



# Choosing Care for Your Children: Child Care Centers and Preschools

*Selection of child care is an important task for Kansas parents. The Choosing Care for Your Children series is designed to help you be a better informed consumer.*

## **What is the difference between a center and a preschool?**

A child care center is a facility in which care and educational activities are provided for 13 or more children 2 weeks to 16 years of age for *more than 3 hours and less than 24 hours* per day.

A preschool is a facility in which learning experiences are provided for children who are at least 30 months of age but not old enough to attend kindergarten for *3 hours or less* per day, and where no meal is served.

Before making any decision about day care, *visit* more than one. As you *visit*:

### **Look for safety**

Is there 75 square feet of space outside for each child? Is outside space fenced 4 feet high and free from trash, with shady places for children to play? Is play equipment in good repair? Is climbing equipment securely anchored? Is the playground checked daily for dangerous objects?

Is there 35 square feet of space inside for each child? Is space free of “house hazards” such as uncovered electric plugs or unguarded floor furnaces? Are necessary safety gates placed in proper areas? Are there two exits so

children can easily get out in case of fire? Is all equipment safe and in good condition? Is there sufficient sand, woodchips, or other approved padded material underneath playground equipment? Is play equipment in good condition, with no splinters or missing parts?

Is there a safe water supply, proper sewage disposal, plenty of light and air? Are the radiators or heaters covered? Is there a posted plan for action in case of emergency such as fire or storm? Are first aid kits easily accessible to adults? Are there working smoke detectors in every room of the facility? Is there a list posted of the children’s allergies? Are children’s medications labeled and stored properly away from children? Are all cleaning supplies and poisonous materials locked and out of reach of children?

### **Ask about care**

Have all children had health checks? Are immunizations up to date? Are all adults who will work with your child free from communicable diseases? Are their health assessments on file?

What is the written procedure if your child has an accident or illness? Will you be called immediately? Will your child be taken to your doctor or the hospital emergency room if you cannot be reached? Are the

teachers trained to observe signs of illness? Will they contact you if they think your child is ill?

Are there places and equipment for children to have rest time and naps? Do children have their own bedding and individual cots, cribs, or mats? Are hand washing, teeth brushing, and other health practices encouraged?

Is lunch served? May children have second portions if they wish? Are menus posted? Are snacks served in mid-morning and mid-afternoon? Do all snacks and meals conform to MyPlate guidelines?

Does each child have a place for a coat and other personal belongings?

Are there plans in place in case of emergencies such as fire, flooding, tornados, earthquakes, intrusions, or terrorism?

### Check educational activities

Ask the teacher to show you the *written daily plans* for the group where your child will be. Are they appropriate for your child's age?

Is there a variety of daily activities: active and quiet; individual and group; activities to do indoors and outdoors?

Do the activities give opportunities for children to:

- feel good about themselves?
- interact with other children and adults?
- be creative?
- develop large muscle skills (jumping, climbing) and fine motor skills (using scissors and crayons, putting puzzles together)?
- express themselves and communicate their needs?
- learn new concepts?
- practice self-help skills?
- sing songs, read books, and engage in other language-based activities?

Are materials on low open shelves so the children may choose the things they like to do? Are toys age- and developmentally appropriate for both indoor and outdoor play?

Look around for books, pictures, blocks, puzzles, games, art materials, wheel toys, things from nature, and plants. Does the place have a good feel?

### Talk about discipline

Ask the teacher to show you the *written policy outlining guidance methods*. No teacher may use corporal punishment, verbal abuse, or threats. Withholding or forcing food may not be used as punishment.

### Learn about people at the center

The teacher and teacher's aide are the adults who are with the children in the unit or group. Children should never be left unsupervised, even while sleeping. Licensing regulations require the following adult-child ratios:

Group	Adult/Child Ratio	Unit Size
Infants	1 adult/3 children	9
Infants to 6 years (2 infants per adult, max. 4 infants)	1 adult/4 children	8
Toddlers	1 adult/5 children	10
2 to 3 years	1 adult/7 children	14
2 ½ years to school age	1 adult/10 children	20
3 years to school age	1 adult/12 children	24
Kindergarten children	1 adult/14 children	28
School-age children	1 adult/16 children	32

A center may enroll children from 2 weeks to 16 years of age, but not all in the same group or unit. Each unit must have its own space, equipment, and materials, and assigned teachers who know the children and plan for them. In general, the younger the children, the smaller the group size should be.

Ask about the training and education of teachers who will be working with your child. Does the teacher have training in child development and know how to work with young children? Do staff members have at least a CDA (Child Development Associate) and one year of experience working with children? Do staff members have certification in First Aid and CPR? Have they been trained on child abuse prevention and how to recognize and report suspected abuse?

