

Child Care

ESSENTIALS

Choosing Quality Child Care in Nebraska



Find the online version of this guide at:



go.unl.edu/child-care

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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table of contents

- Introduction + Overview** **4**
- What is Quality Child Care? 4
- Why Quality Child Care in Nebraska Matters 5
- What Does Quality Child Care Look Like? 6
- What is Developmentally Appropriate Practice? 6
- Finding Child Care in Nebraska 7
- Age-Specific Information** **8**
- 6 weeks - 18 months 10
- 18 months - 3 years 14
- 4 - 5 years 18
- 6 - 12 years 22
- Resources** **26**
- Child Care Licensure + Reporting Violations 26
- Child Care Subsidy Program 27
- Additional Family Support Services 28
- Glossary of Terms 29
- Organizations + Programs 30
- References 31



CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

introduction + overview

Who is This Guide For?

The Child Care Essentials guide is for Nebraska **parents** and caregivers seeking information on how to choose quality child care that best meets the needs of their family.



Words highlighted in **orange** are defined in the glossary on page 29.

What is Quality Child Care?^{1,2}

A **quality** early childhood program provides a safe and nurturing environment that supports all aspects of your child's development. Characteristics of quality in an early care and education setting include:

- Nurturing, supportive adult-child and family relationships.
- Safe, stimulating physical environments.
- Frequent one-on-one, language-rich, adult-child interactions.
- Opportunities for children to explore and learn across a variety of developmental domains — cognitive, language, emotional, social and physical.
- Adult behaviors that are sensitive to the individual and cultural needs of young children and their families.

Why Quality Child Care in Nebraska Matters

Quality Care Sets the Foundation for Success

A child's brain is rapidly developing during the first five years of life and is an important reason for choosing quality care for your child. These early years set the foundation for a child's success and have a big impact on their learning, development, behavior, and mental and physical health.³ Early relationships, environments and experiences affect all aspects of a child's development.

Quality Care is in Demand

Nebraskans are hard workers — but they are also family oriented. There are approximately 133,000 children under age 5 living in Nebraska, and nearly 75% of children under age 6 are in need of some form of paid child care.⁴ A strong early care and education workforce is vital to care for the state's youngest population while their parents are working.



75% of children under age 6 require child care

Find Quality Today

Finding the right child care program is an important step for families. Often there are waitlists at child care programs that have reached their licensed capacity. Typically, for a small fee, you can request that your child(ren) be placed on a list at your chosen program(s). The child care program will contact you when they have a space available for your child.

Quality Care Impacts Nebraska's Future

Ensuring all children have access to quality early experiences is an investment in Nebraska's future. The 2018 Kids Count in Nebraska Report states that well-educated children are more likely to become successful adults and community members.⁵ Well-educated children grow up to have greater job satisfaction, earn higher incomes, and have lower divorce and crime rates. Creating equal opportunities for all children to learn and grow in their early years — regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic background — is vital to Nebraska's prosperity.



What Does Quality Child Care Look Like?

Partnership

Quality child care providers show an interest in partnering with you to meet your family's goals. Seek child care providers who make an effort to develop a long-term relationship with you that is built on trust and respect. Having a strong partnership makes it easier to resolve any concerns that may arise.

Two-Way Communication

It is important to have regular, two-way communication with your child's caregiver, especially for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children. In-person communication and phone calls are recommended; however, some programs may use email or a smartphone app to share information via text and send photos of your child's day. When your child is in school-age care, it is important to have in-person conversations with your child's caregiver and the ability to reach them by phone or email when needed.



CHOOSING A PROVIDER

When searching for a quality child care program, look for providers who:

- 1 Have training in **early childhood education (ECE)** and **special needs**.
- 2 Describe their communication practices as "open."
- 3 Use **developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)**.

What is Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)?

Caregivers (e.g., early childhood teachers or after-school staff) make many decisions throughout the day to best support children's learning and development. Being intentional in their interactions with children is the core of **developmentally appropriate practice**, or DAP. Caregivers should create goals for children on an individual basis, and make sure activities are both challenging and manageable for each child. For caregivers to set these important goals, they must have knowledge about:

- Child development and learning for the age group in their care.
- Each child's individual needs.
- Each child's culture, community and home environment. Learning needs to be relevant and respectful for the child and their family.
- Appropriate learning materials, including books and pictures that reflect diversity and children with special needs.

Discipline + DAP⁶

Young children are experiencing many things for the very first time. They are naturally curious and seek adult attention to learn about their world. Sometimes, this means they engage in behaviors that are challenging for caregivers. A quality child care provider will use discipline to guide children as they develop self-control and learn appropriate behaviors. **Discipline** means to teach and guide — it is not a punishment. A child care provider should help children learn strategies to manage their behavior in socially acceptable ways. Children should receive individual support as they learn to manage their feelings. Child care programs should have a discipline policy that aims to create a safe, effective learning environment for all children. It is not appropriate to exclude or remove a child from their classroom or program as a disciplinary action. A DAP classroom and program will offer children solutions to the problems that are causing their challenging behaviors.



LOOKING FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE?

