



# GUIDE TO CHOOSING Child Care

*Helping You Choose the Best Child  
Care Option for Your Family*

**Childcare Resources**  
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**[www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org)**



United Way  
of Central Alabama, Inc.

## **About Childcare Resources**

**Childcare Resources is central Alabama’s only child care resource and referral agency.**

Childcare Resources:

- *Helps families select child care*
- *Trains child care providers*
- *Provides financial assistance to low-to-moderate income working families*
- *Supports parents in understanding healthy child development*

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit United Way partner agency since 1984, Childcare Resources makes quality and affordable child care happen in central Alabama, and we expect our agency to aspire to the same standards of quality that we promote. By providing superior quality customer service, professional programs and services that are delivered at low to no cost, Childcare Resources is committed to strengthening our community by supporting families with children, preparing them to succeed in school and life. The agency serves Blount, Jefferson, Shelby and Walker counties.

***Childcare Resources’ mission is to make quality care and education of children happen by providing information, education and assistance to families, providers of child care and the community.***

**Stay connected with Childcare Resources**



**Links are available on our website: [www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org)**

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*For your convenience,  
**Checklist and Questions to Ask**  
are located at the end of the Guide.*

# Finding Child Care

Childcare Resources' Resource and Referral is a free service that guides families through the process of selecting quality child care. Finding such child care can be difficult especially in central Alabama, where there are hundreds of child care programs. Our trained and dedicated staff understand that this is an important decision for families. We help parents narrow down their choices based on their specific needs, location, kind of care, etc., and provide educational materials so they'll know how to recognize quality child care when they visit potential providers.

Enrolling a child in a quality program means that they are receiving care from a trained professional in a safe, healthy, nurturing and stimulating environment. Parents want to know that their child is receiving the kind of care they need to be healthy, happy and ready for school. Quality child care is an important step toward school success. A child's experience in child care helps shape the foundation of learning that will last a lifetime!

## How to Find Child Care Over the Phone

- Call 205-945-0018, ext. 307 or 800-822-2734, ext. 307
- Speak to a consultant who will ask you specific questions about your child care needs
- Receive by mail, email or fax a customized listing of child care providers along with educational materials

## How to Find Child Care Over the Internet

- Visit Childcare Resources' website at: [www.ccr-bhm.org/locate-child-care](http://www.ccr-bhm.org/locate-child-care)
- Receive a customized listing of child care providers

**Disclaimer:** Please be advised that the list of child care providers offered by Childcare Resources is only intended as a resource. Childcare Resources does not warrant the information concerning any provider nor do we license, endorse, rate or recommend any particular providers. Only you can determine whether the quality of care is appropriate for your child.

## Steps to Locating Child Care

- **Start Early!** Finding the right child care option for your family can take time
- **Contact Childcare Resources.** Call 205-945-0018, ext. 307 or go online to [www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org) for a FREE customized listing of child care options.
- Visit child care programs and ask questions about:
  - ✓ **Staff to Child Ratio**
  - ✓ **Group or Classroom Size**
  - ✓ **Caregiver Education and Turnover**
  - ✓ **Health and Safety**
  - ✓ **Accreditation**
  - ✓ **Family Involvement**
- **Make an Informed Choice.** Visit and tour multiple programs.
- **Stay Involved!** Your child care provider and you are partners. Participate in your program regularly.



## Overview of Licensing in Alabama

Child care programs that are legally operating in Alabama are classified as licensed or licensed exempt. Being licensed means that the child care center, family day care home or family day care group home has been inspected to assure that Performance Standards are met as required by the State Department of Human Resources and the State Fire Marshall's Office. Some programs are also inspected by the state or local Department of Public Health. All programs that require a license must have the license renewed every two years. In Alabama, programs that are licensed exempt include child care centers operated by the following: religious or faith-based organizations, state agencies, local governments, military facilities and programs that operate less than four hours a day.

