

# Guide for Selecting Quality Child Care









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Welcome Families!

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) Early Education Program and Services unit is excited to join you on your exploration to find high-quality early care and education for your young child(ren). This guide provides knowledge and tools to help you choose a high-quality early care and education program that best fits you and your child.

### What is "Quality," and What Does it Include?

Choosing child care must meet your family's needs and provide peace of mind. A high-quality child care program provides children with a stimulating, nurturing environment that is culturally and linguistically respectful where they can develop physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

High-quality encompasses caregivers or teachers who have experience and are trained in early childhood development; offers environments that include parent engagement; provides learning materials; and maintains teaching styles that are age-appropriate and respectful of children's cultural and ethnic heritage.

Choosing high-quality early care and education is a crucial decision to make. The type of care you choose will influence your child's development and later school success. Knowing the kinds of programs and aspects of the program's operation is essential to ensure your selection will best meet your child's learning needs.

It's important to start searching for child care at least six months before you need the care. We hope this guide provides insight into making this crucial decision.

#### **First Five Years**

The first five years of your child's development are crucial. From birth to age five, your child's brain develops faster than at any other time in their life. During these first five years, 90% of their brain will develop. Your child's early life experiences will shape their brain and have a lasting impact on their health and ability to learn and succeed in school and life. Supporting healthy development and seeking quality care for your child is critical because the early years will lay a foundation for a lifetime.

#### **Benefits of High-Quality Child Care**

Children exposed to high-quality early learning environments have opportunities to grow and thrive in their development because of experiences that challenge and provoke their learning. High-quality care helps establish a strong foundation for children that results in social-emotional regulation, school readiness, and future success in life.

#### Children who participate in high-quality programs are more likely to:

- Enter kindergarten more focused, more comfortable in a school setting,
- and with skills to grow as learners
- Form friendships easily
- Cooperate, resolve conflict, and express themselves clearly and effectively
- Graduate from high school
- Avoid juvenile delinquency
- Earn higher salaries as adult

# **Types of Early Care**

There are various types of settings that offer care available in San Diego. Families can choose from a licensed program, license-exempt program, or military program.

- Licensed child care refers to programs governed under the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing division (CCL). CCL provides licenses for providers to ensure oversight and enforcement of the health and safety of children in care at child care centers and family child care homes (FCCH). Licensed facilities are legally required to maintain health and safety standards through monitoring facilities, providing assistance, and establishing partnerships with providers, families, and the child care community.
- License-exempt child care refers to child care providers who can legally operate without a license. This is known as informal child care or family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care. License-exempt care does not have to legally adhere to licensing regulations, except when an FFN receives payments from a state or federal child care subsidy program, which requires the FFN to register with California's TrustLine registry and complete a health and safety self-verification and background checks from the California Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- Military child care is neither licensed nor license-exempt. Military child care complies with standards under various accreditation programs approved by the federal government. For specific information regarding military child care, visit <u>MilitaryChildCare.com</u>.



## **Center-Based Child Care Setting:**

- ✓ What Is It? Child care centers are programs licensed to provide child care, typically in commercial or public agency facilities. Child Care centers operate business models with established policies, standards, and guidelines.
- ✓ **Licensed?** Yes, centers are licensed by Community Care Licensing (CCL). They are monitored regularly or when specific complaints are reported.
- ✓ Hours/Days/Times: The hours and days of child care are traditionally Monday through Friday, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- ✓ Locations: Locations are usually in high-traffic commercial areas.
- ✓ **Cost:** Cost varies. To find out more, visit the YMCA Child Care Resource Service to find out the average full-time weekly cost of child care in San Diego by region, child care type, and age.
- ✓ **Staff Qualifications:** The director and teaching staff must meet minimum qualifications and take classes related to child development. Staff must have training that may include instruction in sanitary food handling, emergency preparedness and evacuation, and caring for children with special needs. Training must also include CPR and first aid. All staff working with children also have background clearances.
- Ratio: There are specific adult-to-child ratios centers must follow based on the children's ages in each classroom-reference CCL for ratios.
- ✓ **Meals/Snacks:** Meals and snacks can be provided as part of the program at an additional cost or no cost, or parents may be required to provide food and snacks for their child(ren).
- ✓ Enrollment: Call or visit the location you are interested in enrolling your child to find out when and how to begin the registration process and the costs associated with the enrollment process.
- Other: The program must provide care and supervision as necessary to meet the children's needs. No child(ren) shall be left without the supervision of a teacher at any time. Supervision means visual observation.



