

A Parent's Guide to Day Care

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▶ Child Care Information line 1-800-862-5252

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Dear Parent:

When you choose licensed day care, you and your family join your child in new experiences and relationships. You, the day-care director, child-care staff, and other people in the day-care center have a responsibility to protect the health, safety, and well being of your child. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Licensing Division, is part of this partnership, too.

Minimum standards require your day-care provider to give you a copy of this pamphlet. You need to sign the receipt form to verify that you have received it and discussed the material with facility staff.

What is day-care licensing?

The Licensing Division was established by law to regulate child-care facilities to help protect the health, safety, and well being of children in care.

With the assistance of child-care providers and experts in areas such as child development, early childhood education, fire safety, health, and sanitation, the Licensing Division develops minimum standards.

Licensing staff inspect day-care centers, private kindergartens and nursery schools, some unaccredited private schools, group day-care homes, and drop-in care centers to be sure that minimum standards are met. The staff also investigate complaints about violations of the minimum standards and the child-care licensing law.

Your day-care facility is responsible for meeting minimum standards. Many day-care programs exceed these requirements. Licensing does not regulate day-care fees, collection policies, or the kind of learning program your day-care facility offers. Each facility has its own special personality and approach to educating and caring for children. Parents can choose the kind of program that best meets the needs of their child and family.

It is important for you to know

- When you visit a day-care facility, ask to see the license. The license means that the day-care facility met the minimum licensing standards the last time it was inspected for such things as fire, sanitation, and safety; the number of child-care staff required; staff qualifications; and requirements for special services.
- Minimum standards prohibit persons who have been convicted of certain crimes from having contact with children in care.
- Compliance with minimum standards does not guarantee high quality child care. They are called "minimum standards" because no one is allowed to operate below these standards.
- A copy of the minimum standards is available for you to review at your day-care facility. You can also request a copy of these standards from your local day-care licensing office. A list of these offices may be found on the DFPS website: **www.dfps.state.tx.us** or by calling the Child Care Information Line at 1-800-862-5252.

Establish a good relationship with the day-care facility

- Spend time at the day-care facility before you enroll your child. Ask questions about the program and observe the activities. Make sure the day-care facility has all the information needed about your child and family to provide good care.
- Work with the staff of the day-care facility you choose. Parent involvement is an important part of a successful experience with day care.
- Read all the material the day-care provider gives you. In addition to material required by licensing standards, each facility has its own policies and requirements. It's important that you understand these requirements before you enroll your child. It's equally important, once your child is in care, to read the notices, special requests, notes, and other materials the day-care provider sends home.
- Drop in occasionally during the day to observe how your child interacts with staff and other children, and get a good picture of the day-to-day activities at the center. Be careful not to disrupt activities.
- Keep your side of the bargain. Pick up your child on time.
- Discuss concerns with the day-care director. Be aware that the teacher's main responsibility is working with the children. Don't be offended if the teacher can't spend much time talking with you when you drop off or pick up your child. If you need more time to talk about your child, set up a conference.
- It's important to let the day-care facility know about things at home that may affect how your child is doing in day care.

When your child starts day care

- Remember that it's normal for a child to have some fears and misgivings about starting day care. Children need time to get used to new situations. Prepare your children for the change as far in advance as possible. Discuss their concerns. If you're enthusiastic, chances are they soon will be, too.
- Depending on their ages, some children will temporarily "act out" their feelings by clinging to you and refusing to let go, forgetting their toilet training, having bad dreams, sucking their thumbs, or other such behavior.
- Work with the day-care director and your child's teacher on this.

Talk things over with your child

Make an opportunity each day to gently ask questions when your children are quiet and feeling secure and protected. Share their excitement about new friends, new skills, and new abilities; listen to their concerns; and give them a chance to boast about their achievements.

Parent responsibilities

The day-care facility must get certain information and records from parents to ensure the child's health and safety, handle emergencies, and meet minimum standards. If you do not provide this material, the day-care facility will not be in compliance with the minimum standards.

