

First Steps

Step 1. Call

Illinois Action for Children at
312-823-1100

Step 2. Discuss

Talk to a child care consultant who will work to meet your needs and preferences and help you find an arrangement for your family. *All information is kept confidential.*

Step 3. Receive

We will send you materials, including a customized list of child care options, child development fact sheets and general guidelines to help you choose the best program and caregiver for your child. *The list of child care options contains referrals, not recommendations.*

Step 4. Visit

We recommend that you visit several programs before you sign up to make sure you feel comfortable with both the child care setting and the caregiver.



1340 S. Damen Avenue
Chicago, IL 60608

Visit us online at
www.actforchildren.org



First Steps

Child Care Options for Your Family

It's hard enough

finding child care for a Saturday night. It's even more challenging to find someone who's there all the days you need them. Someone reliable, qualified, caring. Someone who gives your child the loving attention you would give. Someone you trust.

Options for child care include child care centers, family child care home and in-home care. Consider the characteristics of each care option when choosing the appropriate situation for your family.

Call an experienced child care consultant at Illinois Action for Children to find out what is right for you.



Your Child Care Options

What to ask when looking for a child care provider:

Child Care Centers

Child care centers provide care for groups of children in licensed or license-exempt facilities. Children are usually grouped by age. The types of centers may include: Early Head Start/Head Start, Preschool for All, school-age programs, preschools, summer program and before/after school care. Licensed centers have met Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) standards for child-to-staff ratios, required space per child, safety guidelines and staff training. Centers that may not require licensing include: those that care for children three years and older and are affiliated with universities, churches, government agencies and public schools.

Child to Staff Ratios for licensed facilities:

Age Ratio

6 weeks – 15 months	4:1
15 months – 2 years	5:1
2 – 3 years	8:1
3 – 4 years	10:1
5 years and up	20:1

Advantages

- Daily planned activities
- Many opportunities for building social skills
- Staff with education and annual training in child development
- Staff trained in first aid and CPR
- More availability for children over two years old
- Year-round schedules that do not fluctuate with staff illness or vacation

Disadvantages

- Inflexible hours and days of operation
- The need to find alternate care when children are ill

Family Child Care

Home providers offer care for children in a caregiver's home. The three types of family care include licensed homes, group homes and licensed-exempt homes. Licensed homes and group homes have met DCFS standards for child-to-staff ratios, required space per child and safety guidelines.

With some exceptions, **licensed home providers** may care for up to eight children including their own, or up to 12 children with an assistant. Call for specific details.

With some exceptions, **licensed group home providers** may care for 12 or more children with the help of a full-time qualified assistant. Call for specific details.

License-exempt homes provide care for three or fewer children, or children from one family, or children related to the caregiver.

Advantages

- A home environment
- Daily planned activities
- May offer a flexible schedule
- Consistent care from one adult
- Siblings care for together
- Mixed age groups
- Availability for infant care
- Licensed providers are trained in first aid and CPR

Disadvantages

- A provider many not have formal early education background
- The need for alternate care when children are ill or when the provider is ill or on vacation

In-Home Care

In-home care brings a caregiver into your own home. This type of care is not regulated by DCFS licensing standards. An in-home care provider may be a nanny, a relative or an au pair.

Advantages

- Children have the stability and comfort of being in their own home
- A more flexible care arrangement
- Individualized care
- Alternate care for sick children is not necessary
- The cost is more economical for large families

Disadvantages

- Expense
- The parent becomes an employer
- Less privacy

Child care consultants are available **Monday through Thursday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, and Friday, 8:30 am to 12:30 pm.**

Call Illinois Action for Children at **312-823-1100.**

If you need care outside of Cook County, we will provide you with the phone number of the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency in your area.

Illinois Action for Children is funded in-part by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS).



Does the arrangement meet my needs?

- The hours I need child care?
- Location?
- How much can I afford?
- Openings/availability

How qualified is the provider? Do they have...

- Experience?
- Patience, warmth and responsiveness to children?
- A professional attitude or commitment?
- Training in CPR and first aid?
- The ability to offer individual attention to each child?
- Ongoing training and education?
- An open door for parent involvement and communication?

Does the environment provide...

- A satisfactory child-to-staff ratio?
- Clean, comfortable and safe surroundings?
- A bright and pleasant atmosphere?
- Healthy meals and snacks?
- Rest areas, and a bed for each child?
- Smoke detectors and fire extinguishers?

Be sure to discuss...

- Payment, schedules and fees including: deposits, late fees, sick/vacation payments and field trip fees
- Parents' access to the facility
- Provider's references
- Dates that the center or home is closed for holidays or vacations
- Health and illness policies and emergency contact information
- Any special characteristics of your child including: food preferences, habits, allergies or other medical needs
- How to help your child make the transition to the program
- A written contract
- Policy for late pick up