

# Choosing Quality Child Care



**The first five years of a child's life are critical learning years.**

**Consider these tips as you search for a safe, high quality learning environment where your child can grow and thrive:**

## Learning

- Are the play spaces organized with age-appropriate toys and books, puzzles and blocks easy to reach and use?
- Does the child care program offer both structured and unstructured play time daily?
- Do providers frequently read and sing to children throughout the day?
- Does the child care program allow screen time? (National guidelines recommend children less than 2 years old have no screen time. For children 2 years and over the total screen time is less than thirty minutes each week, for educational or physical activity use only. This includes home and child care settings.)

## Program Enrichment

- Does the child care program participate in Montana's Best Beginnings STARS to Quality?
- Is the program accredited by a national organization? Accreditation indicates the program has been recognized by a leading national organization for providing excellent care.
- Does the program participate in the Federal food program (Child and Adult Care Food Program)?

## Supervision

- Are children supervised at all times, including when they are sleeping?
- Are teachers warm, welcoming and interacting with each child?
- Are clear and simple safety rules established with the children?
- Do teachers focus on positive, clear, consistent and fair guidance?
- Are there enough staff-members to supervise all children? See the recommended guidelines for adult-to-child ratios in child care centers on the reverse side.\*

## Health and Safety

- Do teachers follow standards for health and safety, including proper hand washing, diapering, and toileting?
- Is someone always present who has current pediatric (infant/child) CPR and pediatric first aid training?
- Is there a plan for responding to disasters (fire, flood, etc.)?
- Do the children go outside every day unless the weather or conditions don't support outdoor time?
- Is the playground regularly inspected for safety?
- Does the child care program support breastfeeding?
- Are infants held by adults during feeding?
- Does the child care program serve meals?

## Professional Development

- Do the teachers and director have a credential or an early childhood-related degree?
- Have the Director and teacher(s) had specific training on children's development and experience caring for children?
- Do the directors and teachers receive early childhood-related training or education?

## Communication

- Are parents always welcome in the home or center and given a copy of the program's policies?
- Are annual conferences or regular and consistent communication held with parents?

## Adult-to-Child Ratios<sup>1</sup>

The following chart represents the adult to child ratios for all licensed child care types in Montana:

### Child Care Center

**Birth through 23 months 1:4**



**2 years through 3 years 1:8**



**4 years through 5 Years 1:10**



**6 years and over 1:14**



### Family Child Care 1:6

(no more than 3 children can be under the age of 2;  
6 children maximum)



### Group Child Care 1:6

(no more than 3 children can be under the age of 2;  
12 children maximum)



### Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN)

In this more informal type of care, parent and legal guardian selects an individual, often a family member, friend, or neighbor, to care for all children in one family or up to 2 unrelated children.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mtrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?RN=37%2E95%2E623>