## Family Child Care Home (FCCH)

- What Is It? Family child care homes (FCCH) are licensed programs that provide child care in the provider's home.
- ✓ Licensed? Yes, homes are licensed by Child Care Licensing (CCL). They are monitored regularly or when specific complaints are reported.
- ✓ Hours/Days/Times: Many FCCH hours and days are traditionally Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Some may offer more flexibility in terms of hours of care or care outside traditional work hours (ex., evenings, weekends, etc.).
- ✓ Locations: FCCHs are located in homes.
- ✓ **Cost:** Cost varies. Search on the YMCA Child Care Resource Service website to find out the average full-time weekly costs for FCCHs in San Diego by region, child care type, and age.
- ✓ Staff Qualifications: The provider must comply with the requirements for training in preventive health practices, including pediatric cardiopulmonary resuscitation and pediatric first aid, at least 15 hours of health and safety training, and at least one additional hour of training in childhood nutrition, emergency preparedness, and evacuation, or caring for children with special needs.
- Ratio: There are specific adult-to-child ratios that the provider must follow. Since care is sometimes provided in mixed-aged groups, the ratios can vary based on the age of the children in the program.
- Meals/Snacks: Meals and snacks can be provided as part of the program at an additional cost or no cost, or parents may be required to provide food and snacks for their child(ren).
- ✓ Enrollment: Call or ask to visit the location you are interested in enrolling your child to inquire about the registration process and the costs.



# Family, Friend, Neighbor (FFN)

- ✓ What Is It? Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care is provided in the child's or caregiver's home by a person who is a family, friend, neighbor, or a babysitter/nanny.
- ✓ Licensed? No, FFN is not licensed by CCL. They are considered license-exempt.
- ✓ Hours/Days/Times: The hours, days, and times are arranged between the FFN and the family.
- ✓ Locations: Care is provided in the child's or caregiver's home.
- ✓ Cost: Cost is determined between the FNN and the family.
- ✓ Staff Qualifications: There are no regulations on staff qualifications under FFN since they are license-exempt except when an FFN receives payments from a state or federal child care subsidy program, which requires the FFN to register with California's TrustLine registry and complete a health and safety self-verification and background checks from the California Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- ✓ Ratio: There is no current maximum number of children that a license-exempt provider can legally care for. However, providers are only allowed to care for children of one family in addition to their own children.
- ✓ Meals/Snacks: Meals and snacks are determined between the FFN and the family.
- ✓ Enrollment: There are no regulations for enrollment in FFN. The arrangement is between the FFN and the family.



### **Military Child Care**

- ✓ What Is It? The military offers child care programs in various settings, including military child care centers and family child care homes.
- ✓ Licensed: No, Military child care centers are not licensed by Community Care Licensing (CCL). However, Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) contracted by the Military are licensed; see FCCCH information. For more information, visit <u>MilitaryChildcare.com</u>.
- ✓ Hours/Days/Times: Hours, days, and times vary.
- ✓ Locations: Locations are found on or near military bases and military housing sites.
- ✓ Cost: The cost varies depending on the type of service provided.
- Staff Qualifications: Staff qualifications vary based on the services provided. All family members residing in the home may be involved in caring for and assisting the children.
- ✓ Ratio: Ratios depend on the services provided.
- ✓ Meals/Snacks: Meals and snacks may be provided as part of the program.
- ✓ Enrollment: Visit <u>MilitaryChildcare.com</u> for more enrollment information.
- Other: Military types of care for children include child development centers, family child care homes, and 24/7 center care. For specific information on the various types of care, visit <u>MilitaryChildcare.com</u>.



# **Transitional Kindergarten (TK)**

- ✓ What Is It? Transitional kindergarten (TK) is a program designed specifically for four-year-olds offered by the local school district and may not be offered in every elementary school. The program is geared toward preparing children before kindergarten.
- ✓ Licensed: No, TK is not licensed by CCL. They are considered license-exempt and follow school district regulations.
- ✓ Hours/Days/Times: Hours, days, and times vary. Schools can choose to offer TK as a part-day or full-day program.
- ✓ Locations: Locations are found on school sites in school districts and some charter schools.
- ✓ Cost: The program is free for all students who meet age requirements.
- ✓ **Staff Qualifications:** TK classrooms must have at least one teacher with both a multi-subject teaching credential and 24 Units in early childhood development or a child development permit.
- ✓ Ratio: Currently, there is a maximum classroom size of 24 children with two adults.
- ✓ Meals/Snacks: Meals or snacks can be provided as part of the program at an additional cost or no cost, or parents may be required to provide food and snacks for their child(ren). Arrangements must be made during enrollment to ensure the availability of daily food intake.
- ✓ Enrollment: Contact your local neighborhood elementary school for enrollment into TK.
- ✓ Other: Transitional Kindergarten, like kindergarten, is optional. For more information, visit <u>TK California</u>.

