

Star-Quality Child Care Program

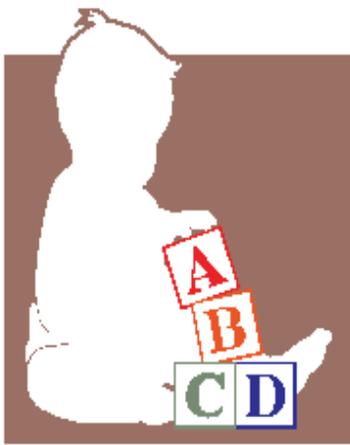
**A Parent's Guide to Choosing
Quality Child Care in Tennessee**

HANDY WORKBOOK



**Tennessee Department
of Human Services**





A Parent's Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care in Tennessee

Before You Begin

Child Care: It's one of the most important decisions you will ever make. This workbook can help you "Do Your Homework"

Choosing the right child care for your child is one of the most important decisions a parent can make. You are dependent on the provider to not only keep your child safe and healthy when you are not there, but also to help your child fully develop so that he/she will be successful in school and in life.

Group care is not the same as raising your own child. You must look for different things. Take the time to do your homework. If you immediately need child care, do as much research as possible and do not be afraid to change if you find another program better-suited for your child. Children need stability, but it is better to his/her needs.

Always try to compare several different programs before you make the final choice. Seek out the advice of trusted family and friends, but do not blindly accept anyone else's opinion.

Each child is unique—always do your own homework.

Choosing a specialized program: If you are seeking a specific service for your child (for example, foreign language instruction, specialized physical or arts activities, etc.) remember that these experiences are usually only a part of your child's overall child care experience. You should still carefully evaluate the entire program's ability to meet all of your child's needs.



Special Note: If your child has special needs...

By law, all regulated providers must assess the child and their program to see if it is possible to successfully serve the child's needs.

- If accepting the child will not cause an "undue hardship", then they must do so.
- Children with special needs should learn and play with the other children.
- Children with special needs should be included according to the child's "developmental age" to promote the child's success.

You can search for child care and learn more about child care and child care services on the internet at:

<http://www.state.tn.us/humanserv/childcare.htm>

or you may call the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Center for your area at the number listed in the section titled Child Care Resource and Referral Centers for Parents.



Child Care options in Tennessee

Family Child Care Homes

Group Child Care Homes

Child Care Centers

Licensed and Approved Child Care Options in Tennessee

In Tennessee, child care for 5 or more children for 3 or more hours per day must be licensed or approved by the State unless exempt by state law (for example, most Mother's Day Out programs are exempt).

Types of Licensed/Approved Care:

- Family Child Care Homes and Group Child Care Homes provide care in a home-type setting. Family Homes care for 5-7 children; Group Homes care 8-12 children.
- Child Care Centers care for 13 or more children. The children are divided into different age groups, with each group having an assigned caregiver.
- In home care usually has a mixed agegroup of children in their care.

Homes and Centers each have unique experiences to offer your child. You should visit both types of providers before you decide what setting will be best for your child.

What is Licensing:

In licensed and approved care, your child's provider must pass health and fire inspections and receive regular unannounced visits to check for ongoing compliance with licensing rules. This regulation is intended to keep your child safe and help your child develop.

In unregulated care, there are no rules for criminal background checks, and there are no unannounced visits to ensure your child is safe.

Licensing cannot guarantee your child will receive safe, quality care, but the minimum licensing regulations and the ongoing surprise visits by professional licensing staff make licensed/approved care the safest choice for your child.

The certificate of licensure should be conspicuously posted -OR- ask provider to show you the license.

STAR-QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAM

The Child Care Report Card Program can help you choose quality child care. This program evaluates agencies for the criteria the experts recognize as being critical to quality. The Report Card along with this workbook can give you the vital information you need to understand how to look for quality child care. It will also allow you to compare the many different programs available in Tennessee.

This evaluation includes, an on-site observation by a highly trained Assessor who visits each child care program to evaluate the indoor and outdoor spaces, activities, materials, and the interactions between the children and their caregivers.

To make sure every observer looks for the same things at the center or home, the Assessor is specially trained to use the Child Care Environment Rating Scales for this on-site observation. These scales are nationally recognized as reliable tools for assessing the quality of child care programs.