Search the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network or the Nebraska Resource and Referral System website for licensed child care and Step Up to Quality providers in your area.



nechildcarereferral.org



nrrs.ne.gov

Finding Child Care in Nebraska

Finding child care in Nebraska may seem like an overwhelming task, but with a little searching, you will be able to choose the right care for your child. Use the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network's website to identify **licensed child care providers** in your community. This resource allows you to search for both family child care and center-based care for children 6 weeks through age 12.

Child Care Choices

The following describes licensed child care providers in the State of Nebraska.

Family Child Care Home I: A child care program in the licensee's residence which is licensed to serve at least four but not more than eight children, except that a licensee may be approved to serve up to two additional school-age children during non-school hours if not more than two of the other children in care are under 18 months of age.

Family Child Care Home II: A child care program in the licensee's residence or another location which is licensed to serve at least four but not more than 12 children.

Child Care Center: A child care program licensed to provide child care for 13 or more children. A center may be located in the licensee's residence or another location.

School-Age Only: School-Age Only Child Care Centers are licensed to provide care for 13 or more children who attend kindergarten or above. A school-age center may be located in the licensee's residence or another location.

Preschool: A partial-day early child care program of primarily education services to any number of children age three or older, and where children do

not nap and are not served a meal. A preschool may be located in the licensee's residence or another location.

Other: You may choose an alternative form of child care (e.g., nanny, relative). Some non-licensed programs, such as those enrolled in Child Care Subsidy, are regulated by DHHS and subject to state and federal requirements. Nebraska Extension recommends, at a minimum:

- Ask your provider to take the "Safe With You" training.
- Ask your provider if they have a criminal history fingerprint background check on anyone age 18 or older who is in contact with your child.
- Obtain three references you have permission to contact.



CHILD CARE LICENSING

For information on Child Care Licensing in Nebraska, call **1-800-600-1289** or visit:



go.unl.edu/dhhs-ne-gov-licensure

CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

age-specific information

How to Use This Guide

The Child Care Essentials guide is divided into sections by age, with information to help you choose the right care for your child. In each section, you will find a checklist of questions to ask and consider, along with additional resources.

Visit each section of the guide to learn how the following areas relate to quality child care:

- Relationships
- Health + Safety
- Curriculum + Approaches to Learning
- Learning Environment
- Policies + Administration

6 WEEKS – 18 MONTHS



18 MONTHS – 3 YEARS



4 - 5 YEARS



6 - 12 YEARS



CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

6 weeks- 18 months

When choosing a quality child care setting for your baby, there should be opportunities for:

- Feeling respected in an environment that promotes equality, values diversity and is inclusive of the child's voice and choice.
- Recognizing families as valued partners and experts of their children.
- Continuous two-way communication between the family and caregiver.
- Supporting children as they learn about themselves and others through play.
- Positive social interactions among all children and caregivers.
- Fostering and supporting children's confidence.





Relationships

A nurturing, loving and responsive caregiver is key for supporting the healthy growth and development of your baby. Routine events, such as naptime, feeding and playtime, make up the bulk of your baby's day. A quality caregiver recognizes and appreciates these special daily routines as opportunities for learning and development. Whenever possible, caregivers should remain close to the babies in their care, such as spending time on the floor while they play. Babies under 6 months of age should be held when they are bottle fed.



Health + Safety

Your baby's caregiver should be trained in CPR and first aid. The classroom should be sanitary and safe. Caregivers should be aware of and practice a variety of emergency preparedness drills to be ready for all possible scenarios.



Curriculum + Approaches to Learning

The caregiver should work to meet the needs of your baby as an individual. Each baby should follow their own daily schedule and routine according to child and family preferences.



Words highlighted in **orange** are defined in the glossary on page 29.



Learning Environment

Babies spend a great deal of time in their early care setting, but should also go outside for brief periods twice a day to enjoy fresh air on the playground or go for a stroller walk. Quality caregivers practice "serve and return," which includes imitating baby sounds in a back-and-forth conversation. Caregivers who respond quickly to your baby, both in times of need (e.g., hungry, diaper change) and in times of play, are supporting a responsive learning environment. Quality infant teachers set up an environment where babies can explore the space safely and help them move to new activities throughout the day.

Caregivers should be trained in the **early learning guidelines (ELGs)**, part of Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards. This resource provides information to support young children's learning and development.

Screen time

The recommendation is not to use screens, such as televisions, cellphones or tablets, for children under age 2. Physical activity, play and care routines should be prioritized for babies and toddlers.



Policies + Administration

Get a copy of the child care program's policy handbook and review it before enrolling your baby so you are aware of the program's guidelines and procedures. Infants should not be disciplined. Be sure to ask the director about their **discipline** policy for not only babies, but children of all ages.



6 weeks-18 months

QUALITY CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist of questions to consider asking your child care provider about your baby's care.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Children

- Why are you an infant teacher? What do you like most about working with babies?
- How do you staff the infant classroom/program? Do babies have the same person caring for them most of the time?
- Do caregivers spend time singing, reading and talking with the babies?
- How do you make accommodations for babies with **special needs** or conditions?
- Do you call the children by name?