# **Overview of Licensing in Alabama (continued)**

Performance Standards for licensing include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Safety requirements for facility and equipment as prescribed by the State Fire Marshall
- Records on children and staff, including immunization and health records
- Minimum education or training requirements for staff
- Nutritional requirements for children
- Transportation policies
- Requirements for basic program operations and educational programming
- Disciplinary procedures
- Required staff to child ratios:

## **Staff to Child Ratios in Child Care Centers**

0 up to 18 months	1 to 5
18 months up to 2 ½ years	1 to 7
24 months up to 36 months	1 to 8
2 ½ years up to 4 years	1 to 11
4 years up to school age*	1 to 18
School age* up to 8 years	1 to 21
8 years and older	1 to 22

## **Required Staff to Child Ratios during Napping/Resting**

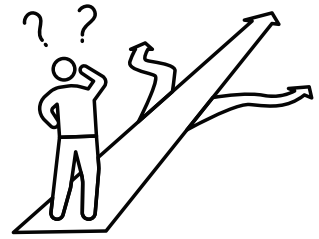
0 up to 18 months	1 to 5
18 months up to 2 ½ years	1 to 14
2 ½ years and older	1 to 36

## **Required Staff to Child Ratios for Sleeping Children in Nighttime Child Care**

0 up to 18 months	1 to 5
18 months up to 2 ½ years	1 to 14
2 ½ years up to 4 years	1 to 18
4 years and older	1 to 25

*\*The term school age in this context refers to children of lawful school age who are enrolled in public or private school.*

# The Different Child Care Options



- **Child Care Centers** provide care for children in various buildings, community centers, places of worship or other facilities. Centers may provide care for infants through school-age children usually separated into same or similar age groups. In Alabama, legally operating child care centers can be licensed or licensed exempt.
- A **Family Day Care Home** provides care for no more than six unrelated children in the caregiver's home and they must be licensed.
- A **Day Care Group Home** provides care for no more than 12 unrelated children in the caregiver's home with two or more caregivers present and must be licensed.
- **Preschool Programs (Mother's Day Out)** can be located in community centers or places of worship. Preschool programs usually operate three to four hours a day, a few days a week for children ranging in age from infants through four-year olds.
- **School-Age Child Care** generally takes place in child care centers, schools, community centers, YMCA/YWCA's or in conjunction with civic park and recreation programs. Care is typically available before and after school, on school holidays and during the summer. School-age child care programs offer care for children in kindergarten through typically 13 years of age.
- **Relative Child Care** arrangements occur when a family relative-- grandparent, aunt, uncle or an adult sibling-- cares for a related child usually in a residential setting.
- **In-Home Child Care** is care provided for a child in his or her home by an individual nanny. As a nanny's employer, parents may be responsible for withholding and remitting payroll taxes; contributing to Social Security; and paying for worker's compensation, insurance and vacation time.



## Child Care Options (continued)

- **Head Start and Early Head Start** are federal programs that promote the growth and development of children from low-income families. Parent involvement, health screenings and family support are included in the programs. Children ages three to five attend Head Start. Early Head Start serves families with children pre-birth to three years of age. Head Start and Early Head Start may be provided in centers or home-based settings. Parents must meet eligibility requirements to enroll. To learn more information on Head Start and Early Head Start, please visit their website at <https://headstart.gov>.
- **First Class: Alabama's Voluntary State Pre-K Program** is managed by the Alabama Office of School Readiness, a division of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. First Class Pre-K provides effective, high quality early childhood experiences to four year old children to prepare them for school success and life long learning. To find Pre-K sites located throughout the state, Visit [www.children.alabama.gov](http://www.children.alabama.gov) or call 334-353-2715 for more information.





# Child Care Concerns and Complaints

If you need to report a licensing concern or want to know if a child care center or family day care home you are considering has had a substantiated (confirmed) complaint, please contact DHR. For child care centers and licensed day care homes, call the Child Care Services Division at 334-242-1425 or 1-866-528-1694. For questions about licensing standards, call DHR or to review the Child Care Licensing and Performance Standards document, you can go visit [www.dhr.alabama.gov](http://www.dhr.alabama.gov) and click on Services and Child Care.



## Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Code of Alabama § 26-14-3 (1975) provides for the mandatory and permissive reporting of child abuse/neglect to a "duly constituted authority," primarily the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and law enforcement, when any person suspects children are being abused or neglected. If you are someone who comes in regular contact with children – physician, teacher, social worker, nurse, child care worker – you should be aware of your legal obligation to report such incidents of suspected or obvious child abuse or neglect. If you are a concerned citizen, neighbor, friend or family member who is aware of such incidents, you should make a report to those who can take action. To report suspected child abuse and neglect, use form: DHR\FCS-1593, which is available at your county DHR office or available online. [www.dhr.alabama.gov/services/Child Protective Services/WrittenReport MandatoryReporters.aspx](http://www.dhr.alabama.gov/services/Child%20Protective%20Services/WrittenReportMandatoryReporters.aspx) or call your local county office.

### County

Blount County

Jefferson County

Shelby County

Walker County

### Number

205-274-5200

205-423-4850

205-669-3000

205-387-5400

### After Hours

205-625-4912

205-324-2135

205-669-4181

205-384-7218

# **Financial Assistance**

## **Child Care Subsidy**

The Office of Child Care Subsidy, a division of the Alabama Department of Human Resources, administers the subsidized child care program funded through the Child Care and Development Fund. The program provides Alabama's low-income families with equal access to child care as they participate in work, educational or training activities. For information and an application, visit [www.dhr.alabama.gov](http://www.dhr.alabama.gov) and click on Services, Child Care, Subsidized Child Care.

## **Supplemental Child Care Program (SCCP)**

Childcare Resources administers a financial aid program for low-to-moderate income working families who meet all five of the following eligibility requirements:

- Live in Blount, Jefferson, Shelby or Walker county.
- Each parent and spouse/partner must work at least 30 hours per week.
- Not eligible for child care assistance from DHR.
- Children are five or under and have not entered kindergarten.
- Qualify according to the Annual Income Eligibility Scale according to family size. For current Eligibility Scale visit our website at [www.ccr-bhm.org/financial-assistance](http://www.ccr-bhm.org/financial-assistance).

**For more information and an application, visit [www.ccr-bhm.org](http://www.ccr-bhm.org) or call 205-945-0018, ext. 307.**

## **Military Child Care Assistance**

Child Care Aware of America through a partnership with the Department of Defense offers military families child care assistance. The program subsidizes active duty and/or deployed service member's child care fees if they are unable to access child care on a military base. The program pays a portion of the family's child care fees directly to the child care provider. For eligibility information, call Child Care Aware of America at 1-800-424-2246 or visit [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org).

## Tax Credits

**Child and Dependent Care Credit** is available to people who, in order to work or look for work, must pay child care for dependents under the age of 13. The credit is also available to those who pay for the care of a spouse or a dependent



of any age who is incapable of self-care and who lives with you for more than half of the year. The credit is calculated based on your income and a percentage of expenses that you incur for the care of qualifying persons to enable you to go to work, look for work, or attend school.

**Earned Income Tax Credit** is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-to-moderate income working individuals and families. To qualify, taxpayers must meet certain requirements and file a tax return, even if they did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a tax return.

**Child Tax Credit** may help to reduce the federal income tax owed for each qualifying child under the age of 17. A qualifying child is one who is claimed as your dependent; was under the age of 17 at the end of the year; is your son, daughter, adopted child, grandchild, stepchild or eligible foster child, your sibling, step-sibling or their descendant and is a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national or a U.S. resident alien. The credit is limited if your modified adjusted gross income is above a certain amount. The amount at which the phase-out begins depends on your filing status.

**For current information about tax credits, visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)**

**Free Tax Preparation Service** is available through United Way of Central Alabama. Call 1-888-421-1266 or 2-1-1 for more information.

**Pre-tax Accounts** for child and dependent care may be available through your employer. This option requires you to estimate your annual expenses (up to \$5,000 a year) and draw those funds throughout the year from an account that has been set up using pre-tax dollars from your payroll deductions. Ask your employer if this is available where you work.

# Quality Indicators

## **Staff-to-Child Ratio** ✓

How many children are attended by each caregiver? The fewer the number of children per caregiver the better attention your child will receive.

## **Group Size** ✓

How many children will be in your child's group? Smaller groups promote calmer and safer environments.

## **Caregiver Education and Turnover** ✓

Ask about the caregiver's training and education. Do teachers attend classes and workshops? How long have the teachers been teaching in the program? Young children will do better when they have a knowledgeable, consistent caregiver present.

