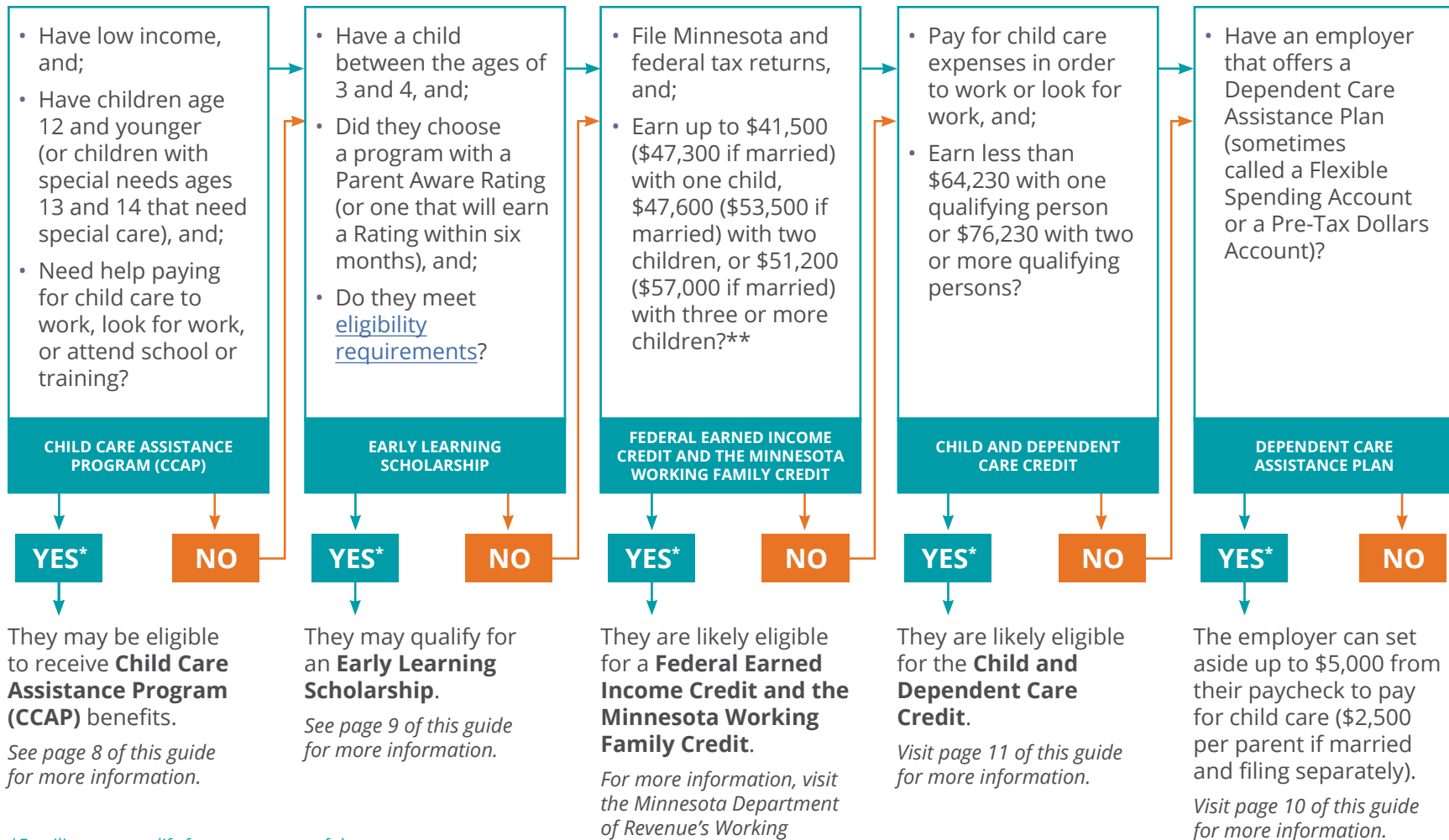
The cost of child care depends on several factors, including the child's age, the type of child care, and the location. There are several programs that can help make child care more affordable. These include the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Early Learning Scholarships, and credits and deductions on income tax.

Parents can use the [Paying for Care Checklist](#) as a financial aid guide.

Financial Support Eligibility

There are several programs that can help make child care more affordable for the families you work with. This chart helps explain what families might qualify for.

