

# A Guide to Choosing the Right Child Care for You and Your Child

A Johnson County Health Department Resource



July 30, 2009

The purpose of this information packet is to help the parents of Johnson County to make an informed decision when placing your child(ren) under the care of a child care provider in Johnson County. As a parent it is your responsibility to make sure your child is in a safe and nurturing place that encourages learning and development. This information packet will inform and guide you through the process of choosing a daycare setting that fits the needs of you and your child. The goal of this guide is to educate you and give you resources to narrow down your search results. It will also give you an idea of some questions to ask and observations to make when interviewing promising prospective providers. Lastly, it will show you how to access documents that you have rights to in order to make the best informed decision for your family.

## Finding the type of child care that fits:

The first step is to select a child care environment that you and your child are comfortable in. There are many different types of child care with the biggest difference being how many children are in care at once and whether the delivery of the child care is done in a home or in a child care center. It is important to understand what defines one type of child care from another.

- Child Care in a Home

- This type of care caters to smaller groups of kids in a home type setting.

- **Licensed Day Care Home**

- A maximum of 10 children under 16 years old. (see table below)
        - 1 child minimum
      - Total child count includes kids related to the provider under the age of 11
      - Number of children in care depends on the age of the children

Maximum Number of Children Under 18 Months	Maximum Number of Children 18 Months to Kindergarten Age	Kindergarten Age to Age 11	License Capacity
0	7	3	10
1	5	4	10
2 • P	4	3	9
3 r	3	2	8

- Provider Requirements

- 18 years old or older
        - Completed First-Aid and child care job related training or readings
        - KBI Background check including criminal history of child abuse and/or neglect on ALL persons living, working, or volunteering in the home.
        - Licensed homes are **inspected annually** by Johnson County Health Department surveyors to check compliance with regulations, safety, and well being of the children in care
        - Must have the approval of the Fire Marshall for fire safety.



- **Child Care in a home continued...**

- **Group Licensed Daycare Home**

- Maximum of 12 children under 16 and this total includes children under 11 years old that are related to the provider

- Usually in the home of the provider, but can be a residence not owned by the provider.



Age of Children Enrolled	License Capacity
All 2 1/2 years to 11 Years of Age	9
All 3 Years to 11 Years of Age	10
All Kindergarten Age to 11 years of Age	12

License Capacity, Two Adults *			
Maximum Number of Children Under 18 Months	Maximum Number of Children 18 Months to Kindergarten	Kindergarten Age Child ** to Age 11	License Capacity *
1	8	3	12
2	7	3	12
3	6	3	12
4	4	2	10

Maximum # Children 18 Months to 2 1/2 Years	License Capacity
0	5

- **Group Daycare Home Continued...**

- Provider Requirements:
      - 18 years old or older
      - Completed First-Aid and child care job related training or readings
      - KBI Background check including criminal history of child abuse and/or neglect on ALL persons living, working, or volunteering in the home.
      - Group homes are inspected annually by Johnson County Health Department surveyors to check compliance with regulations, safety, and well being of the children in care

- Must have the approval of the Fire Marshall for fire safety.

- **Registered Day Care Home**

- A maximum of 6 children ranging in age from newborn to 16 years old with no more than 3 children under 18 months old
  - 1 child minimum
- Children under 12 that are related to the provider count toward the total children count.
- Provider Requirements
  - 18 years old or older
  - Completed First-Aid and child care job related training or readings
  - KBI Background check including criminal history of child abuse and/or neglect on ALL persons living, working, or volunteering in the home.
  - Registered homes fill out a safety evaluation stating the safety of the home in which care is being administered.
  - A Registered Family Daycare is **NEVER inspected unless a complaint is being investigated.**

- **Child Care in a Center**

- This type of facility caters to a larger number of children on site at a time.

- **Child Care Centers**

- Child care and educational activities for 13 or more children ranging from 2 months old to 16 years of age.
- Centers are required to have a qualified Program Director, requirements include:
  - Employed Full-time
  - Completed First-Aid and child care job related training or readings
  - There are a number of levels of program Director licensing and this depends on the Program Director's prior experience and/or college credits, showing proficiency in early childhood education.
  - KBI Background check including criminal history of child abuse and/or neglect on ALL persons living, working, or volunteering in the center.
  - Program Director and staff training directly affect how many children that can be cared for at any given time
  - Centers have to maintain, at **ALL** times the established child : adult ratios (see table at the top of the next page)



Centers Continued...

