



Child Care Department
(406) 247-4700
childcare@hrdc7.org
www.hrdc7.org
7 N 31st St. Billings, MT

A guide to ensuring you and your child get the best care.

The first five years are a critical time of growth and development. High quality care and education gives children the experiences they need to be successful in school while allowing parents the opportunity to support their families.

Don't get caught by these common mistakes!

- ⇒ Read contracts carefully and ask questions.
 - Many providers have different rates and different policies about when your child is absent from care. Ask questions and make sure you and your provider understand each other. You are entering a contract with your provider.
 - Find out if there are any additional fees such as deposits, travel fees, activity fees and supply fees among others.
 - Also, if you are on the Best Beginnings Scholarship they may charge more than what the state will pay for daily and hourly rates. You will be responsible for your co-pay as well as any difference between the state rate and the provider's rates plus any additional fees. If you fail to report moving to a different facility within 1 business day you could also be charged for extra days.
- ⇒ Look into attendance policies
 - Have your schedule handy and make sure they can cover when you need care.
 - Are they open on Holidays or during evenings if you have to work?
 - Are there penalties if you are late picking up or discontinue care without notice?
 - Do they take part-time care if your schedule changes?
 - Do you still get charged if your child misses a scheduled day of care?
 - What is the policy on sick children attending care?



STARS to Quality

Why should parents choose a STARS to Quality program?

STARS programs are continuously improving their ability to provide a healthy, safe, and enriching environment for children. Programs have voluntarily enrolled in STARS to Quality to support Montana's children and families. All licensed programs are eligible to apply.

5-STAR rating system that evaluates and promotes:

- » Education, qualifications, and training
- » Leadership and program management
- » Family/community partnerships
- » High-quality supportive environments
- » Staff/caregiver-to-child ratio and group size

Programs achieve these high standards of quality and strive toward accreditation through hard work and hands on coaching from the qualified staff in HRDC's Child Care Department.

Take a tour and use this checklist!

The Child Care should be willing to let you and your child see children being cared for and the entire facility.

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?
- Is there a posted program and activity schedule?

Professional Development

- Do the teachers and director have an early childhood-related degree or certificate?
- Have the caregivers had specific training on children's development and experience caring for children?
- Do the caregivers receive on-going early childhood related training or education?

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)?

Health and Safety

- Do teachers follow standards for health and safety... including proper hand washing, diapering, toileting and sanitizing surfaces?
- Do all caregivers have current pediatric (infant/child) CPR and pediatric first aid training?
- Is there a plan for responding to disasters such as a fire or flood?
- Do the children go outside every day unless the weather or conditions don't support outdoor time?
- Is the playground regularly inspected for safety and kept secure?
- Does the child care program support breastfeeding?
- Are infants held by adults during feeding?
- Does the child care program serve quality meals/snacks and how do they handle food allergies?
- Is there a posted menu?

Supervision

- Are children supervised at all times, including when they are sleeping?
- Are teachers warm and welcoming while engaging with each child?
- Are clear and simple safety rules established with the children?
- Do teachers focus on positive, clear, consistent and independence building guidance?
- Are there enough staff to supervise all children in appropriate age groups?

In a Center 1 adult may care for...
4- infants (under 2 years old)

8- 2-3 year olds

10- 4-5 year olds

14- 6 year olds and over

Ratios for Family & Group Care vary slightly

Learning

- Are age-appropriate toys, books, puzzles and blocks organized as well as 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.)

You can check if a facility is licensed or has repeated licensing deficiencies at:

ccubs-sanswrite.hhs.mt.gov/MontanaPublic/ProviderSearch.aspx

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Our Referral Specialist can get you a list of child cares meeting your criteria, including STARS facilities.