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Choosing Child Care in Alberta



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Choosing Child Care in Alberta

This document offers tools to help you in your search for the child care that will best meet your family's and child's needs. Start your search early – finding the right child care for your family can be a big project. The Alberta government is committed to providing resources so you can feel confident and comfortable when making your final decision.



What does your family need?

Choosing child care for your family is a very important decision. Parents want to find a safe, healthy environment that supports their child's social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development but also is a good fit for their child. Think about where he or she will be most comfortable. It's important to consider things like your child's age, the types of activities they enjoy, the number and ages of children your child enjoys being with, and any food allergies or food preferences that must be accommodated.

Finding the right program is also important for your family. Each child care program will have a different approach to how they offer child care and may provide different services, such as snacks or meals, or even the hours in the day that they provide child care. You'll want to consider other things like your work hours, the location of the program and the cost.

A few things you should think about when considering the best child care option include:

- Would you prefer your child to be in a home-based setting or in facility-based early learning, like a daycare?
- Are you looking for part-day or full-day care? How many days per week or per month?
- Do you prefer child care that is close to your home, close to your workplace, or close to your child's school?
- What is your child care budget?
- What hours of child care work for your family's needs?
- How many children do you have who require child care? Would you like them to stay together?
- Do you prefer an early childhood educator who has completed post-secondary education specializing in child development, guiding children's behaviour, and early learning practices?
- Would you prefer a program that is licensed by the Government of Alberta?
- What are your goals for your child's learning, development and discipline?

Child care subsidy

Subsidies are available to offset the cost of child care for eligible families with a lower household income with children enrolled in licensed:

- daycare
- family day homes
- out-of-school care centres

Learn more about eligibility and how to apply for child care subsidy on the Government of Alberta website at alberta.ca/child-care.

Types of child care in Alberta

In Alberta, there are two types of child care under the *Early Learning and Child Care Act and Regulation*: licensed and unlicensed. This makes it easy for parents to know which options are regulated by the government and which are not.

Licensed child care

Facility-based

Licensed facility-based programs include:

- daycare
- out-of-school care
- preschool

The Alberta government works collaboratively with licensed facility-based programs by monitoring and inspecting their centres to ensure they are meeting health, safety and program quality standards for children in their care under the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*.

Home-based

Family day home educators are recruited and trained by licensed family day home agencies to offer child care in their own home. Family day home educators can offer child care for up to 6 children not including their own.

Licensed agencies help by offering family day home educators a network for training, resources and assistance. Agencies provide assurance to parents using family day homes by monitoring each program to ensure they are meeting health, safety and program quality standards for children in their care as prescribed under the Family Day Home standards and the Act.

Visit alberta.ca/child-care to learn more about licensed child care programs and how you can become a family day home educator.



Unlicensed child care

Unlicensed child care programs can provide child care for up to 6 children, not including their own, at any given time. Unlicensed providers are not monitored by the Alberta government or licensed agencies. Examples of unlicensed care include nannies, private day homes and informal arrangements with friends, neighbours or family.

Under the Act, the Alberta government can investigate complaints about unlicensed child care providers when there is reason to believe that:

- a person is providing care for more than 6 children (not including their own), or
- an imminent threat to the health, safety or welfare of any children to whom the person is offering or providing care exists.

If either of these are confirmed, Children's Services will issue and enforce a stop order. In this situation, parents of the children in the unlicensed program will be notified of the stop order.

Know the difference

Under the Act and Early Learning and Child Care Regulation, there are specific rules that licensed child care providers must follow.

Some regulations you may want to know about include:

- Licensed child care programs are not required to provide meals, but some will. If they do, they must have the necessary health licence and facilities. It's always a good idea to ask what the program does about food and snacks.
- Licensed child care providers are required to have staff with an educational background in early learning and child care.
- Licensed child care programs are able to operate 24 hours a day and so some may be able to accommodate parents who work shift work.
- Licensed child care programs have a duty to inform parents of any licensing inspection reports or changes to their licence conditions.
- Licensed child care programs are required to ensure adequate amount of staff are in place at all times. The regulations set out the number of staff required depending on the age of children attending their program.

Make a list of your options

Use the following resources to make your list:

- Find licensed child care options near you using the online [Child Care Look-up Tool](#).
- Call Child Care Connect for support (*see below*)
- Ask for referrals. Friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours are good sources of referrals.
- Depending on your child care preferences and needs, you might contact local Indigenous, newcomer, or disability organizations to find out about child care options.

Tip:

Online reviews and comments should not be your only source of information.

- Don't be afraid to ask potential providers to talk with you about their reviews.
- Even if a child care provider has received only great reviews, it's still important that you meet with the provider and visit the child care facility or home for yourself.



Call Child Care Connect for support

Parents can call Child Care Connect toll free at 1-844-644-5165:

- Learn more about child care options in your area.
- Get help finding the licensed child care program in your community that works best for your family.
- Find out if your unlicensed provider has been issued an order to stop providing child care within the past 24 months.
- Report concerns, complaints or incidents related to a child care program.



Making your decision

Once you have narrowed down your options, get in touch with child care providers you are interested in. Visit the home or centre in person – it's important that you assess the care being provided and that you feel comfortable with the care your child will receive. Try not to rely on “first impressions” when assessing the home or centre.

Every child care program determines their own fee. Review any contract or agreement the provider asks you to sign so you understand the terms and conditions that provider is requiring. This includes giving notice if you want to end your child care or when a fee may or may not be refunded.