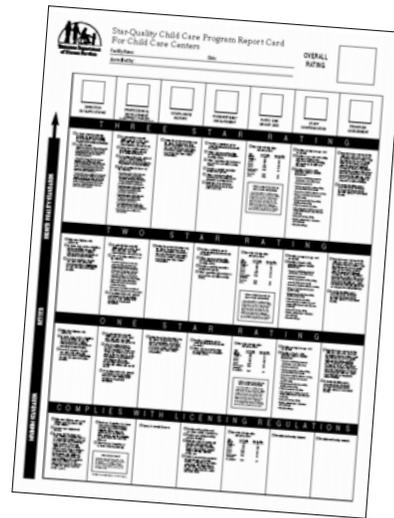


Looking at the Child Care Report Card

The **REPORT CARD** lists 7 major areas of evaluation for child care centers and 5 major areas for family and group child care providers. You will see check marks that show where the provider stands in each area: *Director's Qualifications, Professional Development, Compliance History, Adult:Child Ratios, Parent/Family Involvement, Staff Compensation, Program Assessment, and Business Management.* See the "Glossary" at the end of this workbook for more information about each of these areas.

Who Gets a Report Card?

Child care agencies receive a **REPORT CARD** each year at their licensing renewal. The **REPORT CARD** must be in a place where you can easily see it. It shows how the program is rated in each component area.



Tennessee STAR-QUALITY Program

The **STAR-QUALITY** Program is a voluntary program for providers who have gone beyond the state's basic requirements for child care. These **STAR-QUALITY REPORT CARDS** will have Stars at the top of each area rated. Providers can earn from 1 Star to 3 Stars in each area and on their overall rating.

Higher Check Marks Indicate Higher Quality for Your Child

Minimum standards are required by state law. The law sets the lowest standards needed to help keep children safe and healthy. Each "**STAR**" shows additional requirements that rise above state law. The more **STARS** on the **REPORT CARD**, the higher the child care program has risen above the minimum state requirements in that area.

Telephone Screening: Contacting Providers

Careful screening is the most critical step of this important decision. Once you have identified the programs that interest you, begin by calling them to get basic information and to see if they have an opening. The best time to call centers to talk with the director is between 9 and 11 a.m. or 1 and 3 p.m. The best time to call homes is between 1 and 3 p.m. or after 6 p.m.



Telephone Contact

Names of providers.			
What are your hours?			
Do you have any Stars?			
How many children, and what ages will be with my child?			
What meals and snacks are provided?			
What will my child do each day?			
I would like to visit your program. What day and time would be convenient?			
What kind of activities do you provide for parents?			
Additional comments:			

Telephone Screening: Contacting Licensing

A building that seems very nice and a provider that seems very caring may still have a history of licensing violations and complaints, or may be facing a legal enforcement action.

Before you take time to visit the provider call the local DHS Licensing office to ask about the provider's licensing history and any complaints. (Your county DHS office is listed in the Blue Pages of your phone book.) A list of office addresses, phone numbers, and driving directions is also available on the web at:

<http://www.state.tn.us/humanserv/st.map.htm>.

You are Now Ready to Visit the Agency

Always make at least two visits to the agency. The first visit should be pre-scheduled with the provider. The 2nd visit should be an unannounced (surprise) visit. (State law requires that regulated providers always allow reasonable access by parents, but providers can make restrictions to limit disruptions; for example, they can restrict parents from eating lunch with their child except on certain days of the week). **NEVER** enroll your child in an agency that does not allow immediate access to your child at **ALL** times.

It is critical to visit the programs that have "passed" your telephone screening. Observe the entire program, not just your child's classroom, and observe all the caregivers and the children.

Observe The Program

Names of providers.			
Is the Report Card Posted?			
What were the evaluation results?			
Is it a Star-Quality program?			
Are the bathroom and kitchen clean?			
Is the bathroom accessible?			
Are there many toys and books for the children to choose from?			
Additional comments:			

Observe The Caregiver

Names of providers.			
Does the caregiver greet the children when they first enter?			
Does the caregiver talk to the children on their level, make eye contact and really listen to what they have to say?			
Does the caregiver use a calm voice with positive, encouraging words?			
Does the caregiver get down on the floor with the children? Eat with the children?			
Is the caregiver smiling and enjoying the children?			
How many children does the caregiver have?			
Are caregivers able to give individualized attention?			

Observe The Other Children

Names of providers.			
Are most of the children smiling, laughing and busy?			
Do the children look bored?			
Are there discipline problems?			
Are the children given opportunities to make choices?			
Can I picture my child learning and having fun here?			
If I were a child, would I enjoy being here? Additional comments			

Ask questions

For example:

How long has the staff been here?

