



## CONSUMER EDUCATION: CHILD CARE SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR CHOOSING CARE

Of paramount concern to all parents is the health, safety, and well-being of their children while in child care. The Office of Child Care is committed to expanding high-quality choices available to parents across the range of child care settings.

Parents who need out-of-home care for their children are faced with the challenging task of learning how quality care is defined, locating a program that provides that level of quality, and securing a spot for their child. Parents must also find a place that is convenient, affordable, and aligns with their family's philosophy of care and education for their child. In response, States and Territories, as well as organizations in the early and school-age care and education community, have developed a variety of strategies and resources to support parents seeking the right place for their child.

Some States working to increase the demand for quality programs, as well as their availability, offer parent and consumer education on quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). A QRIS provides parents with a way to differentiate among the child care providers in their communities. Information about the quality of child care that each provider offers, including how it has met QRIS standards (such as staff qualifications, learning environment, and curricula), promotes more informed child care choices. Some States have adopted the strategy of requiring parents receiving child care assistance to choose providers that meet higher standards of quality.

States are also updating their Web sites with accessible, easy-to-understand information about the types of child care available, availability of financial assistance, and resources on how to identify quality. States that employ these approaches improve transparency and greatly reduce the burden placed on families looking for the information so vital to their child care decisions. These efforts are supported by the reauthorization of the *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act* (CCDBG Act of 2014), which requires States to provide information to parents about a variety of topics including:

- The diversity and availability of child care services provided through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and other child care services the family might be eligible for; and
- The quality of providers, which can be based on a state quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), if available, or other quality standards.<sup>1</sup>

This is one of a series of four issue briefs that address CCDBG Act of 2014 requirements and provide state examples and links to state Web sites that can serve as examples for States and Territories in enhancing their own consumer education efforts.<sup>2</sup> These briefs were developed based on several regional webinars and meetings that focused on consumer education.

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<sup>1</sup> *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014*, 42 USC 9801 (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-113publ186/pdf/PLAW-113publ186.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> These issue briefs were originally produced by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, a previous contract of the Office of Child Care. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance is disseminating the issue briefs. These briefs and other resources about consumer education can be found on the Child Care Technical Assistance Network Web site at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/>.

The information in this brief is organized into three main sections:

- State Efforts to Describe the Diversity of Services;
- Resources for Choosing Child Care; and
- Additional Resources.

The examples below do not include all States and Territories but represent a range of approaches.

## **State Efforts to Describe the Diversity of Services**

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CCDF Lead Agencies are required to provide information to parents regarding the range of child care provider options available. Some States provide this information directly to parents, while others work through partner organizations, such as the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) system.

States use a variety of approaches to inform parents about the types of available child care and financial assistance. Most of the information is available via a Web search or in publications available electronically or in hard copy from different sources.

### **Connecticut**

2-1-1 Child Care is a free, confidential, and statewide service that helps match the requests of parents with child care providers and programs. Parents can call 2-1-1 Child Care for information and referrals to programs including licensed child care centers, family child care, before and afterschool programs, Head Start, and play groups. Child Care Referral Specialists help parents learn about options in their community and understand what to look for in finding a quality child care arrangement, and they encourage parents to contact the Office of Early Childhood, Division of Licensing to check on the complaint history of licensed child care programs. In addition, Child Care Referral Specialists can help parents become connected to other resources such as financial assistance or early intervention services. Additional information is available at <http://www.211childcare.org/parents/>.

### **Hawaii**

PATCH (People Attentive to Children) is Hawaii's statewide CCR&R agency. Its Web site provides a comprehensive list and description of the types of early education options—including child care, Head Start, and unregulated providers—available to families looking for quality care. Also included is detailed information about the options for paying for child care, including subsidy programs and tax credits, and a comprehensive list of other resources and supports for parents. Additional information is available at <http://www.patchhawaii.org/families/options>.

### **Nevada**

*Child Care Options: A Comparison* is a publication by The Children's Cabinet, a nonprofit serving as the CCR&R agency in Nevada. The document provides a side-by-side comparison of different types of child care options, including ratios and group size, parental involvement, and typical advantages and disadvantages of different settings. The publication is available at <http://www.childrencabinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/CCOptionsTable.pdf>.

### **Oregon**

The Oregon Department of Education provides information on its Web site including steps to finding child care and types of child care. Central Coordination of Child Care Resource and Referral also provides information on its Web site including a table featuring highlights of the requirements of different types of care. Highlights include requirements for background checks, teacher training requirements, and ratios and group size. Additional information is available at <http://www.oregon.gov/OCC/Pages/ForParents.aspx> and <http://teachingresearchinstitute.org/projects/fcco/resources>.

