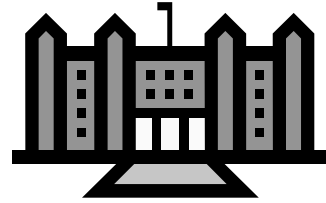


CHOOSING A CHILD CARE CENTER



Centers generally care for children aged two to six who are potty-trained and have all necessary immunizations. Centers traditionally are not as flexible regarding hours, fees and special services as are Family Child Care Homes. Standard operating hours are generally Monday–Friday, 7 am–6 pm. Some centers offer scholarships or sliding scale fees for income-eligible families.

Environment

Child care centers are institutional by nature. Centers are usually located in schools, religious facilities, and public or private buildings. A center may be a part of a large corporation or locally owned. Center philosophies vary, but their goals are usually centered on meeting a child’s physical, emotional, cognitive and developmental needs to promote school readiness. Some centers focus on a specific teaching method, such as High Scope, Montessori, or Waldorf. Center programs tend to be organized around the care and education of a larger group of children. Depending on age, children receive care in separate areas at the center so that their safety can be monitored and their activities coordinated in appropriate ways.

Licensing

All centers providing child care are required to be licensed. The exceptions are centers that operate less than 12 weeks out of the year (e.g., vacations and holidays only) or that operate less than 16 hours per week. Regulations state that there must be 35 square feet of indoor space and 75 square feet of outdoor play space per child. (In San Francisco’s Financial District, it is a rarity to find a child care center that has 75 square feet of outdoor space per child. Since this is an area many parents request because of its proximity to their work, centers opt for a waiver for the outdoor space requirement.) Centers must also comply with certain health and safety standards.

Staffing

At least one staff member who has completed the required 15 hours of health and safety training, including pediatric CPR and first aid, must be on site at all times. In addition, the staff person(s) must complete components relating to immunization and communicable diseases. All teachers working in centers are required to have 12 units of ECE (early childhood education). Teachers’ assistants must have 6 ECE units. Directors, in addition to having 12 ECE units, must have three additional units in administration. Licensing is very specific about what course work these units must be in; 3 units of child

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development; 3 units of child, family and community; three units of curriculum planning for young children; and three additional curriculum units in a specific area of interest (i.e., music, art, dance, etc.) Teachers in subsidized centers are required to have a children's center permit (24 ECE units).

Capacity and Teacher-to-Child Ratios

Capacity for Child Care Centers is determined on the basis of the initial application review done by the Department of Social Services Community Care License Division. Among other things, this review takes into consideration fire clearance, available space, and the number of available staff. Regulations for teacher-to-child ratios vary according to the type of centers (subsidized or non-subsidized) and the ages of the children in the group.

In non-subsidized centers the teacher-to-child ratios are as follows:

- Infants (0–2 years old) 1:4
- Preschool (2–6 years old) 1:12 (or 1:18 if there is a teacher and an aide)

For subsidized centers the teacher to child ratios are as follows:

- Infants (0–2 years old) 1:3 with a maximum of 18 children in one room
- Preschool (2–6 years old) 1:8 with a maximum of 24 children in one room

Scheduling and Fees

Centers are generally not flexible regarding hours and fees. For some parents this can be a problem. It is imperative that parents clarify these issues with the provider before care begins. Discuss the center's daily routine and payment schedule at the parent interview. You will also want to know about holidays, vacation, and sick care. Some centers may have a contract for you to sign or you may want to draft one of your own. Make sure that you both understand the terms of the agreement before you sign.

If you have any questions or need assistance choosing the appropriate child care, please call our Referral Line at **(415) 343-3300**.