Partnering with Families

- How will you inform me about my baby's day?
- How does this program respect the language, culture and values of families?
- How do you help families adjust to child care?
- What are the different ways we can communicate with each other about my baby's day?



HEALTH + SAFETY

- Does your program have a secure entrance?
- Do you have a space for mothers to breastfeed or express breastmilk?
- If I provide breastmilk or my own formula, do you have a safe refrigerator or freezer to store it?
- What happens if my child does not drink all of the provided breastmilk?
- How do you handle the transition from bottles to solid foods?
- How many babies do you care for at one time?
- Do you serve meals and snacks? Are they prepared on-site or are they catered in?
- Are the caregivers trained in CPR and first aid, and are emergency numbers posted?
- What are your immunization requirements?
- How is your program kept clean (e.g., carpets, dishes, toys) and safe, indoors and outdoors?
- Do you accommodate for special situations, such as using cloth diapers or a sound machine for napping?

Notes: _____



CURRICULUM + APPROACHES TO LEARNING

- What are some of the activities babies participate in?
- Do you use a **curriculum**? If yes, what is it and why did you choose it?
- Do you use an **assessment** tool to plan for my baby's learning and development?
- If you use a curriculum and/or assessment, how are staff trained and supported to use them?
- How do you adapt activities to meet the needs of each baby?
- What do you notice babies enjoy about the activities offered during the day?
- What training do staff members have in infant development?



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Self-reflective:** Is the infant play space welcoming and safe?
- How much time do the babies spend outside?
- What is your weather policy? Do you have a separate outdoor space for babies?
- How often do babies go outside?
- Do you have an area for indoor **gross motor play** (other than the classroom space) when babies cannot go outside?
- How do you determine the activities you provide for babies from day-to-day?
- Does my baby need any extra clothes for outdoor play?
- Will my baby have a space to store items from home, such as a pacifier or extra clothing?
- Are therapeutic and/or support services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy, welcomed and provided on-site?



POLICIES + ADMINISTRATION

- Am I welcome to drop in at any time?
- Do you have a family handbook?
- Do you have a parent/family involvement group?
- How can I express concerns regarding my baby's care?
- What is the program's sickness and health policy?
- Does your program have specific policies that support **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging**?
- What is the severe weather policy?
- Do you have an emergency preparedness plan?
- What happens if I am late to pick up my baby?
- What is your caregiver or staff turnover rate?
- Is there always a director on-site? If not, what is the plan?
- What are your social media and photography policies?

Notes: _____

CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

18 months– 3 years

When choosing a quality child care setting for your toddler, there should be opportunities for:

- Feeling respected in an environment that promotes equality, values diversity and is inclusive of the child's voice and choice.
- Recognizing families as valued partners and experts of their children.
- Continuous two-way communication between the family and caregiver.
- Supporting children as they learn about themselves and others through play.
- Positive social interactions among all children and caregivers.
- Loosely structured activities that are interesting and fun.
- Fostering and supporting children's confidence.





Relationships

Toddlers thrive in nurturing and caring environments. Your child will be successful in a program where positive praise and encouragement are offered throughout the day. A quality toddler caregiver will respond to your child's communication attempts and frequently use language to describe emotions and the environment. Toddler caregivers will value and engage in daily communication with your family about caregiving practices at home and they will enjoy sharing about your child's activities and experiences while at the child care program.



Health + Safety

Quality toddler caregivers should be trained in CPR and first aid. Toddler caregivers should be aware of and practice a variety of emergency preparedness drills to be ready for all possible scenarios.



Curriculum + Approaches to Learning

A quality caregiver will be flexible and responsive to the individual interests and needs of your toddler throughout the day. Toddler classrooms should follow a consistent routine. Caregivers should use a visual daily schedule that includes pictures to help your child begin to understand what will happen next. Toddler caregivers should be willing to adapt children's schedules and be flexible to meet their individual needs.



Words highlighted in **orange** are defined in the glossary on page 29.



Learning Environment

The physical environment should be set up to allow toddlers to easily access learning materials. Toys and other items should be well organized and labeled with pictures and words so your toddler can choose what interests them. Look for cozy spaces and child-sized furniture. Quality spaces for toddlers have multiples of the same toys and materials to support this age group. Outdoor spaces should be used daily for at least 30 minutes for a half-day program and 60 minutes for a full-day program. It is important to have a variety of activities available outside so toddlers can choose how they want to play. Look for a variety of play areas and materials, such as sandboxes, climbing structures and musical instruments. Additional materials that may be seen outside include balls, push toys, portable tunnels, sticks, shovels, pails and more.

Caregivers should be trained in the **early learning guidelines (ELGs)**, part of Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards. This resource provides information to support young children's learning and development.

Screen time

The recommendation is not to use screens, such as televisions, cellphones or tablets, for children under age 2. Physical activity, play and care routines should be prioritized. Children ages 2-3 years should have only one hour of exposure to screens and digital media each day. The screen should be viewed with a caregiver, contain quality content and reflect what the child is interested in and learning about.