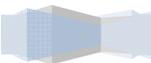
Age of Children	Minimum Staff/Child Ratio	Maximum Number Of Children per Unit
Infants (2 weeks to 12 months)	1 to 3	9
Infants to 6 years	1 to 4 (Max. of 2 Infants)	8 (Max. of 4 Infants)
Toddlers (12 months to 2 1/2 years if walking alone)	1 to 5	10
2 years to 3 years	1 to 7	14
2 1/2 years to school age	1 to 10	20
3 years to school age	1 to 12	24
Kindergarten enrollees	1 to 14	28
School age	1 to 16	32

- Day Care Centers are inspected annually by Johnson County Health Department surveyors to check compliance with staffing, regulations, safety, and well being of the children in care

Preschool



- This type of setting is intended to care and educate children who are not yet old enough for kindergarten eligibility.
- Like child care centers, Adult: Child ratios must be maintained at all times. (see table in Child Care Centers for ratios as they are the same in preschools)
  - Kids need to be 30 months of age or older.
  - May have fewer than 13 children so long as facility meets requirements of a preschool
  - Run in 3 hour sessions and do not provide meals
  - The license held by the preschool determines how many students can be enrolled and requires a qualified Program Director. In order to do this the Program Director must:
    - Be employed during all hours of operation
    - Completed First-Aid and child care job related training or readings
    - KBI Background check including criminal history of child abuse and/or neglect on ALL persons living, working, or volunteering in the center.



## I know what type of care I want... How can I get a list of some that fit our needs?

Now that we have an understanding of what types of child care are available, the next step is to choose which of these best fit the needs of you and your child. Once a provider type has been selected, it is time to obtain a list of providers. This is where a Resource and Referral Agency comes in. The role of these agencies is to provide parents a list of daycares that fit your needs. They can search their database of child care providers and can filter out daycares that wouldn't match the needs of your family. You can search based on location, hours of operation, current openings, and type of daycare (registered, licensed home, licensed group, and centers). Searches are catered to you and what you are looking for. It is important to know the two agencies that serve Johnson County. Both of these agencies provide a wealth of knowledge and resources. It is highly recommended to visit each of their websites and become familiar with their services. Keep in mind that child care openings become available and they also become filled on a daily basis. Don't get discouraged and keep in contact with your Resource and Referral Agency to stay up to date. Here's how to contact them:

### 1. Daycare Connection

- (913) 529-1200
- <http://www.daycareconnection.org/>
  - 8855 Long  
Lenexa, KS 66215

### 2. Family Conservancy

- (913) 342-1110
- <http://www.thefamilyconservancy.org/>
  - 626 Minnesota Ave  
Kansas City, KS 66101



## Now that I have a list of 3-5 providers that I'm interested in... What next?

### Interview them

The only way to learn about these providers is to go and spend some time with them. On your visits you want to be a good consumer and ask as many questions as you can, while making observations of the facility and staff. Remember there is no such thing as a dumb question when it comes to your child's development and well being. Make sure to talk not only to the provider, but also talk to other employees, and be observant of your surroundings. You also need to visit the provider while they have kids in care, unannounced to see how the child care is being delivered. Through this regimen of announced and unannounced visits, you should be able to get a feel of how the facility is run.