Can parents visit at any time?

Do the children get to go on walks or field trips?

Are infants taken out of their cribs when they're not sleeping?

How are volunteers used in the classroom?



Age-Specific Observations

Infant/Toddler:

- Are toddlers kept interested with a large variety of activities?
- Are toddlers redirected from inappropriate behavior instead of punished?



Preschooler:

- Are the children read to every day?
- Are children encouraged to communicate and ask “why”? Are their questions answered?
- Are there opportunities for daily hands-on play?
- Do children experience physical activities such as balls, games, and dancing every day?

School-Age:

- Are children read to or read with every day?
- Do children watch TV every day or are opportunities provided for games and hands-on activities?

For an Infant or Toddler.

	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
• Infants are held when given a bottle	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Caregivers talk, read and sing to the babies and toddlers	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Infants can eat and sleep on their own schedules	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Infants are taken out of cribs when not sleeping	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Infants go outside every day	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Plastic gloves are used for diapering	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Child’s and caregiver’s hands are washed after diapering and toileting	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Toilet training begins when the child is ready	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Toys are disinfected daily	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

For a Preschooler:

• Children are encouraged to nap or rest but are given the opportunity to look at books or other quiet activities once they are ready to get up	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Children can bring a favorite stuffed animal for naps	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

For a School-Age Child

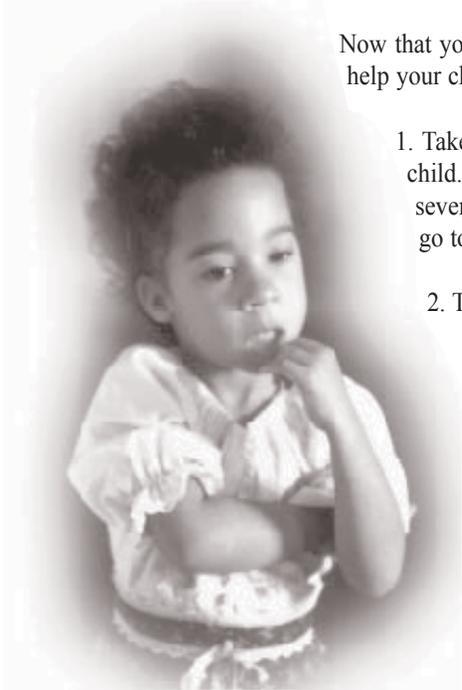
• Child is given time to do homework	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Snacks are provided after school	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Opportunities for outside activities or sports are provided	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Quiet activities are available	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
• Other activities include arts, crafts, cooking games, etc.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Other questions or Comments

GETTING YOUR CHILD READY TO START

Getting Your Child Ready to Start

Now that you have chosen the best child care arrangement for your child, you should help your child get ready for this big change in his/her life.



1. Take your child with you to visit the program before you plan to leave your child. Spend time there helping your child adjust to the setting. If possible make several short visits. Tell your child that he/she will be staying there while you go to work.
2. Try to feel and act positively toward the new experience. Your child will pick up on your feelings and attitudes.
3. Talk to your child about specific things he/she will be doing in child care. "Remember how we saw the children playing in the sand? When you go to child care you will be able to play in the sand too. After storytime, Ms. Marla will take all the children outside to play on the playground." Talk about how and when you will be picking him/her up. "I will come to pick you up after you have nap time and eat your snack."



Communication is key

After you find the right child care facility for you and your child, stay in touch with your child's caregiver. Visit regularly, observe, and talk to your child's caregiver.

Once You've Started Child Care, Establish and Maintain Good Communication



1. Visit often, even if the program provides transportation. Talk to the teachers, look at the lesson plans, check out the parent bulletin board and ask questions.
2. Keep up your end of the bargain: pay on time, pick up your child on time and provide the agency with items (like diapers and formula). Caregivers are very busy, so try not to add to their responsibilities by asking special favors of them (like fixing hair or washing clothes).
3. Let the caregivers know when something has happened at home that may affect your child's behavior or health.
4. Consider the caregiver's feelings. Let them know when you appreciate their work.
5. If you and your caregiver do have a problem, set up a specific time to talk. Most minor difficulties can be resolved at this level. If the problem is not resolved and your child is at a child care center, make an appointment to meet with the director.
6. Stay involved: remember that you and your provider are a team in the quality care of your child.
7. Children should wear "play" clothes. They will be painting, feeding themselves and building with playdough.
8. Keep emergency numbers for backup transportation, parent work numbers and persons to act in your behalf current.

CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL FOR PARE

COUNTIES SERVED

SOUTHEAST SIGNAL CENTERS, INC.**423-629-4174****Fax: 423-629-4653**Bledsoe, Bradley, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs,
Polk, Rhea & Sequatchie

SOUTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER**931-438-2322****Fax: 931-438-4507**Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis,
Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Moore, Perry
& Wayne**Toll Free: 1-866-776-2811**

UPPER CUMBERLAND TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY**931-372-3780****Fax: 931-372-3914****Toll Free: 1-888-621-5753**Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon,
Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren & White

NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE (MARTIN)**731-587-7868****Fax: 731-587-7919****Toll Free: 1-877-424-6080**Benton, Carroll, Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Lake,
Obion & Weakley

SOUTHWEST KIWANIS CENTER FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT**731-664-4233****731-660-7364****Fax: 731-512-1521****Toll Free: 1-800-858-2738**Chester, Decatur, Fayette, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood,
Henderson, Lauderdale, Madison, McNairy & Tipton

SHELBY COUNTY SOUTHWEST TENNESSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**901-333-6051****Fax: 901-333-6052**

Shelby

UPPER EAST TENNESSEE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**423-246-6180****Fax: 423-230-3780****Toll Free: 1-866-215-2936**Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan
Unicoi & Washington

EAST SOUTH UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE (KNOXVILLE)**865-946-1866****Fax: 865-974-1357****Toll Free: 1-877-584-0596**Blount, Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Knox,
Loudon, Monroe, Sevier

EAST NORTH MICHAEL DUNN CENTER (THE HENRY CENTER)**865-882-5289****Fax: 865-882-8565****Toll Free: 1-866-499-5200**Anderson, Campbell, Claiborne, Morgan, Roane,
Scott & Union

MID-CUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES OF DICKSON**Toll Free: 1-866-446-6006**Cheatham, Dickson, Houston, Humphreys, Montgomery,
Robertson, Rutherford, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale & Wilson

DAVIDSON COUNTY TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**615-963-7079****Fax: 615-963-7084**

Davidson

Report Card Glossary

The foundation of your child's care is in individuals who are dedicated to the loving development of your child. This basic foundation must be built upon to ensure the very best care for your child.

Each of these report card areas offers you critical information needed to make the informed choices of what is best for your child.

Director qualifications – This area offers you how much education and experience the center's director has. The director must plan the entire program and train the caregivers. Professional training and experience help the director to plan the best care for your child.

Professional development – This area tells you how much education and experience the caregivers have. Caregivers who have more experience, education, and training are more likely to understand how to meet your child's developmental needs and therefore better prepare them for the future.

Compliance history – This area tells you if there have been any legal enforcement actions such as probation or civil penalties because the provider has broken licensing rules. This is important because the first step in quality child care is to keep your child safe.

Parent/family involvement – This area tells you how the provider involves parents and family in the child care program. Children receive better overall care when the provider has active partnerships with parents and families.

Family and Group Homes are evaluated on three of the above components: compliance history, parent/family involvement, and program assessment.

In addition, they are evaluated on the following components:

Professional development – This area tells you how much education and experience the Primary Caregiver of the home has. Primary Caregivers who have more experience, education, and training are more likely to understand how to meet your child's developmental needs and therefore, better prepare them for the future.

Ratio and group size – This area tell you how many adults are supervising the children in the center and how many children are grouped together. This is very important because more caregivers and smaller groups mean more personalized attention and supervision for your child.

Staff compensation – This part of the report card provides information on the center's pay scale and benefits. A higher star-rating does *not* mean that the center's staff receive higher pay. Instead, this area tells you if all staff are included in a defined pay scale and whether the scale for the teachers is related to their experience, education and training. Staff turnover is stressful for young children, and providers can better help their staff to stay by providing a compensation package.

Program assessment – The program assessment is a 3-4 hour independent, on-site observation in which the agency is rated on the quality of care observed. This rating gives you a very good overall picture of the program's quality.

Business management – This area tells you the Home's policies, philosophy, and business and financial management practices. This is important because good business practices lead to more stability, thus reducing the stress and unhealthy development that can happen when children must face frequent changes.

NOTES