- Complete an enrollment form that includes basic information about your child; telephone numbers where you can be reached during the day; authorization for emergency care for your child; and written permission for swimming, other water activities, and transportation services.
- Tell the caregiver about any special concerns or needs, including allergies, medical history, and current medications.
- Give the day-care facility a copy of your child's immunization record showing immunizations against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, Haemophilus influenza type b, Hepatitis B and varicella. In some parts of Texas, a tuberculosis test report and Hepatitis A vaccine is also required. For school-age children, you can sign a statement that these records are on file at the school.
- Provide a doctor's statement that your preschool child is physically able to participate in the day-care program.
- Inform the day-care facility in writing about who is permitted to take your child from the facility. Generally, the day-care facility may only release your child to you or to an adult you designate.
- The facility may allow a school-age child to leave the facility alone or allow an older brother or sister to pick up a child if you request this in writing. The facility is only allowed to do this when all safety considerations have been met.
- Make sure that child-care staff know the child has arrived. Make sure that staff are aware when you come to pick up your child. Don't leave your child at the front door, and never leave your child at the facility before opening or after closing.
- Other requirements must be met if the day-care provider gives medication to your child, if your child is an infant, or if your child needs special care or a special diet.

What happens if your child is ill or injured?

- The day-care facility is not allowed to admit a child who seems to be sick unless a doctor or nurse gives approval in writing. This may cause problems for parents, but it is necessary to prevent a sick child from infecting other children.
- If your child has been absent because of a contagious illness, the day-care facility must follow guidelines concerning when the child can return to day care.
- If your child appears seriously sick or injured while at the center, the caregiver must call you immediately. It's important that you pick up your child as soon as possible.
- If your child needs immediate medical attention, the center must call your child's physician, take the child to the nearest emergency room or minor emergency clinic, or call for an ambulance. This is why the day-care facility must have your authorization for emergency medical care.

Liability insurance requirements

- Ask the day-care director whether or not the facility carries liability insurance. Texas law requires day-care facilities to carry liability coverage in the amount of \$300,000 per occurrence to cover a child when the child is in care of the facility.
- Liability insurance coverage is not required if the insurance cannot be secured due to financial reasons; if the licensee is unable to locate an underwriter willing to issue a policy; or if the current policy limits have been extended. You are to be notified, in writing, that the coverage is not available.

Take a good look

As you become more familiar with your child's day-care program, you will see many strong points. Almost all day-care facilities strive to provide a warm, loving, safe, and healthy environment for children. Look for these characteristics, but also be aware of warning signals that tell you something is wrong.

Feel secure when you see that:

- the facility welcomes you to visit any time, and you are invited to observe the class or participate in activities.
- staff are alert and involved with the children.
- staff seem warm and interested in the children. There is spontaneous laughter, hugging, and eye-to-eye contact.
- staff are gentle, but firm when necessary.
- the facility is clean and attractive.
- your child is relaxed and happy after the initial adjustment period.
- your child seems physically well cared for. Staff inform you of minor accidents and tell you when your child doesn't feel well.
- children seem involved with constructive activities, and they get individual attention.

Be seriously concerned when you see that:

- parents are not encouraged to visit the facility.
- children are left without direct adult supervision.
- adults spend much time scolding, ordering, and yelling at children.
- adults are physically rough with children or allow rough play.

- the building is dirty, or you see unsafe conditions.
- your child is unhappy about being left at the facility, and this doesn't improve with time.
- a child comes home bruised or injured, and the center can't explain what happened. (The child may not remember minor bruises and scrapes received when playing, however.)
- children seem aimless, bored, angry, or frustrated, or there are too many children to supervise.

When things aren't going well

You may find yourself displeased about something that has happened at the facility. Talk about these things with facility staff. There may be a misunderstanding that can easily be resolved.

If the situation isn't resolved and you believe minimum standards are not being met, call the local day-care licensing office. They will handle your call discreetly.

A licensing representative will investigate your complaint. The licensing representative may need to interview you and your child and may also interview other children at the facility.

If the licensing representative finds that a standard has been violated, the facility will be notified and a time set for the facility to correct it.

Licensing staff may revoke a license if a facility doesn't meet minimum standards. The department does not take action to revoke a license unless children are in immediate danger or the licensee refuses to comply with standards.

If you suspect child abuse

Most day-care facilities, like most parents, take good care of children. Child abuse is rare, and it is very unlikely that anything like this will happen to your child.

If you do suspect that your child has been abused or sexually molested, report the situation immediately. Use the toll-free Child Abuse Hotline number 1-800-252-5400 or 1-512-834-3784 to report abuse or neglect that has occurred in Texas. The situation will be investigated immediately, and you will be given referrals or recommendations for help for your child and family.

Should agency staff interview or examine your child during an abuse investigation, a reasonable effort will be made to notify you within 24 hours after the interview or examination.

Parents who suspect or believe that their child has been abused in day care sometimes remove their child from care, but don't report the problem. This leaves other children in danger. State law requires everyone, including day-care providers, to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately.

Immunity

When people make a report of suspected child abuse in good faith, they are immune from any liability. When the department investigates a complaint, the identity of the complainant is not revealed.

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