

UCSF Family Services

Choosing Child Care

Tips for Evaluating Out-of-Home-Care

(licensed centers and licensed family child care homes)



Choosing child care can be a challenging process, especially for first-time parents. This primer outlines the basics of evaluating licensed care, with extra attention to family child care homes. Please contact UCSF Family Services' Child Care Referral Service (tiny.ucsf.edu/ReferralService) for additional assistance. Visit tiny.ucsf.edu/FamilyServices to learn about Family Services' many other resources.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Define and prioritize your child care needs, such as location, schedule and languages.
- Visit more than one facility so you can learn about the range of available care options.
- Visit promising candidates more than once. Observe how the facility functions during different times of the day.
- Make certain you fully understand the facility's policies and procedures BEFORE enrolling your child. Are the policies in writing?
- Knowing what a child care provider can actually offer is crucial, but also make sure the provider understands your expectations.
- If possible, speak with the parents/guardians of enrolled children.
- Advice from others may be extremely helpful, but do not base your decision solely on someone else's recommendation. Another person's definition of quality care may differ from yours.
- Keep in mind that child care referral services provide information, NOT recommendations. Families are fully responsible for evaluating program quality.
- Contact Community Care Licensing's Centralized Complaint & Information Bureau (CCIB) to verify licenses and check for complaints against the child care facilities you are considering:
1-844-LET-US-NO (1-844-538-8766)
Some facility details are available at tinyurl.com/CCLSearch.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy about a particular facility despite positive feedback from others, explore additional options.

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LICENSED CARE

The following are some points to consider when evaluating licensed child care programs (centers and family child care homes).

Program Details

1. How long has the facility been licensed?
2. What is the license capacity?
3. What age range does the program serve?
4. What are the hours of operation?
5. Does the facility offer only full-time enrollment or are part-time options available?
6. What is the adult/child ratio?
7. What is the daily routine?
8. Are meals and/or snacks provided and, if so, do they involve an additional fee?
9. What activities are offered?
(Are they age appropriate? Culturally appropriate?)

Staff and Children

1. Ask about the staff's qualifications.
2. What is the staff turnover rate?
3. How does the facility help new children adjust?
Is the approach appropriate for your child?
4. How does the facility's child care philosophy translate into staff practices? Is the philosophy compatible with your values?
5. What is the staff's approach to discipline?
6. Based on your observations and, if applicable, feedback from others ...
 - a. Do the staff enjoy and value their work?
 - b. Does the facility value/appreciate its staff?

- c. Does the program make families feel welcome?
- d. Does the program respect the language and culture of each child?
- e. Do the children receive adequate attention and guidance?
- f. Are the children generally happy and alert?

Policies

1. What is the payment policy? Are there fees for late payment and late pick-up?
2. Does the program charge the regular tuition for the child's absences and the facility's holidays/closure days?
3. How much notice do families receive for policy changes and rate increases?
4. How much notice is required for termination of care?
5. How many days each year is the facility closed?
6. Is there a written health & safety policy?
7. What are the facility's procedures for safely handling and preparing food/milk/formula, especially items families bring from home?
8. Is the written disaster/emergency plan clear and current?
9. Are there established procedures for parents and staff to address concerns and give/receive feedback?
10. California law gives parents/guardians the right to make unannounced visits, during regular business hours, to the facility in which their child is receiving care. What is the facility's overall attitude toward this regulation?

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Physical Environment

Yes No

Yes No

1. Adults have a clear view of all areas used by the children.	☐	☐		
2. Adequate...				
a. light	☐	☐		
b. heat	☐	☐		
c. ventilation	☐	☐		
3. Safety Features				
a. functioning smoke detector	☐	☐		
b. functioning carbon monoxide detector	☐	☐		
c. fully charged fire extinguisher	☐	☐		
d. well stocked first aid kit	☐	☐		
e. covers on electrical outlets	☐	☐		
f. electrical cords secured	☐	☐		
g. guards/screens on windows	☐	☐		
h. cords for curtains/blinds secured	☐	☐		
i. medicines, cleaning products, tools locked away	☐	☐		
j. gates for stairs and other non child-proof areas	☐	☐		
k. earthquake precautions taken (ex. top heavy furniture secured to wall.)	☐	☐		
4. Toys, Books & Other Materials for Children				
a. age appropriate	☐	☐		
b. well-maintained	☐	☐		
c. comply with current safety regulations	☐	☐		
d. adequate supply	☐	☐		
e. good variety	☐	☐		
5. On-site Outdoor Play Area (if available – not required)				
a. fenced in/enclosed	☐	☐		
b. impact absorbent play surface	☐	☐		
c. play structures well-maintained (ex. slides, swings firmly anchored to ground.)	☐	☐		
d. no harmful objects (rusty nails, broken glass, etc.)	☐	☐		
e. bodies of water (ex. pools, ponds) – securely fenced in or covered	☐	☐		



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LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

Licensed family child care homes (FCCHs) are facilities located in the provider's (licensee's) home rather than in a commercial building, as is often the case with licensed centers. FCCHs have the option of caring for children within a broad age range (newborn through school-age).

A small family child care home (licensed for 6-8 children, just 1 caregiver required) may have...

- no more than 4 children in the home at one time if all 4 are infants (under 24 months old)
- up to 6 children if no more than 3 are infants
- up to 8 children if no more than 2 are infants and at least 2 are ≥ 6 years old *

A large family day care (licensed for 12-14 children, 2 caregivers required) may have...

- up to 12 children in the home at one time if no more than 4 are infants
- up to 14 children if no more than 3 are infants and at least 2 are ≥ 6 years old *

Parent/guardian notification and property owner permission is required if a small FCCH decides to care for 7-8 children, or a large FCCH decides to care for 13-14 children, at once.

** A younger child enrolled in and attending kindergarten or elementary school may fill one of the ≥ 6 years old slots.*

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EVALUATING FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Does the provider serve an established age range, such as 3 months to 2 years old, or does the age range vary?
- Is there any flexibility regarding the days/hours of operation? Would you need this flexibility?
- If the provider does not have established vacation periods, how much notice is given for upcoming vacations?
- Are there arrangements for back-up care if the caregiver is ill, has an emergency or is on vacation?
- Does the FCCH have liability insurance or a bond? If not, are you comfortable with the terms of the insurance waiver?
- If the FCCH cannot provide outdoor time for the children, is there enough indoor space for more vigorous/active play? Are you comfortable with the indoor alternative?
- Does the home have smokers? California prohibits tobacco smoking, at all times, in residences licensed as family child care homes.
- Are there pets on the premises?
- Are there children living in the home? Children under 10 years old who live in the home and are in the family child care during business hours count toward the facility's capacity.
- Are there other adults on the premises? Do they have contact with the children?
- How often is the provider present? State regulations require a family child care licensee to be in the facility for at least 80% of total operating hours.
- Licensees must actually live at the address where they are licensed and may only be licensed at their primary residence.