Listen to the way teachers (and other adults) talk to the children. Are their voices kind? Are their faces pleasant? Do they touch children gently and often? Are the children allowed to follow through on their own ideas, yet receive a teacher's help with the hard spots? Are all the children expected to do the same

thing in the same way, or are they encouraged to “do their own thing”?

Ask about the nurse registration. If they are not licensed, have they been trained on medications and proper doses to administer to children? Do they keep records of what medication was given and to whom?

### **Is it easy for you to get there?**

Is the center located on your way to work? Is it in your neighborhood? Is it convenient to your child’s school?

Is there parking space so you can stop and take your child into the center and go in to pick up your child?

### **Notice the license**

All child care centers and preschools must be licensed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. This means the facility has been inspected. If you have concerns about the facility, call the local health department or KDHE Child Care Licensing.

### **Talk about fees**

Cost may not be the most important thing about a center, but can you pay the bill? When are fees due? Do you pay when your child is sick? Can you arrange for extra care? What happens if you are late picking up your child?

If the center has a “sliding fee scale” or a Purchase of Services Agreement for income-eligible families you will be asked to state your income if you wish to take advantage of either. Contact your local SRS office for information.

### **Before your child goes to center or preschool . . .**

1. Be willing to look at *more than one place*. Shop around for the best one. Call the director; make an appointment, and talk about the services and people.
2. During your visit, use all of your senses (eyes, ears, touch, and nose). Look in all the rooms — this is okay to do. Look for lesson plans to be posted for everyone to see, and see if the environment is arranged with toys and activities that will help your child develop socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. You are going to leave your child in this place. Be sure it suits you.
3. Be ready to give the director information:

- *a little bit about your family*: address, phone number where you work, if there is one parent or two who will take the child to the center and pick up the child.
- *information about your child*: habits; favorite things; allergies; early growth patterns; child’s nickname; names of people who live in the child’s home; name of child’s pet.
- *a health assessment* for your child, completed by your doctor or the Department of Health.
- *a series of “permissions”* to allow your child to go on field trips: have pictures taken for publicity; be taken to your doctor or to the hospital emergency room in case of an accident.
- *emergency information*: telephone numbers where you or a friend of yours can be reached in case of accident or illness. This is required on the first day of attendance.
- *emergency medical release form* so the provider can get care for your child.

4. Ask the provider if they will work with your child if he/she has special needs or chronic concerns such as allergies.
5. Ask for and read carefully the *written policies* of the center or preschool. If there is something you do not understand, talk to the teacher or director.
6. Ask the providers or teachers to explain their ideas about teaching and learning in children and then watch the teacher interact. Observe the environment to see if these reflect what he/she says.
7. Ask the provider/teacher to explain their ideas about family engagement and maybe holidays.

### **After your child is enrolled . . .**

- Listen to your child and talk about the day.
- Pick up your child **on time**.
- Pay fees promptly according to the plan made with the director.
- Inform the teacher when your child is ill or will be absent for other reasons.
- Abide by the written policies.
- Schedule conferences with the teacher to talk about your child’s progress.
- Participate in activities if possible.

- Attend all parent meetings, if possible. Ask questions. Get involved!

## How do you help your child be ready for the child care center or preschool?

Talk to your child about what goes on at the center or preschool. Be sure to mention familiar and enjoyable activities.

Take your child to visit with the teacher when no children are there. Introduce your child to the teachers. Give your child time to “check it all out.”

Stay until your child feels comfortable. Request to eat with the child and offer to pay for the additional meal. You may have to take a day off work, but it will be worth it.

## If problems arise . . .

If a problem should arise, discuss it with the teacher and try to work things out. You should be encouraged by the teacher to visit the center while your child is there. This is your right.

If you have any concerns about the care your child is receiving, call the local health department or KDHE child care licensing office.

If you feel your child has been neglected, or physically or mentally abused while in care or by any one else, immediately contact the local Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) office. Take your child to a physician or hospital for an examination. If the

DCF office is closed, contact your local law enforcement agency.

## And remember . . .

Generally your child’s teachers and caregivers are important persons in your child’s life. Get to know them and share your child’s experiences.

- Be supportive.
- Show your appreciation.
- Give your cooperation.

## Contact information

### Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Child Care Licensing and Registration

Curtis State Office Building

1000 S.W. Jackson, Suite 200

Topeka, KS 66612-1274

Phone: (785) 296-1270

Fax: (785) 296-0803

E-mail: [cclr@kdhe.state.ks.us](mailto:cclr@kdhe.state.ks.us)

[http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/bcclr/child\\_care.html](http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/bcclr/child_care.html)

### Kansas Department for Children and Families

Office of the Secretary

915 SW Harrison Street

Topeka, Kansas 66612

Phone: 785-296-3274

<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/>

### Kansas Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Phone: 1-800-922-5330

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