Policies + Administration

Ask for the child care program's policy handbook and review it before enrolling your toddler so you are aware of the program's guidelines and procedures. Each program should have a written **discipline** policy that includes positive methods of age-appropriate guidance for the children enrolled.



18 months–3 years

QUALITY CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist of questions to consider asking your child care provider about your toddler's care.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Children

- What do you like most about working with toddlers?
- How do you make accommodations for toddlers with **special needs** or conditions?
- Do you read, sing and play with the toddlers?
- How do you staff the classroom/program? Do you provide for **continuity of care**?
- Self-reflective:** Do caregivers answer toddlers' questions patiently? Do they ask the toddlers questions? Do caregivers call the toddlers by name?

Partnering with Families

- How will you inform me about my toddler's day?
- How do you help families adjust to the program?
- What are the different ways we can communicate with each other about my child's day?
- How does this program respect the language, culture and values of families?



HEALTH + SAFETY

- Are meals and snacks served in the program? Are they prepared on-site or catered in? How do you accommodate for dietary needs and requests?
- Are the caregivers trained in CPR and first aid, and are emergency numbers posted?

- What are your immunization requirements?
- How often do you require a health report from our doctor if our child is ill?
- How is your program kept clean (e.g., carpets, dishes, toys) and safe, indoors and outdoors?

Notes: _____



CURRICULUM + APPROACHES TO LEARNING

- What does a typical day look like for toddlers attending your program and how do you plan for their individual needs?
- What are some of the activities toddlers participate in?
- Do you use a **curriculum**? If so, what is it and why did your program choose it?
- Do you use an **assessment** tool to plan for my toddler's learning and development?
- What do you notice toddlers enjoy about the activities offered during the day?
- How does this program support my child's language and culture?
- Tell me about your daily schedule for toddlers. Is it posted so children can learn what comes next?
- Are the caregivers in the toddler room trained in child development?
- When a toddler exhibits challenging behavior, how do you proceed?



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- How much time do toddlers spend outside?
- What is your policy on weather and outside play?
- What do you notice are the children's favorite things to do outside?
- Do you have an area for indoor play when toddlers cannot go outside?
- How do you determine what materials you provide for toddlers?
- Does my toddler need any extra clothes for outdoor play?
- Will my toddler have personal space to store items from home, such as a coat or extra clothing?
- How do you adapt learning activities to meet the needs of each toddler?
- Are therapeutic and/or support services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy, welcomed and provided on-site?
- Self-reflective:** Is the toddler space engaging with soft lighting, low tables and chairs, and areas to engage in many different activities?



POLICIES + ADMINISTRATION

- Am I welcome to drop in at any time?
- Do you have a family handbook I may review?
- Do you have a family/parent involvement group? How do you engage family members?
- How can I express concerns regarding my toddler's care or education?
- What is the program's sickness and health policy?
- What is the severe weather policy? Do you practice safety drills with the children?
- Do you have an emergency preparedness plan?
- What happens if I am late to pick up my toddler?
- Do you have a policy for when my child is ready to potty train?
- Is there always a director on-site? If not, what is the plan?
- What is your caregiver or staff turnover rate?
- Does your program have specific policies that support **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging**?
- What are your social media and photography policies?
- Do you have a **discipline** policy? Do you suspend or expel children for behavior?

Notes: _____

CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

4-5 years

When choosing a quality child care setting for your preschool-age child, there should be opportunities for:

- Feeling respected in an environment that promotes equality, values diversity and is inclusive of the child's voice and choice.
- Recognizing families as valued partners and experts of their children.
- Continuous two-way communication between the family and caregiver.
- Supporting children as they learn about themselves and others through play.
- Positive social interactions among all children and caregivers.
- Loosely structured activities that are interesting and fun.
- Fostering and supporting children's confidence.



Relationships

Nurturing, caring teaching is just as crucial for preschoolers as it is for babies and toddlers. Teachers should acknowledge children's efforts and provide specific praise and encouragement. There should be many examples of positive interactions among children, and between children and their teachers. Responsive caregivers will always use positive language and respond to children's communication attempts. Teachers will be in close proximity to children, such as kneeling down to talk to them, sitting with them during meals and snacks, and sitting on the floor playing with them during times of free play.



Attentive teachers will develop daily rituals during drop-off and/or pick-up time where they connect with the child's family. They will frequently ask about children's lives outside of the child care program, staying up to date on children's activities and experiences. Quality child care programs will also make sure communication with families is in their home language.

Health + Safety

Programs that provide meals and snacks will have a printed menu that follows USDA guidelines posted where families can see it. Food is prepared and stored safely, and programs will use family-style dining practices when it is safe to do so. Children are encouraged to do the majority of their caregiving tasks (e.g., toileting, hand washing, dressing, tooth brushing) independently, but caregivers will help as needed.

Safety and Security

Quality preschool caregivers should be trained in CPR and first aid. Caregivers should be aware of and practice a variety of emergency preparedness drills to be ready for all possible scenarios.

Curriculum + Approaches to Learning

Quality caregivers will be flexible and responsive to the individual interests and needs of your preschooler throughout the day. Classrooms should follow a consistent routine, but allow for flexibility. There should be a combination of children's free-choice activities, along with some teacher-directed activities. Your preschooler should be actively engaged in activities and conversations with peers and teachers throughout the day.

