

Steps to Finding Quality Child Care

Step One: Consider the types of Care available

Children's Centers: A children's center provides full and/or part-time care. Children's centers must meet established minimum health, safety, and educational standards. These children's centers are monitored regularly by the Pinellas County License Board staff. If you choose a child care center, your child will be in a group of children his/her own age with activities planned especially for that age group. In Pinellas County the adult to child ratio for each age group is one adult to:

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| every 3 infants– age 2 months to 1 year | every 5 toddlers– age 1 to 2 years |
| every 10 children– age 2 to 3 years | every 15 children– age 3 to 4 years |
| every 20 children– age 4 to 5 years | every 25 children– age 5 years and older |

Family Child Care Homes: In a family child care home a person cares for a small group of children in his/her own home. Family child care homes must meet established health and safety standards to be licensed. These sites are monitored regularly by Pinellas County License Board staff. If you choose a family child care home, your child will be with a small group of children whose ages may range from a few weeks to school age. Your child will be in a home environment that should offer indoor and outdoor play.

The number of children in a Family Child Care Home is limited to a maximum of **five (5)** including children or relatives of the operator who are not yet of school age. No more than **three (3)** of the five children may be under **two (2)** years of age.

Large Family Child Care Homes (LFCCH): A LFCCH may have a maximum of 12 children with no more than four (4) children being under the age of two (2) years OR they may have more than four (4) children under the age of two (2) years with no more than a total of eight (8) children.

School Age Care: School age programs may provide before and after school care. Quality school age programs may be held onsite at a local school, community recreation center, church, or even a family child care home. Group size and ages may vary according to the program. Standards in care may also vary due to variations in regulations.

Play Groups: Playgroups are primarily groups of parents and children who meet together on a regular basis in a variety of locations. The parents have the opportunity to network and share experiences of parenthood. Many parents use these occasions to allow their children to socialize with children of similar age. Parents new to the area find this type of exchange an ideal way to meet new friends and learn about the many Pinellas County resources.

In-Home Care: In-home providers are baby-sitters, housekeepers, or nannies who come into your home. This type of care is not regulated by any governmental agency. You may contact CCR&R for information about private agencies that will help you find people interested in providing this type of child care.

Step Two: Define your child care needs Does the child have special needs that need to be taken into consideration when looking for care? Think about your schedule, the days you will need care, and where you would like the provider to be located. Know what you can afford to pay and keep in mind the services that each provider might offer.

Step Three: Resource and Referral Call Child Care Resource and Referral of Pinellas County for free information at 547-5750. You will receive a list of children's centers and/or family childcare homes in your area and prepared specifically to your needs.

Step Four: Visit the children's centers and homes you have selected

Remember that it is up to you to choose what is best for your child. You are the expert when it comes to knowing what environment is best suited for you and your child. Arrange a time to talk with the children's center director or family childcare provider. Discuss the program you have seen at the end of your visit. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Step Five: Make your decision Sort out what you have seen. If you chose licensed child care, and you have narrowed your choices, you may contact the Pinellas County License Board at 547-5800 to ask for a file review. Ask if the prospective provider has met standards over the past year. Find out about complaints, commendations, and staff qualifications.

Step Six: Making child care work It is important to establish and maintain a good relationship with the provider. Establish a clear contract with the provider and make sure you understand the policy of the provider. Communicate often and exchange information on an ongoing basis. Be involved in the program!