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## Resources for Choosing Child Care

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Lead Agencies report using a wide variety of strategies to inform parents about finding quality child care. Many have begun to offer materials in multiple languages, and several have created multimedia materials, such as videos, that explain what to look for in a quality program.

- Virtually all States use parental choice information materials (such as flyers, forms, brochures, or parent handbooks); verbal communication at the time of application; and referral to CCR&R agencies.
- Most States provide information via their agency Web site.
- Slightly more than half of all States have a statewide QRIS.
- Slightly more than half of all States offer community outreach meetings, workshops, or other in-person events.
- Approximately 10 percent of States issue public service announcements.

### ***Examples of State Consumer Education Initiatives***

States and Territories publish a variety of resources to inform parents about what to look for when searching for child care, including guidebooks, checklists, videos, and public awareness campaigns. The examples below do not include all States and Territories but represent the range of approaches.

#### **Colorado**

*Working Your Way Through the Child Care Maze: A Guide to Help Parents Find and Choose Quality Child Care* is a 20-page publication provided by Qualistar Colorado and Bright by Three, two nonprofit organizations focusing on quality early childhood education and the healthy growth and development of Colorado's children. The publication outlines a four-step process parents can use when choosing quality care for their child. Each step is thoroughly covered in the guidebook, including information about applying for financial assistance and looking for care for a child with special needs. This publication is available at [http://www.qualistar.org/uploads/file/ChildCareMaze\\_English.pdf](http://www.qualistar.org/uploads/file/ChildCareMaze_English.pdf).

#### **Iowa**

Parents are advised about care options when they first apply for child care assistance. The public KinderTrack portal informs parents about Iowa's child care regulations. A pamphlet, *Child Care Assistance*, outlines the full array of care providers from which parents may select. It is available at county Department of Human Services offices, CCR&R agencies, PROMISE JOBS offices, and online. More information is available at <http://dhs.iowa.gov/child-care>.

#### **Maryland**

Maryland developed a mapping tool designed to show where licensed child care programs are located and to provide information about the services offered by those programs. The tool also shows where child care programs are located in relation to local public schools and to community-based early childhood education and family support service centers known as "Judy Centers." Additional information is available at <http://geodata.md.gov/mdcc/>.

#### **Massachusetts**

Massachusetts Early Education and Care (EEC) launched an improved Child Care Search function on its Web site at <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ChildCareSearch/EarlyEduMap.aspx>. This search functionality, in both English and Spanish, provides detailed information about early education and care programs in the Commonwealth. It also, for the first time on the Web, provides important licensing information, including

the date of the most recent licensing visit, and indicates whether a program is the subject of EEC legal action.

### **New York**

*As You Think About Child Care* is a three-minute video that provides parents with information about the types of care available, questions to ask during a search for child care, and contact information for CCR&R and the state agency responsible for child care. For parents visiting child care programs, the State offers age-specific checklists for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. Additional information is available at <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/pub1115Atext.asp>.

### **Tennessee**

The *Parents Know, Kids Grow* Web site provides resources and information about children's safety, well-being, and learning. It covers such topics as finding the best child care, creating a safe sleep environment, and learning about childhood development through research-based articles, videos, and additional resources. The topics on the site were chosen in response to questions and concerns from parents across Tennessee and in response to issues that threaten the health of Tennessee's children. Additional information is available at <http://www.parentsknowkidsgrow.org/>.

### **Texas**

The statewide campaign, *Don't Be in the Dark About Child Care!* informs parents about the difference between regulated and unregulated child care and the reasons to choose regulated care. It includes a Web site, printed materials, television, and radio spots informing parents about the importance of selecting regulated child care. Additional information is available at [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Care/DontBelInTheDark/default.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/DontBelInTheDark/default.asp).

### **Utah**

The Utah Office of Child Care created the Web site, <http://careaboutchildcare.utah.gov/>, in partnership with the Child Care Licensing Program, the Child Care Professional Development Institute, and Utah's CCR&R agencies. The site promotes quality child care and helps parents locate licensed providers in their area. The Web site also provides links to child care and child development resources for parents, grandparents, and providers, including videos and public service announcements.