Checklists for parents

Health and safety

- Is the child care program licensed under the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*? Licensed programs are required to post their licence certificate in a prominent place in the centre where parents can see it. You can also ask them to confirm if they are licensed under the Act.
 - Daycare, preschool and out-of-school care programs are required to have a licence.
 - Family day home programs operate under licensed family day home agencies that monitor to ensure they are meeting standards for safety and quality. Family day home programs can provide child care for up to 6 children, not including their own.
 - Unlicensed providers can provide child care for up to 6 children, not including their own. However, the Alberta government does not monitor unlicensed providers or any networks, associations or organizations that provide support for unlicensed providers.
- Do the provider, educators, and any adults who will be in the centre or home with children have a current criminal record check, including a vulnerable sector search? This is especially important if you are choosing unlicensed care.
 - If you are considering an unlicensed provider, we encourage you to visit the home when it is operating.
 - Typically, unlicensed providers will welcome parents into their home during operating hours. If this is not a policy of the provider, consider choosing this provider with caution.
- Does the child care program have up-to-date CPR, first aid training and health and safety plans?
- Is the provider connected to any support associations or networks?
- Is the facility or home and all the equipment (indoor and outdoor) clean and in good condition?
- Is the outdoor play space fenced in?
- Are there locks on the medicine cabinets?
- Are the stairs secured with gates?
- Are cleaning supplies kept out of reach?
- Was the policy regarding sick children discussed with you? For example, if children have a fever or other symptoms of a communicable disease, are they sent home? How does the program isolate sick children from other children until the parents can pick them up?
- How many children are cared for at one time? How many staff per child are present?
- Is there a hand washing policy?
- Do staff and children wash their hands before and after diapering or toileting?
- Where do children sleep during naptime?
- Does the agency or centre provide any information about past inspections or incidents?
 - Licensed child care programs are required to post recent inspection reports that outline any non-compliances and the actions required to rectify them.
- For unlicensed care, call Child Care Connect at 1-844-644-5165 to see if the Alberta government has issued any stop orders in the last 24 months on an unlicensed home you maybe considering.

Nutrition and mealtime

- Does the program provide meals and snacks? Is the menu posted?
- Does the menu offer healthy food choices?
- Does food for all children meet the standards in Canada's Food Guide (<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>) or Alberta's Nutritional Food Guidelines (open.alberta.ca/publications/5906406)?
- Do the program educators or staff sit with children during meals?



Tip:

You can see inspection, complaint, and incident reports about licensed child care programs using the Alberta government's [Child Care Look-up Tool](#). If you see anything concerning in a program or agency's track record, talk with them about it.

Activities and play materials


- What training and experience does the provider or educators have?
- What type of programming does the centre offer? Examples include Flight curriculum, Montessori, Reggio etc...
- Is a schedule posted, and is it followed daily?
- Is there time for both children and program educators or centre staff to pick activities?
- Is there time in the schedule for indoor and outdoor play?
- Are there lots of play areas available for children to explore?
- Is there enough space for children to engage in active play?
- Is there a lot of time to play in these areas each day?
- Are materials and equipment age-appropriate?
- Are the materials and equipment in good condition?
- Are there enough toys for the number of children?

Relationships and parent engagement

- Do the providers or educators play with children?
- What can the centre or home provider tell you about the play, learning, and care activities they will do with your child?
- What is the centre or home provider's approach to child guidance?
- How do the centre staff or home provider engage with the children? Are they warm and caring?
- Do they model appropriate behaviour? Are children and adults respectful to other children and adults?
- Are centre staff or the home provider trained in early childhood development? What is their experience?
- Do the home provider or centre staff communicate well with parents and guardians?
- Are the rules and expectations for the children simple and clear?
- Has the provider or centre staff explained their child care agreement with you? (Most child care programs have policies related to illness, cancellations, payment, etc. and it is important that you clearly understand all of these policies.)
- How are parents encouraged to become involved in their child's care?

For infants

- Are infants held and carried frequently?
- Do the program educators respond quickly to infants' cries?
- Do the program educators frequently talk with, sing to, and read to infants?
- Do the program educators adjust to infants' individual feeding and sleeping schedules?



Child care during COVID-19

Since the onset of COVID-19, parents have relied on safe and high-quality child care programs so they can work or go to school, which is essential for Alberta's economic recovery from the pandemic.

The Alberta government has taken a number of steps to keep licensed child care programs as safe as possible for children, their families and staff. Most importantly, the Government of Alberta has developed health guidance for licensed facility and home-based programs, which outline the requirements for enhanced sanitization and safe daily operations.

To learn more, visit alberta.ca/child-care-during-covid-19.aspx

Get involved!

Staying involved in your child's care is important. You and your child care provider are partners working together in your child's healthy development.

Some ways to get involved include:

- Be comfortable in sharing your thoughts, suggestions or concerns.
- Volunteer for a special event or celebration.
- Join the group on your child's birthday.
- Volunteer to read a story or do an activity with the group.
- Talk with your child's educator regularly either in person or through email.
- Ask your child about their day.
- Share information about special events with your child's provider, such as family visits, family vacations, or a change in your family.
- Ask the centre or family day home agency if there is a parent advisory committee.



If you have concerns

If you are concerned about the health, safety or well-being of your child or another child in any child care setting (licensed or private), call Child Care Connect toll free at 1-844-644-5165.

All complaints received are taken seriously and reviewed:

1. Children's Services staff will determine if your complaint falls under the scope of the Act and Regulation, or the Family Day Home Standards.
2. If your complaint is within the scope of the legislation, regulation, or standards, an investigation will be conducted. Some complaints may fall within the scope of another authority and be referred to police, fire department, municipal government, public health, Child Intervention, or another organization.
3. Complaints can be submitted anonymously.

Child Abuse Hotline

If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Call 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS) to get help if you, or children you know, are being neglected, abused or sexually exploited. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7.

Learn how to recognize the warning signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation at alberta.ca/recognize-family-violence.aspx.



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