## Questions to Ask

(A good interview checklist is available thru the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies at: <http://www.kaccrra.org/PDFs/FAMpdfs/ParentChecklist.pdf>)

1. Are you a licensed or registered child care provider?
  - a. If you are interviewing a provider that you found by means other than Daycare Connection or Family Conservancy ask to see the license or registration.
    - i. To protect yourself against enrolling in an illegally ran child care, before making your final decision be sure to check the providers credentials with the county or state. You can do this by calling:
      1. Johnson County Health Department. They can tell you over the phone if the provider is licensed or registered. Legally that is the extent of the information that the County Health Department can make available to you.
        - a. Stacey Stroh: A/CCF Program Aide
          - i. (913) 477-8339
        - b. Dottie Davis: Program Aide
          - i. (913) 477-8068
        - c. Eldonna Chesnut: Division Director
          - i. (913) 477-8366
      2. Call KDHE and ask them about the provider's credentials.
        - a. (785) 296-1270
2. What is your rate for my child(ren)?
  - a. Financial assistance may be available if you meet certain financial criteria through the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS).
    - i. To check your eligibility on the internet access:
      1. [http://www.srskansas.org/ISD/ees/child\\_care.htm](http://www.srskansas.org/ISD/ees/child_care.htm)
3. Ask for references from both currently enrolled families and families with children that were at one time enrolled.
  - a. Make sure to follow up with the provided references and have the references give you as much information as possible.
4. What kind of training or experience do you have in child care?
  - a. Prior exposure and experience with children is very important.
    - i. Licensed providers need a minimum of 5 clock hours of training to renew their license annually whereas registered providers aren't required to have any.
      1. When it comes to provider clock hours of training... the more the better.
  - b. Were the class hours of training done through a KDHE approved source?
    - i. Johnson County Health Department has many classes available that are KDHE approved.
  - c. CPR training is highly encouraged but not currently required.
  - d. Any other accreditations or degrees obtained? (Associates degree or Bachelors Degree?)
  - e. Also note the experience of anyone employed or volunteering in the care of your children.
5. Is your facility accredited by any nationally recognized organization such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children?
  - a. Any additional accreditation shows a child care provider has gone above and beyond the call of duty. These things are always good to note.

6. Are you a member of the food program?
  - a. This is a good thing for your provider to be involved in. The food program is run through a separate agency at no cost to the provider that helps offset some of the costs of food and food preparation to the provider. Providers have this added benefit to do things right and prepare nutritious and safe meals. In order to be in the food program it requires the provider to take extra steps to ensure quality nutrition for your children.
  - b. Food Program employees visit the provider 3 times annually. Two of these visits are unannounced and help to serve as quality control in addition to the unannounced annual visit by the Johnson County surveyors.
    - i. The food program provides extra sets of trained eyes studying and critiquing the provider's child care practices. These extra layers of quality control help to ensure quality of care.
  - c. Centers have to meet a different set of criteria than home providers, making it a little more unlikely for centers to be involved in the food program.
7. What are the hours of operation for your facility?
  - a. **Especially Note: No matter the child care setting, it is your right as a parent to have access to the daycare facility and your child at any time during the daycare's hours of operation. In fact, it is highly encouraged to regularly visit unexpectedly to check on your child in his/her everyday environment.**
8. Is there any flexibility if I get held up at work?
9. What is your mission and/or philosophy when it comes to caring for children?
10. What kind of activities will your child be taking part in on a daily basis?
  - a. You are looking for age appropriate activities, interactions, and stimulation. Infants need to be touched, held, and talked to, to help them in their development. Toddlers need to be able to interact and safely explore their surroundings.
11. What kind of meals and snacks do you provide the children in your care?
  - a. Meals and snacks should include:
    - i. Breakfast:
      1. Should include a fruit, veggie, or a juice.
      2. A bread or cereal product
      3. Milk
    - ii. Meal
      1. Meat, poultry, fish, egg, cheese, cooked peas, beans or peanut butter
      2. A total of 2 fruits and /or veggies in any combination.
      3. Bread or cereal product
      4. Milk
    - iii. Snacks
      1. Milk or a product of milk
      2. Fruit, veggie, or full strength juice
      3. Meat or meat alternate.... Or a bread/bread product.
12. What kinds of toys are available to my child?
  - a. Infants need to be able to explore their senses. Look for toys that stimulate the infant to use their sight, touch, and sense of smell, and hearing. Toddlers need toys that are accessible and keep them actively exploring. Cause and effect toys are encouraged as they provide a response to a stimulus, advancing the child's learning and development.
13. How many children are currently in your care?