Kindergarten Readiness

Many parents are concerned about what their child's preschool program is doing to prepare them for kindergarten. Before children enter formal school, it is important to nurture their natural love of and interest in learning. Caregivers should support preschoolers' efforts to get along with their peers, share and cooperate, and help them learn to follow simple directions and daily routines.

Learning Environment

The physical environment should be set up to allow your preschooler to navigate the space and access materials independently, with child-sized furniture and open shelves. A wide variety of toys and other learning materials should be available and well organized. The space should allow children to be in a large group, small group or to do an activity alone, and include at least one "cozy corner" children can use to relax. Outdoor spaces should be used daily for at least 45 minutes for a half-day program and 90 minutes for a full-day program. It is important to make a variety of activities available outside so children can choose how they want to play. Look for a variety of play areas, such as sandboxes, climbing structures and musical instruments. Additional materials that may be seen outside include balls, bikes, portable tunnels, sticks, shovels, pails and more.

Caregivers should be trained in the **early learning guidelines (ELGs)**, part of Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards. This resource provides information to support young children's learning and development.

Policies + Administration

Ask for the child care program's policy handbook and review it before enrolling your child so you are aware of the program's guidelines and procedures. Each program should have a written **discipline** policy that includes positive methods of age-appropriate guidance for the children enrolled.



Words highlighted in **orange** are defined in the glossary on page 29.



4-5 years

QUALITY CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist of questions to consider asking your child care provider about your preschooler's care.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Children

- What do you like most about working with children in this age group?
- Will my child have a consistent caregiver?
- How do you make accommodations for preschoolers with **special needs** or conditions?
- Do you call the children by name?

Partnering with Families

- How will you help me with my child's initial adjustment to your child care?
- Am I welcome to drop into the program at any time?
- How will we work together to help my child transition to kindergarten?
- How will teachers keep our family regularly informed about our child's activities?
- How does this program respect the language, culture and values of families?



HEALTH + SAFETY

- What meals and snacks are served and are they prepared on-site or catered in?
- Do the adults sit with children during mealtime?
- Are the caregivers trained in CPR and first aid, and are emergency numbers posted?
- What are your immunization requirements?
- How often do you require a health report from our doctor if my child is ill?
- How is your program kept clean (e.g., carpets, dishes, toys) and safe, indoors and outdoors?

Notes: _____



CURRICULUM + APPROACHES TO LEARNING

- How does this program support my child's language and culture?
- What is your daily routine and how do you plan for individual children's needs?
- Do you use a **curriculum**? If so, what is it and why did your program choose it?
- How does your curriculum align with early learning guidelines or standards?
- How do you train and support your staff with this curriculum?
- Do you use an **assessment** tool to plan for my child's learning and development?
- What do you notice the children enjoy about the activities offered during the day?



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- How much time do children spend outside?
- What is your policy on weather and outside play?
- What do you notice is the children's favorite thing to do outside?
- Do you have an area for indoor play when children can't go outside?
- How many children can be in this space at one time?
- How do you determine what materials you provide for children?
- Does my child need any extra clothes for outdoor play?
- Will my child have a space to store items from home, such as a book bag, coat or extra clothing?
- Are therapeutic and/or support services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy, welcomed and provided on-site?



POLICIES + ADMINISTRATION

- How can parents be involved in program events?
- How can I express concerns regarding my child's care or education?
- What is the program's sickness and health policy?
- What is the severe weather policy?
- Do you have an emergency preparedness plan?
- What happens if I am late to pick up my child?
- What is your caregiver or staff turnover rate?
- Is there always an administrator or designated lead on-site? If not, what is the plan?
- Do you have a **discipline** policy?
- Do you suspend or expel children for behavior?
- Does your program have specific policies that support **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging**?
- What are your social media and photography policies?
- May I have a copy of the family handbook to look at before I enroll my child?

Notes: _____

CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

6-12 years

Choosing child care for school-age children is a necessity for many families. A quality child care setting can help children learn and develop — and have fun, too. School-age child care is typically for children in kindergarten through age 12, and may be provided before or after school, and/or during school breaks. Places that offer this type of care for older children include elementary schools, family child care homes and community organizations, such as the YMCA.

When choosing a quality child care setting for your school-age child, there should be opportunities for:

- Feeling respected in an environment that promotes equality, values diversity and is inclusive of the child's voice and choice.
- Engaging with peers.
- Recognizing the importance of play.
- Child-driven free time.
- Loosely structured activities that are interesting and fun.
- Enhancing and supporting children's creativity.
- Practicing leadership and social skills.
- Fostering and supporting confidence to do well academically.





Relationships

Quality child care settings will intentionally show children they are welcome, valued and safe. School-age children will grow and develop in child care settings where they have positive, responsive and caring adults who support their strengths and abilities. Staff will allow children to share their ideas rather than always tell them what to do. Staff will communicate in respectful and appropriate ways, and let the children know they enjoy being with them. Communication with parents/families should be two-way, regular and meaningful. A quality program will also have staff who support children in resolving any conflicts by using problem-solving strategies and include them in decision-making.