DOES THE FAMILY YOU'RE WORKING WITH:



*Families may qualify for one or more of these programs.

**Based on 2019 tax year; be sure to review current eligibility requirements.

Financial Aid Programs

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP)



WHO

Families may be eligible to receive CCAP benefits if:

- They have a low income. This includes families currently or recently in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and those who have never received cash assistance.
- They have children age 12 and younger or children with special needs who are ages 13 and 14 that need child care.
- They need help paying for child care to work, look for work, or attend school or training.



WHAT

This program pays a portion of families' child care costs to the family's child care provider. Families are responsible for the rest of the cost. Families must use a licensed provider, or a legal, unlicensed provider that is authorized to accept CCAP. There may be a waiting list for assistance in some counties. However, parents should still get on those waiting lists, because they can move fast.



HOW

A good starting point to help parents determine their eligibility is the Bridge to Benefit's free [financial aid screening tool](#). This easy to use, online tool can help determine eligibility for the CCAP program. You can also help families fill out the application from the site, which also contains [a detailed list of questions and answers](#). Families must submit the application to their local [tribal or county human services](#) office. Once they apply for CCAP, a child care worker will officially determine their eligibility and help them understand the program. For more information about the Child Care Assistance Program, visit the [Minnesota Department of Human Services' Child Care Assistance](#) page.

Financial Aid Programs

EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIPS



WHO

For families meeting income eligibility requirements and who have a child between the ages of 3 and 4 — and in some cases children younger than 3 — who choose a program with a Three- or Four-Star Parent Aware Rating or one that will earn a Rating within six months.



WHAT

Available statewide, scholarships help families afford high-quality child care and early education programs. Families can receive up to \$7,500 per scholarship annually when parents choose a qualifying program.



HOW

For more information, call Parent Aware at 888.291.9811, contact your [local scholarship administrator](#), or visit the [Early Learning Scholarships](#) page on the Minnesota Department of Education website.

Tax Refunds and Credits

DEPENDENT CARE ASSISTANCE PLAN (DCAP)



WHO

Family members whose employers offer a Dependent Care Assistance Plan. This plan is sometimes called a Flexible Spending Account or a Pre-Tax Dollars Account.



WHAT

Families estimate how much they will pay for child care in the coming year. The employer sets aside that amount from their paychecks to pay for child care, up to \$5,000 (\$2,500 per parent if married and filing separately). That amount is not subject to income tax.



HOW

Family members ask their employers' human resources departments if they offer a Dependent Care Assistance Plan and how to enroll.

Tax Refunds and Credits

CHILD AND DEPENDENT CARE CREDIT



WHO

Families who pay child care expenses and qualify for the federal child and dependent care credit. Families must have earned income for the year. Even families that don't pay any taxes may qualify for a refund of the state credit, but they must file tax returns.



WHAT

The Child and Dependent Care Credit is both a federal and state credit that is available if filers paid for someone to care for their child or other household services. The care or services must be needed in order for them to work or look for work. Taxpayers earning less than \$64,230 with one qualifying person or \$76,230 with two or more qualifying persons are generally eligible for these credits.

At the federal level, the [Child and Dependent Care Credit](#) gives qualifying parents 20-35% of up to \$3,000 of child care for one dependent, and up to \$6,000 of expenses for two or more dependents. The [Minnesota credit](#) is limited to the amount of the federal Child and Dependent Care Credit.



HOW

Families apply for tax credits on their annual Minnesota and Federal tax returns. The credits reduce the amount of tax owed. The Minnesota credit may also increase the amount of a refund, depending on the family's situation. For more information, visit the Minnesota Department of Revenue's [Child Care and Dependent Care Credit](#) page or call 800.652.9094.

From February 1 through April 15, trained volunteers are available at sites around Minnesota to help families with their tax preparation. For more information and to see if families qualify for help, call 800.657.3989 or visit the Minnesota Department of Revenue's Free Tax Preparation Help page.

***Based on 2019 tax year; be sure to review current eligibility requirements.*

Tax Refunds and Credits

FEDERAL EARNED INCOME CREDIT AND THE MINNESOTA WORKING FAMILY CREDIT



WHO

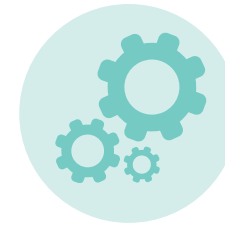
Families that file Minnesota and Federal tax returns. Even families that don't pay any taxes may qualify, but they must file tax returns.