- a. The more kids that are under the providers care means the less individual attention your child will receive. This needs to be kept in mind when making your choice. Also make sure the provider is licensed for that many children.
  - b. Daycare centers are required to maintain a child to adult ratio at ALL times.
14. Do the children get to play outside, even when it's cold?
- a. Kansas Child Care Licensing and Registration Laws (KAR 28-4-116a4A) states that each child over 18 months of age shall have at least one hour of outdoor play daily, and each child under 18 months needs to be taken outdoors daily. The only exception is if by going outside it would harm the child's health.
15. How much TV and computer "Screen Time" daily?
- a. TV watching should be a minimum. Infants and toddlers learn and develop through play; it almost goes without saying that playing is an important tool in the child's development.
16. What kinds of emergency plans do you have in place?
- a. All providers should have posted in plain sight emergency plans for things like fire, flood, tornado, and serious injury.
17. Ask about discipline policy.
- a. Punishing a child by hitting, spanking, or smacking is strictly prohibited. The provider should have a policy in place and made clear to the parents before enrollment.
  - b. Other prohibited punishments include:
    - i. Anything that will scare, humiliate, or confine the child in any way
    - ii. Withholding or forcing food.

### Things to Observe

1. Note the overall cleanliness and safety of the environment that the children will be in.
2. Note how sanitary the facility is.
  - a. Should be free of dirty dishes and trash.
3. The space should be clean and free of clutter, with covered trash cans, covered outlet covers, and sharp edges protected.
4. Hazardous materials should be out of reach or locked away.
  - a. Anything with a warning label (shampoo, deodorant, dish soap, cleaners, sharps) need to be stored either 5 feet or higher or behind a locked cabinet inaccessible to the children.
    - i. If one child can open a child-proof lock, it needs to be replaced with a different type immediately, as it is no longer deemed inaccessible to the children.
5. Look at the space used for napping, quiet time, and relaxing.
  - a. Infants are to sleep in a crib or playpen only.
  - b. Noise should be limited, and it should be in a place that can be easily monitored by the provider.
  - c. The bedding should be clean and provide adequate space for rest (2 feet in all directions)
6. Children's personal belongings need to be stored in an individualized space.
7. Take a look at the outdoor play area/playground and make sure that toys are well anchored and that there is adequate ground cover with no sharp or hazardous objects within the children's play areas.
8. Most importantly, look at the children that are in care at the time.

- a. Are the children content, secure, involved and active, safe, happy? All of these things are important in the development of your child.

## **I have a few places that I like after interviewing them...What next?**

Hopefully you were able to make good observations and have been able to rule your list down to under 3. Now is one of the most important parts of making your choice, doing your homework. As parents you can take advantage of the Kansas Open Records Act, and access state records through Kansas Department of Health and Environment. You have the right to inspect and obtain copies of public records which are not exempted from disclosure due to a specific law. You must request the records, and you are only going to get what you ask for, so it is important to know what you are asking for and what the documents mean when you get them. It is wise to do this as far in advance as possible to allow adequate time to receive the documents from KDHE (sometimes taking 3+ weeks). In addition to obtaining the hard copy records, few people realize that you can call KDHE and ask for verbal highlights of the file. This is the best option if you are pressed for time. This could save you a little money rather than having the hard copies sent to you, but the hard copies are money well spent so that you can go over them on your own time and really get an understanding of the things you are reading.

Call KDHE at (785) 296-1270

- When talking to the person you want to:

1. Know the Names and addresses of the providers home/facility so that you can give them to KDHE staff and ask, "I am a parent seeking daycare in Johnson County and I have narrowed my search down to a few child care providers. I would like a verbal run down on Provider X, located at Address X; I am concerned with anything in the previous 2 years."
  - a. Have a pen and paper ready to jot down some notes, Verbally request:
    1. Previous 2 Annual Survey Results
    2. Complaint investigations and the results of the investigation
    3. Compliance checks
    4. Enforcement actions involving the daycares

While you have the KDHE staff on the phone, in addition to the verbal description of the providers, tell the staff member you would like to do an open records request to obtain documents pertaining to Provider X at Address X. Keep in mind there will be a charge for these documents (currently \$0.25/ page and \$7/hr of administrative time). Processing your request may take some time because it requires a staff member going thru the file and covering up personally identifying items for the protection of the others associated with the daycare. Also know that centers generally tend to have more paperwork than homes. So, at this point:

- They will probably tell you to send them an email at [cclr@kdheks.gov](mailto:cclr@kdheks.gov), and make sure to put "open records request" in the subject line. Remember to give them the name and addresses of the childcare facilities you are interested in, your personal address and phone number, and to request the following 4 documents:
  1. Previous 2 years of Annual Surveys (If the provider is Registered, then they will not have these in their file, because the county surveyors never go to these residences for anything other than complaint investigations by Kansas statute).