# National Standards of Quality

There are two important organizations that have established high-quality indicators for early learning and care settings. The National Associate of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) has standards for center-based settings. The National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) has standards for family child care settings. These standards can be used as a guide when visiting early learning and care settings.

NAEYC	NAFCC		
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b> All families feel welcome when they enter the program, are encouraged to be involved in it, and feel like they are partners in their children's care, development, and education. The interactions and communication between the adults and children are warm and respectful.	<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b> All families feel welcome when they enter the program, are encouraged to be involved in it, and feel like they are partners in their children's care, development, and education. The interactions and communication between the adults and children are warm and respectful.		
<b>CURRICULUM</b> The program supports all areas of development (social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) and provides opportunities for children to learn and develop through play, relationships with caring caregivers, and socializing with peers.	<b>THE ENVIRONMENT</b> The program has materials and areas that are developmentally appropriate for children to use and explore, such as child-sized chairs and tables, a variety of age-appropriate materials, and safe sleeping environments. The program has secure indoor and outdoor areas that are clean and regularly maintained. The room has adequate ventilation and areas with soft or natural light.		
<b>TEACHING</b> Caregivers provide responsive care for each child's unique needs, support each child's interests, and value the process through which children learn.	<b>LEARNING ACTIVITIES</b> The program supports all areas of development (social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) and provides opportunities for children to learn and develop through play, relationships with caring caregivers, and socializing with peers.		
<b>HEALTH</b> The program promotes the health and safety of all children by having knowledgeable care- givers who provide first aid and encourage healthy habits such as hand washing, cleaning, and sanitizing regularly. The program supports nutrition by providing nutritious meals and snacks and promoting regular physical activity.	<b>SAFETY &amp; HEALTH</b> The program promotes the health and safety of all children by having caregivers knowledgeable in providing first aid and encouraging healthy habits such as hand washing, cleaning, and sanitizing regularly. The program supports nutrition by providing nutritious meals and snacks and promoting regular physical activity.		

### NAEYC

#### SCREENING OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

The program uses screening tools and observations to learn more about each child's development and shares this information with families on an ongoing basis. Caregivers and families share information and observations of children and use this information to set goals together. Families are provided with support to address developmental concerns if they arise.

# STAFF COMPETENCIES, PREPARATION, AND SUPPORT

The program employs knowledgeable caregivers, who hold the required educational qualifications, and are motivated to continue developing their understanding of child development and ways to support all children. The program provides opportunities for staff to attend training and other opportunities for continuing their education.

#### FAMILIES

The program creates and builds trusting relationships with family members through regular interactions and communication. The staff takes the time to learn about each family, their unique culture, traditions, and views on childrearing. They use this information to adapt their approaches to children's care, teaching methods, and curriculum to the families served. The program acknowledges the importance of the connection between the family and the care program to support children's optimal learning and development and focuses on strengthening this partnership with families.

#### **COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

The program is well connected to the community and its resources and can bring in representatives from the community to share their talents with children.

### PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The program has materials and areas that are developmentally appropriate for children to use and explore, such as child-sized chairs and tables, a variety of age-appropriate materials, and safe sleeping environments. The program has secure indoor and outdoor areas that are clean and regularly maintained.

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The program has written policies that are clear, available, and accessible to all families. Procedures include information on curriculum goals and guidelines on safety (ex. ratios of staff to children), health (child sick policies), and approaches when supporting children exhibiting challenging behaviors.

### NAFCC

### PROFESSIONAL & BUSINESS PRACTICES

The program does not discriminate against a child or family based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or disability. Confidentiality is established, and the privacy of the children and families is respected. Contracts are established with families and maintained.