WHAT

The Earned Income Credit is a special credit for working families with low incomes that reduces the amount of federal tax that they owe, if they owe any tax. The credit is subtracted from the amount of tax owed, so families pay less tax or get money back from the government. Families must meet certain eligibility requirements to claim the credit.

Taxpayers who qualify for the federal Earned Income Credit also qualify for the Minnesota Working Family Credit. Taxpayers earning up to \$41,500 (\$47,300 if married) with one child, \$47,600 (\$53,500 if married) with two children, or \$51,200 (\$57,000 if married) with three or more children are generally eligible for these credits.



HOW

Families apply for tax credits on their annual Minnesota and Federal tax returns. The credits reduce the amount of tax owed or increase the amount of a refund, depending on the family's situation. For more information, visit the [Minnesota Department of Revenue's Working Family Credit](#) page or call 800.652.9094.



Tools for Parents

The search for child care can be stressful for parents. Often, they've found new employment and need child care as soon as possible. With your help, we can simplify the process of searching for child care and early education programs, so parents can make the best decisions for their families. [*Finding Child Care: A Guide for Families*](#) is available in print format in English and Spanish, and online in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. It also contains a checklist that parents can carry with them when they visit child care programs.

Parent Aware Online Search Tool

Parent Aware's free online [search tool](#) offers the most accurate information available on more than 12,000 licensed child care and early education programs in the state. Parents can adjust criteria like location, hours of operation, and ages served to get customized results based on their family's needs. Listings also indicate if the program is bilingual or uses a language other than English. Using this tool with a parent can help them narrow their search when they feel overwhelmed by options, or broaden their search if they need more information about available programs.



DHS Licensing Information Lookup

You can access a child care and/or early education program's licensing record by clicking on the "View Record" link in the provider's Parent Aware profile page or by searching on [DHS Licensing Information Lookup](#). Finding out this information can help put parents' minds at ease about the safety of their children, and can help steer them away from unlicensed child care, or programs that have a history of licensing violations.

Child Care Information Specialists

Parent Aware's Child Care Information Specialists are also available for additional help. Parents can contact them at 888.291.9811 or via the online chat function on the [Parent Aware website](#). Support is available Monday through Friday.



Types of Care and Education for Children

When searching for child care on the Parent Aware website, parents can filter programs by three broad categories: centers and preschools, family child care, and Head Start. School-age care programs may appear in either the centers and preschools or family child care categories.

Some types of programs are not included in the search results. They are listed as other types of care. Most of these programs are not legally required to meet licensing health and safety standards. They are not eligible for a Parent Aware Star Rating.

You can use these program descriptions to help parents and families narrow down their search.



Centers and Preschools

CHILD CARE CENTERS AND PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS

These programs are licensed and monitored by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) or tribal human services agency. They 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.

PUBLIC SCHOOL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Public schools, including charter schools, may offer many program options, including early childhood education, extended day, family literacy, and school readiness programs. In-school or school readiness programs are administered by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). They are license-exempt, meaning they can provide care without having a license. License-exempt programs can become certified by meeting health and safety standards, which allows the programs to serve families that receive child care assistance.

SCHOOL-AGE CARE PROGRAMS

School-age care programs care for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. They can be offered in a provider's home or in a building, like a school, community center, YMCA/YWCA, or parks and recreation program. These programs may be licensed or license-exempt, depending on the setting. License-exempt school-age programs can become certified by meeting health and safety standards, which allows the programs to serve families that receive child care assistance.



Family Child Care

FAMILY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Family child care programs are licensed and monitored by the county or tribal licensing agency. Family child care providers may care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in their homes. Some family child care programs are also provided 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 (3 TO 5-YEAR-OLDS)

Early Head Start, Head Start and their child care partners serve young children from low-income families. 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.

Program services are responsive to each child and family ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage. Early Head Start and Head Start encourages the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community.



Other Types of Care

DROP-IN PROGRAMS

This is short-term care provided for a few hours at a time. It is usually offered in shopping malls or community centers.

FAMILY, FRIENDS, OR NEIGHBORS

Provider cares only for related children or children from no more than one unrelated family.

