

# GUIDE TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE



## DID YOU KNOW?

80% of the brain develops by age 3

## QUALITY CHILD CARE MATTERS!

family  connections  
helping children, families, & providers thrive

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[www.FamilyConnectionsMT.org](http://www.FamilyConnectionsMT.org)

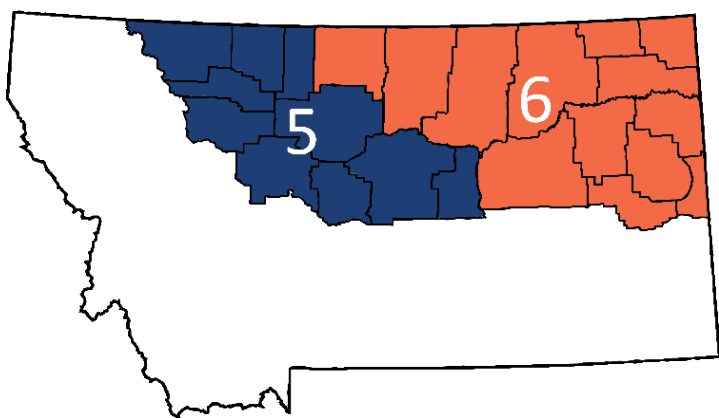
# INTRODUCTION

Choosing a child care provider for your child is one of the most important decisions families make. The first five years are a critical time of growth and development, and families are children's first and most important teachers. High quality early childhood care and education gives children the experiences they need to enter school ready to succeed while providing parents the opportunity to work and support their families. This guide provides information, resources, and guidance to help you make the best decision when choosing high quality child care and education programs that meet the needs of your family.



# ABOUT R&R

Family Connections is the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency serving Regions 5 and 6 in North Central and North Eastern Montana.



**Region 5 Counties:** Glacier, Toole, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, Chouteau, Cascade, Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum

**Region 6 Counties:** Hill, Blaine, Phillips, Valley, Daniels, Sheridan, Roosevelt, Garfield, McCone, Richland, Dawson, Prairie, Wibaux

**Family Connections Services:**

- Professional Development to train, mentor and coach child care providers
- Financial Assistance to help pay for childcare
- FREE Referrals to help find child care

# STEPS TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE



**Start early!** Finding the best child care for your family takes time. There are many types of child care programs to meet the diverse needs of families such as Center, Family, Group, After School, Preschool, and Family/Friend/Neighbor Care (FFN).

***When considering your child care options, look for child care programs with the following qualifications on Pages 4-5:***

## **Best Beginning STARS to Quality Program:**

A voluntary quality rating improvement system that aligns quality indicators with support and incentives for early childhood programs and professionals. This quality improvement program promotes strong early childhood education in Montana.

**<https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/stars>**

# STEPS TO CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

## **Licensing and Registration Requirements:**

Centers, Group, Family and Family/Friend/Neighbor Care (FFN) are required to be licensed, registered or certified. See more information at: [dphhs.mt.gov/qad/Licensure/Become-a-Child-Care-Provider](https://dphhs.mt.gov/qad/Licensure/Become-a-Child-Care-Provider)



## **Provider to Child Ratios:**

**Center:** 13 or more children with ratios based on the ages of the children.

**Group:** Two adults care for 7-12 children with a limit of 6 under 2 years.

**Family:** Up to 6 children with no more than 3 children under 2 years.

**Family/Friend/Neighbor:** All the children of one family or up to 2 unrelated children.

# FINDING HELP WITH CHILD CARE

## 5 Steps to Finding Help with Child Care

**1. Contact Family Connections about financial assistance to help pay for child care.**

• Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship  
[dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/ChildCare](https://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/ChildCare)

**2. Contact Family Connections for profiles of child care providers who meet your needs.**

[Familyconnectionsmt.org/families/find-a-child-care-provider/](https://Familyconnectionsmt.org/families/find-a-child-care-provider/)

**3. Check online for complaints and licensing violations for potential child care providers.**

[dphhs.mt.gov/qad/Licensure/LBCCL](https://dphhs.mt.gov/qad/Licensure/LBCCL)

**4. Contact potential child care providers to schedule visits to observe the program, ask questions and check references.**

**5. Stay actively involved with regular visits, frequent communication and by participating in your child's care program.**





# CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

## CAREGIVERS & TEACHERS

- ☐ Develop positive relationships with children
- ☐ Get down on child's level when speaking
- ☐ Greet children when they arrive
- ☐ Quickly meet child's needs even when busy
- ☐ Involved in continuing education programs
- ☐ Always ready to answer questions
- ☐ Update parents on child's daily activities
- ☐ Welcome parent's ideas and involvement
- ☐ Staff and children enjoy being together
- ☐ Meet child-to-staff ratios for each age group

## SETTINGS

- ☐ Bright, clean and pleasant setting
- ☐ Adequate space for each activity
- ☐ Securely fenced outdoor play area
- ☐ Variety of safe play equipment
- ☐ Play areas easily viewed by staff at all times
- ☐ Separate areas for quiet play and active play

## IN GENERAL

- ☐ You agree with discipline practices
- ☐ You hear the sounds of happy children
- ☐ Children are comforted as needed
- ☐ The provider is licensed and regulated
- ☐ Surprise visits by parents are encouraged

## ACTIVITIES

- ☐ Activities are age appropriate
- ☐ Daily balance of indoor/outdoor play, story, and nap time
- ☐ Healthy food, snacks and physical exercise
- ☐ Variety of toys & learning materials for children





# CHILD CARE CHECKLIST

## ASK THE DIRECTOR & STAFF

- ☐ What is the program's mission and philosophy?
- ☐ Is the program licensed or registered?
- ☐ May I have a copy of your policies?
- ☐ Do the policies include schedules and fees?
- ☐ What is your sick child policy?
- ☐ Do you offer any financial assistance?
- ☐ Do you have an orientation for new families?
- ☐ What are your procedures for emergencies?
- ☐ Do you practice fire drills and evacuations?
- ☐ Are all staff trained in CPR and First Aid?
- ☐ Do you Background Check ALL staff?
- ☐ What is your system for knowing where my child is at all times?
- ☐ Do you participate in the USDA sponsored Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?
- ☐ How does the program support children's education and learning?
- ☐ Are children able to choose what activities they want to do and who to play with?
- ☐ Do the children help plan activities?
- ☐ How do you accommodate children with special needs?

## WARNING SIGNS

- ☐ All parent visits must be planned in advance
- ☐ There are few planned activities or guidance
- ☐ The child care is not licensed or registered
- ☐ There are too many children for adequate care and supervision
- ☐ Caregivers are physically rough, abusive or yell at the children
- ☐ There are licensing deficiencies for Health and Safety requirements

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