# Visiting Child Care Settings

One of the most important steps when choosing child care is to visit various settings to see what feels like the best fit for you and your child. Depending on the type of setting, here are some things to consider:

- An organized environment
- Low shelves and child-size tables and chairs (center-based care)
- Basic standards of cleanliness are displayed
- · Chemicals are stored out of reach and sight
- No safety hazards observed
- No open bodies of water (such as a kiddie pool)
- Staff/caregivers and children seem to enjoy being together
- Staff/caregivers get down to a child's level when talking with them
- Children are engaged in play for most of the time
- · Age-appropriate toys and learning materials
- There are visuals at children's eye level (art displays, pictures of children, etc.)
- Family culture and language evidenced in the environment

### **Recommended Questions When Looking for High-Quality Child Care**

It's essential to be prepared with some questions when visiting settings. Based on what is important to you and your family, below are some examples of questions you may want to ask.

#### General Questions:

- What's the program's philosophy?
- · How many children are in the program?
- Describe a typical day (routines, activities, etc.)
- Is food provided as part of the care? If so, ask to see a menu.
- Family Involvement:
  - · Are families welcome into the early care or educational environment?
  - Are families encouraged to be involved in the program?
  - Are family culture and traditions discussed and brought into the environment?
- Policies/Agreements:
  - What is the tuition/cost of care, and what does that include?
  - What are the hours of care?
  - What is your policy when children get sick?
  - What immunizations are required?
  - How often are toys and materials sanitized?
  - What is your policy when picking up late?
  - How are challenging behaviors (hitting, biting, etc.) approached?
- Staff/Caregivers:
  - What training/education/background is required?
  - How long has the current staff worked in this program?
- Communication:
  - How do families stay informed on how their child is doing throughout the day? and about their progress throughout the year?
  - What is the best way for families to communicate directly with caregivers?
- Health And Safety:
  - What are the safety precautions in place?
  - What are the procedures for medical care?
  - · What is the process if a child has food allergies?
  - What is the procedure for having other people pick up a child from care?

# Other Things to Consider When Searching for Care

## **Inclusion Programs**

Inclusion programs provide children with special needs the same opportunity to participate in settings alongside their typically developing peers. Programs that offer inclusive environments are an excellent way for all children to learn from one another and have the same chance to be prepared for school.

Many child care centers and family child care homes support children with special needs. Inclusion programs may integrate special education and other related services into all parts of the early care or educational setting to ensure all children's needs are addressed.

Other programs, including local school districts, offer more extensive support that may include an environment with a team comprised of a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and special education assistants. Together, the team provides instruction that supports the unique needs of all children.

In all programs, children with special needs are protected with confidentiality about their development and are not discussed with the public.

## **Family Engagement**

Families play an essential role in their child's early development. High-quality child care settings develop partnerships with families to learn about the children they are serving. Children are best supported when collaboration between providers, teachers, and families is established.

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# **Community Resources**

## San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative

San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI), an initiative of First 5 San Diego, is a resource for families to identify and access early learning and care programs that are committed to quality improvements. Programs participating in SDQPI work to maintain best practices to offer high-quality early learning and care. To find a program that participates in SDQPI, visit the website www.sdqpi.org.

# **YMCA Child Care Resource Services**

YMCA Child Care Resources Services is San Diego's link to the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (R&R), a free community-based program that supports families' needs from finding child care, behavior support for children, respite care for families with children with special needs, paying for child care, child care referrals, military family supports and much more. https://www.ymcasd.org/family-resources/child-care-referrals\_

## 211 San Diego

211 San Diego is a free, 24-hour confidential phone service and searchable online database that helps connect people with community, health, and disaster relief services. They offer information on assistance with health and wellness enrollment services, housing and utility assistance, military and veteran services, food assistance, housing, transportation, and much more.

# Community Info Exchange® (CIE)

Community Information Exchange (CIE) is a network of health and social service providers offering benefits to individuals who opt-in to receive support and services. Once enrolled, CIE contacts care coordinators to establish referrals and determine eligibility for additional programs and services. CIE partners work together to provide whatever support is needed. Opting in can be done by dialing 2-1-1 or completing the online application form.

# County Welfare Departments

Public Consulting Group (PCG), in conjunction with the San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), provides CalWORKs Welfare to Work and Refugee Employment Services to CalWORKs families in the east, south, and central regions of San Diego County. CalWORKs cash aid recipients are eligible for Stage 1 and Stage 2 child care based on their eligibility for cash aid and need. For more information, visit the <u>San Diego CalWORKs</u> information page.

# **CalWORKs Child Care**

CalWORKs Child Care Program begins once a family starts receiving cash aid. CalWORKs offers families access to immediate child care while the parent works or performs a welfare-to-work activity. The program supports parents as they transition into stable, long-term care neededfor the family to leave the program and remain off aid. For more information, visit the California Department of Social Services.