Health + Safety

All staff should be trained in CPR and first aid. Staff should be aware of and practice a variety of emergency preparedness drills to be ready for all scenarios. First-aid kits should be available and easily accessible by an adult. Children should have the time and space to enjoy a well-balanced and nutritious meal/snack. Water should always be available. The children's individual needs — religious, cultural and dietary — should be explicitly considered.



Approaches to Learning

A quality child care setting will provide both structured and unstructured activities. Staff should be flexible and responsive to the individual interests and needs of the children. Children should be given a diverse set of activities to learn and grow, and they should be consulted about their own preferences and interests. Staff should support and adopt an **anti-bias approach** that acknowledges the diversity of children, their parents, guardians and families. Children should have a voice and a choice in their learning, and be respected when they express their opinions in appropriate ways.



Words highlighted in **orange** are defined in the glossary on page 29.



Learning Environment

Children feel safe when they know the plan for the day. Ask if there is a schedule for the week and look for activities that offer time for quiet play and learning, time for individual and group learning, time to be outside and snack/mealtimes. Staff should have training and skills to carry out their roles and responsibilities. The environment should be safe, clean and flexible to the needs of the children. Both the indoor and outdoor environments will encourage children to explore on their own and safely participate in group activities. It is important for children to have many opportunities to be physically active.



Policies + Administration

Ask for the child care setting's family handbook and review it before enrolling your child so you are aware of the program's guidelines and procedures. Ask if the child care is licensed. If it is not licensed, find out why. It can also be helpful to see past **inspection reports**. Ask whom the child can voice concerns to and the best way to do so. Children will feel safe when they know information. The program should have a comprehensive policy that supports **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB)** to ensure all participating children are supported. A quality child care setting will also have a clear anti-bullying policy. There should also be policies in place for using technology and cellphones. Children and staff should be able to access the internet safely.

Homework Support

If homework support is provided, find out details so your child can plan ahead. Ask for information on:

- When homework time is available.
- How children are supported and supervised while doing homework.
- Where children can complete homework, preferably in a calm and quiet space.
- What other activities (e.g., eating, relaxing, physical activity) are balanced with doing homework.



6-12 years

QUALITY CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

Below is a checklist of questions to consider asking your child care provider about your school-age child's care.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with Children

- What do you like most about working with children in this age group?
- Will my child have consistent staff caring for them?
- How will you inform me about my child's daily activities?
- How will you comfort my child when needed?
- How do you make accommodations for children with **special needs** or conditions?
- How do you help children engage in positive peer interactions?
- Do staff have training and experience working with school-age children?
- Self-reflective:** Do staff look at the children and speak with them?

- Self-reflective:** Do staff answer children's questions patiently? Do they ask children engaging questions? Do staff seem interested in what the children are doing?

Partnering with Families

- Are families/parents able to visit?
- Are there regular opportunities for you to tell me about my child's activities, share observations and discuss my child's strengths?
- How will information be shared (e.g., email, text, app) with me? Are there opportunities for two-way communication? How is the information kept secure?
- How does this program respect the language, culture and values of families?



HEALTH + SAFETY

- What meals and snacks are served and are they prepared on-site or catered in? Does the program follow nutritional guidelines and best practices? Do you accommodate for special diets?
- How is hand-washing part of the daily routine (e.g., after using the bathroom, before and after eating)?
- Are the caregivers trained in CPR and first aid? Does the program have first-aid kits?
- Are emergency numbers posted?
- What are the immunization requirements? Do you require a note from our doctor if my child is sick?
- How is your program kept clean (e.g., carpets, dishes, toys) and safe, indoors and outdoors?
- Have all staff completed comprehensive background checks?
- Are children always supervised, both indoors and outdoors?
- Are children ever left alone with one staff member?
- How are staff trained to report child abuse and neglect?
- How are medications kept out of children's reach?
- How does the program practice emergency drills for disasters or in the case of an active shooter?

Notes: _____



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

- What does a typical morning/afternoon look like for children attending your program and how do you plan for their individual needs? During school breaks, what does a typical day look like?
- What are some of the activities children participate in?
- How are children involved in planning activities, and establishing rules and routines?
- What do you notice the children enjoy about the activities your program offers/facilitates?
- How does this program support my child's language and culture?
- When relevant, how is play time and homework time supported and balanced?
- How do staff foster children's positive attitudes and confidence when completing homework?
- What training do staff members have in child development? How do staff accommodate the different learning needs of the children?
- When a child exhibits disruptive or challenging behavior, how do staff proceed?
- How are children's leadership skills supported?



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Are there opportunities for outdoor activities? How do staff assist with activities when children are outside?
- If equipment is available, such as bikes, swings and playground structures, how are different aged children accommodated?
- When the weather does not allow for outside play, how does your program support **gross motor play** (e.g., play in a gym)?
- What is your policy on weather and outside play?
- How do you adapt learning activities to meet the needs of each child?
- Is there a calm, quiet space for children to do homework?
- How are structured activities balanced with unstructured activities?
- How are children's cultural backgrounds represented (e.g., activities, resources, food, music, books, pictures)?