## **Health and Safety** ✓

Is the environment clean, tidy, and organized? Are there appropriate discipline and medication policies in place? Are the teachers certified in CPR and first aid for infants and children?

## **Family Involvement** ✓

Are parents invited to participate and share ideas with the program? How will the teacher share information with you about your child's day?

## **Accreditation** ✓

Nationally accredited programs are measured by their standards of quality that have been established by national child care organizations.

### **For more information about national accreditation visit:**

- **National Association for the Education of Young Children**  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- **Association for Early Learning Leaders**  
[www.earlylearningleaders.org](http://www.earlylearningleaders.org)
- **National Early Childhood Program Accreditation**  
[www.necpa.net](http://www.necpa.net)
- **National Association for Family Child Care**  
[www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)
- **National After School Association**  
[www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)

# Alabama Quality STARS

**Alabama Quality STARS**, Alabama’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), is a part of a national systematic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education. The STARS Standards represent an early care and education program’s quality above the state minimum requirements. Alabama Quality STARS is a five STAR “building block” system. Programs must meet all standards at a STAR level before moving to the next level.

## **The Standards are based on four components:**

- ① Staff Qualifications and Professional Development
- ② Management and Administrative Practices
- ③ Learning Environment and Curriculum
- ④ Family Involvement and Community Partnerships

**For more information, visit  
[www.alabamaqualitystars.org](http://www.alabamaqualitystars.org) or call the Alabama  
Quality STARS office at 205-348-1315 or 1-844-883-7827.**



## Resources for Parents

**Vroom** is a family engagement app for parents that can be downloaded free of charge. This resource provides age-appropriate everyday interaction ideas for parents which foster healthy brain development, whether it is during a car ride, a diaper change, at mealtime, book sharing or even having a 1-minute conversation. Vroom was created based on scientific brain research and development supported by the Bezos Family Foundation. Visit [www.joinvroom.org](http://www.joinvroom.org) to learn more or download the app from Amazon, Google Play, or the Apple iStore.



**Help Me Grow** is a free informational line that helps connect families to health and developmental resources for children birth to age eight. A child development specialist is available to provide information and tools to assist children in being prepared to start school healthy and ready to succeed. If you would like some more information, call 2-1-1 (Connects Alabama) and ask for Help Me Grow or visit [www.helpmegrowalabama.org](http://www.helpmegrowalabama.org).



**The Parenting Assistance Line (PAL)** is a collaborative service of the University of Alabama Child Development Resources, the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama and other state agencies. A Parent Resource Specialist will listen, answer questions, and offer helpful information and support to parents for their specific parenting concerns. PAL provides free information to moms, dads, grandparents, and relatives whose children are age birth through adolescence. Call PAL at 1-866-962-3030 Monday through Friday, 8 am – 8 pm or visit the website at [www.pal.ua.edu](http://www.pal.ua.edu).







# Checklist and Questions to Ask

## Documents you should see posted

- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent DHR license, if licensed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent licensing evaluation form, if licensed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent deficiency report, if applicable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Corrective or adverse action notices, if applicable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent fire inspection report.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent health department inspection report and food permit or written permission from health department to cater food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Menu for meals and snacks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency names and numbers for fire department, law enforcement, medical assistance, poison control center and substitute help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency procedures.

## General

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you licensed or exempt from licensure? Nationally accredited?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are background checks required for all staff members?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How long has the program been in operation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ What is the staff to child ratio?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How many children will be in my child's group?
- \_\_\_\_\_ What is your discipline policy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How do you handle medical, fire and weather emergencies?
- \_\_\_\_\_ May I drop in and visit at any time?

## Caregivers/Teachers

- \_\_\_\_\_ Do the caregivers seem to really like children?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do the caregivers get down on each child's level to speak with the child?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are children's needs quickly met even when things are busy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are caregivers trained in CPR, first aid and early childhood development?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are parents' ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are caregivers trained and experienced?

## Environment

- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the outside play area fenced and does it have safe and age-appropriate equipment?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the environment clean and orderly?

## Activities

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are children involved in a variety of activities with a balance of quiet and busy time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is a daily schedule or a lesson plan posted?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are there plenty of age-appropriate clean and safe toys, books and materials?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are toys within reach of the children?