LEGAL NON-LICENSED PROVIDERS

Family, friends, or neighbor care providers who register with the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) are referred to as legal non-licensed providers. Legal non-licensed providers who are reimbursed for child care costs by CCAP and serve at least one unrelated child are monitored annually for compliance with health and safety requirements by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

About Parent Aware Ratings

Parents and families can use [Parent Aware Star Ratings](#) to find programs using practices that prepare children for school and life. Rated programs appear at the top of search results on the Parent Aware.org website.

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.

For more information about Parent Aware Star Ratings, visit the [Parent Aware website](#).

Of Kindergarten-readiness Best Practices





Care for Children with Special Needs

Parents of children with special needs may have additional concerns and considerations in finding child care that is sensitive and respectful. These resources help families access services and child care to help their children grow and develop.

Help Me Grow

[Help Me Grow's](#) services and programs are for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with developmental delays or disabilities, from birth to kindergarten age. Services are designed to meet the unique learning needs of each child and are free to eligible families regardless of income or immigrant status. If parents have questions about their child's development, or if they think their child might need extra help to learn, they can visit the Help Me Grow website or call 866.693.4769.

Early Childhood Screening

[Early Childhood Screening](#) is a quick and simple way for parents to check how their 3- to 5-year-old is growing, learning, and developing. Screenings are free and can help detect possible health or learning problems so that children can get the help they need before starting kindergarten. An Early Childhood Screening, or a similar health and developmental screening, is required for children to enter kindergarten in Minnesota public schools. For more information or to schedule an appointment, parents can contact their local school district, call the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) at 651.582.8412, or search [MDE's online directory](#).



Follow Along Program

The free [Follow Along Program](#) is available to families with children between birth and 3 years of age in most Minnesota counties. Families can receive age-appropriate developmental and social-emotional screening tools every 4-6 months and fun activities to help support their child's development. Families are connected to additional community resources when appropriate, including referrals to Help Me Grow and early childhood mental health providers when concerns are identified. Families can [enroll online](#) or by calling 800.728.5420.

Center for Inclusive Child Care (CICC)

[The Center for Inclusive Child Care](#) is a resource network supporting inclusive care for young children and their caregivers. CICC provides coaching to early care and education professionals to successfully include children with unique needs or challenging behaviors to prevent expulsion. They also work to implement health and safety best practices and improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers. Parents can learn more by visiting CICC's website or calling 651.641.8339.

PACER Center

[PACER Center](#) is a parent training and information center for families of children with disabilities. Located in Minneapolis, it serves families across the nation, as well as those in Minnesota. Parents can find publications, workshops, and other resources to help make decisions about education, vocational training, employment, and other services for their children.



Resources for American Indian Families

Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care

Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care ([MNTRECC](#)) provides early care and education resources for American Indian children and their families.



What If A Parent Can't Find Care?

Finding high-quality, affordable child care is difficult in many communities. Many parts of the state currently have child care shortages, and many families are on waiting lists for child care assistance or waiting for a spot to open up in their preferred program.

We encourage you to help the families you work with to problem solve other child care arrangements while they wait for their situation to change. Have them look at different locations from where they initially considered — maybe there are options along a different route to work or farther away from home. Encourage them to ask friends, neighbors, other parents, and coworkers who have recently searched for child care for their advice.

And we always encourage parents to get on waiting lists at every program they are interested in. Sometimes openings come up unexpectedly!

In addition, Parent Aware has many [free and low-cost tools and training materials](#) available to help family, friends, or neighbors care for children.



Language Access for Parents

The [Parent Aware website](#) and search tool can be accessed in English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.

Print copies of [Finding Child Care: A Guide for Families](#) are available in English and Spanish. This guide is also available online in English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

Parents looking for programs that are bi-lingual or operate in languages other than English can find language information in a program's [ParentAware.org](#) listing.

Our Child Care Information Specialists are also available for conference calls with you and the families you work with in cases where your translation help is needed. They can be reached at 888.291.9811 or via the online chat function on the [Parent Aware website](#).



Questions?

If you or a parent need additional support finding a child care or early education program, our Child Care Information Specialists are available to help.

Parents can contact them at 888.291.9811 or via the online chat function on the [Parent Aware website](#). Support is available Monday through Friday.

If a parent doesn't feel comfortable reaching out directly, we encourage and welcome you to reach out to our Child Care Information Specialists on their behalf. We are here to help!



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