POLICIES + ADMINISTRATION

- What are the check-in and check-out policies and procedures?
- How can parents be involved in program events?
- How can I express concerns regarding my child's learning and engagement in activities?
- Do you have an emergency preparedness plan?
- What happens if I am late to pick up my child?
- Is there always an administrator on site, or a designated lead? If not, what is the plan?
- What is your caregiver/staff turnover rate?
- If going to a pool is an activity, what is the **adult-to-child ratio**?
- Are personal electronics, such as cellphones and gaming equipment allowed?
- Does the program have a state child care license? If not, is the program regulated by the Department of Education?
- Is the program accredited by the Council of Accreditation (COA)?
- What are the transportation policies? If transportation is provided, are the drivers insured and licensed? How are appropriate car safety seat recommendations followed?
- Is there a field trip schedule? What is your chaperone policy and adult-to-child ratios on field trips?
- What is the program's policy on sickness and health?
- What are the anti-bullying policies and procedures?
- Does your program have specific policies that support **diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging**?
- What are your social media and photography policies?

Notes: _____



CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE resources

Child Care Licensure + Reporting Violations

In Nebraska, anyone who provides child care to four or more children from different families must be licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Children's Services Licensing. A **licensed child care program** must ensure compliance with regulations and statutes required by the Child Care Licensing Act.

If at any time you are concerned about the care your child is receiving, you are encouraged to reach out to Children's Services Licensing to share your complaint.

If you submit a complaint:

- Have the name, address and phone number of the child care program ready.
- Be prepared to share your contact information. This will be kept confidential.
- Share a brief statement of your concerns. Ask yourself where, when and who was involved in what happened.



SUBMIT A COMPLAINT

Contact Children's Services Licensing

 1-800-600-1289

 dhhs.childcarelicensing@nebraska.gov



go.unl.edu/dhhs-ne-gov-complaint



Child Care Subsidy Program

The cost of child care is an important factor to consider. ChildCare Aware states that the average annual cost of child care for an infant in 2020 was \$11,960 for a child care center and \$10,660 for a family child care home.⁷ In Nebraska, the majority of families cover 100% of their child care costs, but there are programs available that provide financial assistance for qualifying families.

\$22k average annual cost of child care for 2 children

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) may be able to help families with the cost of child care through its **Child Care Subsidy Program**.⁸ Parents and caregivers with children age 12 and younger may apply for benefits. To receive assistance, parents and caregivers must be doing one or more of the following:

- Working at a place of employment.
- Participating in the Employment First program as part of the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program.
- Attending school or trainings.
- Going to medical or therapy visits for self or child.
- Receiving illness or injury care (must be confirmed by a doctor).

Disciplinary Reports

The Division of Public Health publishes a monthly report of all negative and disciplinary actions against child care providers. When a program is listed on this report, it means an allegation has been investigated and sufficient evidence was found to determine a violation occurred.

Subscribe to this report using your email:



go.unl.edu/disciplinary-reports

Quality Matters

Finally, please keep in mind a child care license is not a guarantee of quality child care. For more information on program quality, please visit Nebraska's Step Up to Quality website:



stepuptoquality.ne.gov



ACCESSNebraska

Contact ACCESSNebraska to learn more about the Child Care Subsidy Program, apply for assistance and search for an approved child care provider:

Toll free number: 1-800-383-4278

Lincoln: 402-323-3900

Omaha: 402-595-1258

TDD: 402-471-7256



accessnebraska.ne.gov



Additional Family Support Services

These additional resources may be helpful to support your family's needs:

Nebraska Early Development Network

The Nebraska Early Development Network provides early intervention services for families with children birth to age 3 with developmental delays and/or health care needs and connects families to appropriate services.



edn.ne.gov/cms

Healthy Families America®

Healthy Families America (HFA) is one of the leading family support and evidence-based home visiting programs in the United States. HFA promotes child well-being and prevents the abuse and neglect of children through family-focused and empathic support provided in the home. Visit the website to find HFA sites in Nebraska.



healthyfamiliesamerica.org

Learning Begins at Birth

The Learning Begins at Birth Parent Guide is a resource to help Nebraska families as they guide their children's development. It includes information on child development, child care, children's learning, children's health, services available to children and parents, and other relevant information.



learningbeginsatbirth.org

Glossary of Terms

Adult-to-child ratio: This number refers to the number of adults teaching and/or caring for children in a child care group. Typically, small ratios are preferred.

Infants (6 weeks to 18 mos.)	1:4
Toddlers (18 mos. to age 3)	1:6
Preschool (age 3)	1:10
Preschool (ages 4-5)	1:12
School age (kindergarten +)	1:15

Anti-bias approach (Anti-bias education⁹): This approach is designed to increase understanding of individual differences and challenge biases that may exist, such as stereotypes and discrimination based on race, ability, socioeconomic status and/or other characteristics.

Early childhood educators acknowledge, reject and challenge human rights issues and support anti-racism to ensure that children are supported.

Early Childhood Assessment: A tool used to gather and provide educators, parents and families with critical information about a child's development, growth and learning environment.