## ChildCare.gov

<u>ChildCare.gov</u> helps parents find safe, high-quality early child care programs and services in their community. ChildCare.gov provides links to state child care websites for parents to search for child care and education information. ChildCare.gov connects families with programs that best meet the needs of every child and prepare them to succeed in school.



# Alternative Payment Programs

Alternative payment programs use federal and state funding to provide vouchers/subsidies for eligible low-income families to help them obtain child care. Families may be part of CalWORKs (Stage 1, 2, or 3), California Alternative Payment Program (CAPP), Migrant Alternative Payment Program (CMAP), or the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children (Bridge Program). Contact the California Department of Social Services Child Care and Development programs for more information. Provided are the agencies that assist with vouchers/subsidies for child care.

### YMCA Child Care Resource Service

YMCA Child Care Resource Service provides free child care referrals, subsidized child care for lowincome families, and resources regarding child development. You can contact the child care referral line at 1-800-481-2151. https://www.ymcasd.org/family-resources/child-care-referrals

### **Child Development Associates**

Child Development Associates is an alternative payment program for low-income families or families receiving (or have received in the last 24 months) CalWORKs cash aid assistance. These families may be eligible for free or reduced-cost child care services. For more information, visit <u>CDASD.org</u>.

### Child Care Aware® of America

Child Care Aware of America (CCAoA) works with a national network of more than 400 child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies and other partners to ensure that all families have access to quality, affordable child care. CCAoA also provides child care assistance for military families through fee assistance and respite child care programs. For information, visit <u>ChildCareAware.org</u>.

# **Growth and Learning**

### **Milestones**

Children learn through play, and we can observe many skills they develop along the way. Their first words, first steps, and clapping when excited are all skills called milestones. Milestones are things that most (75%) children can do by a certain age. It is important for families to be familiar with milestones so that they can learn more about development and have information and resources about what they can do if they have concerns about their child's development.

To learn more about children's early development, we invite you to visit <u>https://allaboutyoungchil-</u><u>dren.org/</u>. They have information in 8 languages and provide information on milestones for children from birth to five years of age.

### **Children with Special Needs**

A child with special needs may require special attention and specific support that other children do not need based on their development. Special needs can be inclusive of various conditions, including physical ailments, learning disabilities, or chronic or terminal illnesses. Children with special needs attend early care and education program to foster their learning development.

SDCOE has the "**HOPE Infant and Family Support Program**" that supports families of Infants and Toddlers from birth to 3 years old with disabilities. For more information on the HOPE Infant Family Support program, call (858) 292-3700 or visit <u>https://www.sdcoe.net/schools/hope</u>



# References

AGENCY		WEBSITE	QR CODE
1	Community Care Licensing	https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-licensing	
2	License Exempt Care	https://rrnetwork.org/assets/general-files/License-exempt-care.pdf	
3	Trustline	http://trustline.org/	
4	Military Child Care	https://militarychildcare.com/	
5	YMCA Child Care Resource Service	https://www.ymcasd.org/family-resources/child-care-referrals	
6	TK California	https://tkcalifornia.org/parents/tk-parent-faqs/	
7	National Association for the Education of Young Children	https://www.naeyc.org/defining-recognizing-high-quality- early-learning-programs	

# References

	AGENCY	WEBSITE	QR CODE
8	California Department of Social Services Child Care and Development Programs	https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calworks-child-care/ subsidized-programs	
9	Public Consulting Group	https://www.publicconsultinggroup.com/human-services/ san-diego-calworks-information-page/	
10	CalWORKs	https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calworks-child-care	
11	California Department of Social Services Child Care and Development Programs	https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-and-development/ child-care-and-development-programs	
12	Child Development Associates	https://cdasd.org/families/ap-program/	
13	Child Care Aware	https://www.childcareaware.org/fee-assistancerespite/ military-families/	
14	211 San Diego	https://211sandiego.org/	
15	California Child Care Resource & Referral	https://rrnetwork.org/	

# References

AGENCY		WEBSITE	QR CODE
16	ChildCare.gov	https://childcare.gov/	
17	Community Information Exchange	https://ciesandiego.org/cie-participants/	
18	Learn the Signs	https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html	
19	All About Young Children	https://allaboutyoungchildren.org/	
20	San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative	https://sdqpi.org/	
21	SDCOE HOPE Infant Program	https://www.sdcoe.net/schools/hope	