### **Virginia**

The Virginia Department of Social Services created a tri-fold brochure, *Choosing Quality Child Care*, with information and characteristics of quality child care. The publication is provided in English and Spanish and may be found at [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/cc/guidance\\_parents/choosing\\_qcc/Eng\\_-\\_choosing-quality-childcare\\_brochure\\_small.pdf](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/cc/guidance_parents/choosing_qcc/Eng_-_choosing-quality-childcare_brochure_small.pdf). The brochure explains the benefits of quality child care, how to prepare for the search, what questions to ask a child care provider, what to look for while visiting a child care program, and lists other helpful resources for parents. A page on the agency's Web site is dedicated to parent and family resources with categories for choosing quality child care, child development, child care or preschool options, emergency planning, financial assistance, health and safety, special needs, and additional resources. This page is found at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cc/publications.cgi>.

### **Washington**

The Washington State Department of Early Learning designed its 12-page publication, *A Guide to Finding Quality Child Care*, to help parents find the best child care arrangement for their family. It includes a checklist, suggestions for how to participate in a child's care, information about assistance paying for child care, and other resources. This publication is available at <https://depts.washington.edu/cjel/PDFs/ChoosingChildCare.pdf>.

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## Additional Resources

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### **Links to National “How to Choose” Web Sites**

- Child Care Aware®: A program of Child Care Aware of America, Child Care Aware® helps families learn more about the elements of quality child care and how to locate programs in their communities. <http://childcareaware.org/parents-and-guardians/child-care-101/5-steps-to-choosing-care>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care (OCC): OCC administers the CCDF and works with state, territory, and tribal governments to provide support for children and their families juggling work schedules and struggling to find child care programs that will fit their needs and prepare children to succeed in school. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ>
- ZERO TO THREE: A national nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. <http://www.zerotothree.org/early-care-education/child-care/choosing-quality-child-care.html>

### **Checklists for Parents**

#### **RESOURCES FROM CHILD CARE AWARE®**

- *Essentials for Your Child Care Visit*  
<http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/119e.pdf>
- *Five Steps to Choosing Safe and Healthy Child Care*  
<http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/106e.pdf>
- *Is This the Right Place for My Child?*  
<http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/121e.pdf>
- *Putting the Pieces Together*  
<http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/117e.pdf>
- *Selecting a High-Quality School-Age Program for Your Child*  
<http://ccapub.childcareaware.org/docs/pubs/105e.pdf>
- *Selecting Summer Care for School-Age Children: A Quality Checklist*  
<http://www.flchild.com/Howtofindchildcaresite/html/choosing/SummerChecklistEnglish.pdf>

### **Publications**

- *How Contextual Constraints Affect Low-Income Working Parents’ Child Care Choices* (February 2012), by Heather Sandstrom, Lindsay Giesen, and Ajay Chaudry.  
<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412511-How-Contextual-Constraints-Affect-Low-Income-Working-Parents-Child-Care-Choices.pdf>

This research brief (and the larger report upon which it is based) is a product of a multiyear, qualitative Urban Institute study that examined how low-income families make choices when arranging care for their children, and how families’ decisions are shaped or limited by key contextual factors.

- *How Employment Constraints Affect Low-Income Working Parents’ Child Care Decisions* (February 2012), by Ajay Chaudry, Juan Pedroza, and Heather Sandstrom.  
<http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412513-How-Employment-Constraints-Affect-Low-Income-Working-Parents-Child-Care-Decisions.pdf>

This brief draws from a larger study of child care choices to describe how low-income parents’ employment experiences shape their child care decisions. The brief summarizes and builds on findings

from a larger research report that discusses how low-income working families in two study sites make child care decisions, and how these families' decisions are shaped or limited by key contextual factors.

- *High-Quality Child Care and Early Education: What Arizona's Parents Want* (2012), by the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board (First Things First).  
<http://www.azff.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Documents/FTF-ChildCareReport.pdf>

This report is the result of the Arizona Child Care Demand Study, a large-scale, survey-based research project designed to find out when and why Arizona parents use child care; how they make child care decisions; and what they think about the quality, cost, and accessibility of early care and education programs in their communities.

- *Understanding Parents' Child Care Decision-Making: A Foundation for Child Care Policy Making* (February 2011), by Roberta Weber.  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/understanding-parents-child-care-decision-making-a-foundation-for-child>

This paper provides insights into the forces that shape parents' child care and early education decisions. The goal of this brief is to help policymakers by depicting the complexity of child care decision-making revealed through research.

- *Parent Priorities in Selecting Early Care and Education Programs: Implications for Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System* (February 2010), by Aisha Ray.  
<http://bit.ly/1HXNODk>

This study explores family priorities around cultural and language criteria in selecting early care and learning programs, and the extent to which criteria vary for families from different cultural and language communities.

- *Child Care Decision-Making: A Key Topic Resource List* (April 2009), compiled by Research Connections.  
<http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/resources/15714/pdf>

This resource list includes an overview and list of selected resources from the literature focused on child care decision-making.

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