The assessment can be useful in guiding the child's learning experiences for child care.

Child Care Subsidy Program: State-administered funds to help families with the cost of child care. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services may be able to provide financial assistance to eligible families through its Child Care Subsidy Program.

Continuity of care: This concerns the quality of care over time. Specifically, children who remain with the same adult(s) over a long period of time in a quality setting experience continuity of care.

Curriculum: This is the knowledge and skills that children are expected to learn through set goals and intentional activities, opportunities and experiences.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): Research-based guidelines for early childhood caregivers to optimize young children's learning and development.

Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB): For full definitions of each term, visit:



go.unl.edu/developingchild

Discipline: Procedures and practices to promote adherence to certain rules and behaviors. Consequences are often included if procedures and policies are not followed correctly.

Early childhood education (ECE): The period of learning for children from birth to age 8.

Early learning guidelines (ELGs): A framework used to help early childhood educators set up their environments and plan experiences for young children that will best support learning and development.

For more information, visit:



go.unl.edu/elg

Gross motor play: Play that involves using large muscles for movement and position (e.g., spinning, jumping, climbing, running).

Inspection reports: These contain any health and safety violations child care providers have in their program. Levels of quality may also be indicated in the reports.

Kindergarten readiness: Emotional and behavioral regulation, social skills and skills to verbally express themselves.

Licensed child care program/provider: Child care programs and providers who receive a license by a state agency to operate safe and healthy child care. Licensed programs are required to follow licensing rules and regulations based on the state in which the program resides to keep their license current.

Parents: In this guide, parents are primary caregivers for children, and also refer to legal guardians.

Quality (or high-quality): Many child care programs are evaluated based on quality, or degree of excellence. Quality programs may foster positive relationships, maintain appropriate health and safety standards, use stimulating curriculum and encourage engaging learning environments.

For more information on quality early childhood services, visit:



NEarlychildhoodplan.org

Special needs: A child who receives intervention services for a developmental delay or other health care need.

Organizations + Programs

ACCESSNebraska is an online platform to be used to apply for Nebraska Medicaid and other Economic Assistance programs. [accessnebraska.ne.gov](https://www.accessnebraska.ne.gov)

Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) provides cash assistance to families with low income attaining independence with children. dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/TANF.aspx

Caring for Our Children is a set of national standards that represent quality health and safety policies and practices in early care and education settings. nrckids.org/CFOC

Council on Accreditation (COA) is an international accrediting body related specifically to the demonstration of rigorous business practices. [coanet.org](https://www.coanet.org)

Nebraska Early Development Network (EDN) provides early intervention services for families with children birth to age 3 with developmental delays and/or health care needs and connects families to appropriate services. edn.ne.gov/cms

Employment First is a state program that allows parents who receive assistance to pursue education training and employment preparation to help families achieve self-sufficiency. dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Employment-Support.aspx

Nebraska Child Care Referral Network supports families to easily search and locate licensed child care providers in communities across the state. nechildcarereferral.org

Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Child Care Subsidy Program provides resources to income eligible parents to enable them to work or pursue education and training to better support their families, while at the same time promoting the learning and development of their children. The Subsidy program also supports the training and regulation of license exempt and relative care providers not subject to state licensure through Children's Services Licensing. dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Child-Care-Parents.aspx

Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Children's Licensing Services supports the training and regulation of child care services to licensed businesses providing the care, education and supervision of children age 12 or younger. dhhs.ne.gov/licensure/Pages/Child-Care-Licensing.aspx

Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is the designated state agency to operate Nebraska's system of early childhood, primary, secondary and postsecondary education; direct services to clients; and internal support. [education.ne.gov](https://www.education.ne.gov)

Learn about your local Educational Service Unit (ESU): go.unl.edu/esu-map

Safe With You is a complete training that reviews the topics of child abuse and neglect, sudden infant death syndrome and shaken baby syndrome. This training meets the requirements of the Nebraska State Legislature statute 43-2606 which is required of all child care providers to complete. [education.ne.gov/oec/child-abuse-prevention-training](https://www.education.ne.gov/oec/child-abuse-prevention-training)

Step Up to Quality is a statewide program focused on helping child care providers continuously improve the quality of their care. stepuptoquality.ne.gov



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3. Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>
4. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Table B23008. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases.2017.html>
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7. ChildCare Aware of America. *2020 State Fact Sheet: Nebraska*. <https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/ccdc/state/ne/>
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9. Iruka, Iheoma U., Curenton, Stephanie M., Durden, Tonia R., & Escayg, Kerry-Ann. 2020. *Don't Look Away: Embracing ANTI-BIAS Classrooms*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House, Inc.

Other sources used to develop this guide:

California Child Care Health Program, Quality Inclusive Child Care Checklist
cchp.ucsf.edu/content/quality-inclusive-child-care-checklist

Nebraska Child Find
childfind.nebraska.gov

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations
challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu

Nebraska Child Care Resource and Referral
education.ne.gov/oec/office-of-early-childhood-staff

Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood
education.ne.gov/oec

Nebraska Extension Early Childhood Interest Group
child.unl.edu



child.unl.edu