- a. The annual surveys are similar to a yearly check up. They could be pages long, don't let this discourage you as they are standard paperwork in the file. The important things to note on these surveys are the findings and corrections.
- b. Check for habitual or repeated findings and if they are of concern address them with the provider.

2. All complaint investigations documentation

- a. These are of major concern due to the fact that someone close to the daycare, or someone that has had contact with the child care facility was concerned enough to send in a complaint to the state/county.
- b. Pay special attention to concerning complaints like safety issues and providers caring for more children than their license allows. These are particularly important to the well being of your child.
- c. Surveyors check the validity of each complaint by going to the facility and conducting an investigation.
  - i. Complaints can result in one of two ways.
    1. Complaint was substantiated- meaning the complaint was proven true with significant evidence. (These are important to note)
    2. Complaint was unsubstantiated- meaning the complaint was not proven or disproven, not enough evidence to come to a concrete conclusion.
- d. To turn in a complaint on a provider, call the Johnson County Health Department Child Care Division (Dottie, Stacey, or Eldonna) at the numbers listed below.
- e. It's important to understand that if the provider is of the "Registered" type, any paperwork in their file is a result of complaints, as they are not checked annually by the county surveyors; therefore they do not have annual surveys on file.

3. All compliance checks in the past 2 years

- a. This paperwork answers the question, is the facility following rules and regulations set forth by the state and county.
- b. These are also of importance if there are any safety issues discovered. Also note the corrections that the provider did to resolve any problems.

4. All Enforcement action

- a. These are of major concern, address findings with the provider.
- b. Make sure that since then there has been resolution to this conflict.

- If you have any questions on findings from these records or complaints about the providers you are involved with you can get them addressed by calling the Johnson County Health Department Child Care Licensing division by calling:
  - Stacey Stroh: A/CCF Program Aide
    - (913) 477-8339
  - Dottie Davis: Program Aide



- (913) 477-8068
- Eldonna Chesnut: Division Director
- (913) 477-8366

One last homework item that would be wise to look at would be checking the Kansas Bureau of Investigation Offender Registry for violent, drug, and sexual offenders in the areas around the child care facilities.

- [http://www.accesskansas.org/kbi/offender\\_registry/](http://www.accesskansas.org/kbi/offender_registry/)

Doing your homework on your short list of daycares will hopefully help you decide on a daycare that is fitting for your situation and prove to be a great experience for you and your child. Hopefully this guide was a valuable resource in your search for quality child care. Remember, when choosing child care you need to be a careful consumer. Make sure to do your homework, understand the terminology, and know the differences between registered and licensed providers. Use Daycare Connections and the Family Conservancy, as they are great sources of information for parents and providers alike. Be prepared with lots of questions for the providers when you are interviewing with them, and know what observations to make while you are there. Lastly, know how to obtain records from KDHE via the Kansas Open Records Act. The parent that takes special care to do all this will undoubtedly make a well informed decision for you and your child.

## Sources:

Kansas Department of Health and Environment: Child Care Licensing and Registration Division

- <http://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/forms.html>

Johnson County Health Department Child Care Facilities Program.

- <http://health.jocogov.org/adf/childfac.shtml>

SRS Financial Aid Eligibility

- [http://www.srskansas.org/ISD/ees/child\\_care.htm](http://www.srskansas.org/ISD/ees/child_care.htm)

Kansas Open Records Act Information

- [http://www.dol.ks.gov/es/html/kora\\_DRH.html](http://www.dol.ks.gov/es/html/kora_DRH.html)

