



Child Care Info and Referral Guide

General Information

Introduction

Finding quality child care that fits your needs and preferences can be challenging, but the first step is knowing how it works.

Overview

Child care is defined in the state of Oregon “as the care and education of children aged birth to twelve years old, unaccompanied by a parent, guardian, or custodian, regularly, and during a part of the 24 hours of the day.”

Child care includes “daycare,” meant to help working families; early learning programs such as recorded preschool, meant to educate children for better socialization and kindergarten preparedness; relief nurseries, to prevent the cycle of child abuse and neglect through early intervention; and other types.

Ages

Child care regulations break children down into age brackets:

- Infant: Birth to 12 months old (generally, most child care programs will not take children under 8 weeks old)
- Toddler: 1-2 years old
- Preschool Aged: 3 years old to 5 Years old (but still too young for Kindergarten)
- School Aged: Kindergarten aged 5 years old through 12 years old

Types of Child Care

Child care can be regulated as a licensed program or licensed-exempt.

Licensed-Exempt Child Care is a small, home-based program caring for (3) children or less, or (5) or fewer children from the same family. They are often harder to locate as most are not regulated or tracked by DELC. But they tend to be cheap, convenient, best to use for back-up child care, agreeable to odd-hour and off-day care, and have the lowest child-teacher ratios, for more one-on-one care.

Licensed-exempt programs can be regulated as well, a Regulated Subsidiary Provider is a licensed-exempt provider who is eligible to receive Oregon Dept of Human Services (DHS) payments from families who qualify to receive Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC) subsidized child care, meant for families who are full-time students or employed but living within 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Read more about ERDC: <https://www.oregon.gov/delc/programs/pages/erdc.aspx>

Another licensed-exempt program is Record Preschool, an educational program that operates no more than four hours per day, typically 3-5 days per week, focusing on the socialization of children aged 3-5 years old and kindergarten preparedness.

Licensed Child Care is regulated by Oregon's Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC), who conduct a strict licensing process and then afterward conducts regular visits to ensure each program is following basic health and safety rules.

Licensed programs require that staff have ongoing training and background checks. Programs must follow strict ratios for the number of staff and the number of children that can be cared for at one time.

Licensed program types are:

- *Certified Child Care Center*: A child care facility certified to care for many children, not in a single-family dwelling. Center-based care tends to be very structured and regimented, following traditional working hours (typically 7am-6 pm, M-F), and often more expensive than home-based care.
- *Family Child Care*: Home-based child care in single-family dwellings, often with a higher child-teacher ratio than center-based care, less requirements to become licensed, generally cheaper than center-based care, and more numerous. There are two types:
 - Registered Family: single owner-operator, who can care for up to (10) children, of which (6) can be preschool-aged and under, and of those (2) can be infant-toddler aged
 - Certified Family: Can care for (10) preschool-aged and under as a single owner-operator, and up to (16) children with one or more assistants.

Child Care Quality

Everyone wants high-quality child care, but how to define it?

All licensed child care requires providers must enroll with the Oregon Central Background Registry (CBR), which continuously investigates individuals' background status in databases including the Oregon State Police, the Department of Human Services Child Protective Services, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and sex offender registries. Additionally, in home-based child care, all family members over the age of 18 years living in the residence must also register with the CBR.

Licensed-exempt child care such as Regulated Subsidiary Providers or Recorded Preschool teachers have a less stringent background check process.

Unregulated, licensed-exempt providers do not require a formal background check.

Oregon's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) uses the Spark Star Rating System, a voluntary program that helps child care professionals build on what they are already doing well, giving children positive experiences, as well as giving standards for which to improve. All licensed child care is given one Spark star and is considered quality child care, with additional requirements necessary to achieve 2-5 stars. A 5-star Spark rating is the highest rank possible and is indicative of "high-quality" care.

However, a 5-star Spark rating is very difficult to receive, and it's hard to find a program that possesses one; as of 1/2024 there are only (6) qualifying child care programs with 5-star Spark ratings in Linn County, (9) in Benton County, and (6) in Lincoln County.

To find out programs with Spark Ratings, find them at www.FindChildCareOregon.org

Finding Child Care

Finding child care is easier if you know where and how to look. Here are some ways can find what you need.

Pro-Tips

- All interested parents should always conduct their due diligence and vet any child care provider they are interested in using, performing background checks, verifying references, and visiting the program's location to verify the quality, before signing up their children.
- When you find a child care program you want to contact for more info, be aware that child care providers are often busy attending to the needs of the children under their care so will often not answer their phones when you call or quickly reply by email. Leave clear and detailed voicemail messages and/or emails asking about openings and waiting list times. Persistence often pays off, keep contacting them!
- A pragmatic approach for families needing to find child care as soon as possible is to cast a wide net while searching, looking for any child care programs that have openings or short waiting lists within the type, location, and cost range they are comfortable with. Contact as many child care providers as possible to increase the chances of finding an open slot that works for you. If you're not on a half dozen waiting lists at least, you're doing it wrong.
- Don't quit: Exhaust your resources before assuming there is no care available. Go down the list multiple times, sometimes it's that second or third attempt contacting someone that pays off.

Pollywog

For personalized assistance with all things relating to early learning and care, contact *Pollywog*, a referral program provided by the Early Learning Hub of Linn, Benton & Lincoln Counties that focuses on aligning services and support for families with young children. *Pollywog* connects families to local resources such as:

- Childbirth, baby care, and breastfeeding classes
- Parenting classes and workshops
- Child care and Preschool (routed to Family Connections)
- Medical, Dental, & Behavioral Health services
- Community organizations and agencies like home visiting services, WIC, or food assistance.
- Individual & family support services like DHS benefits, Relief Nurseries, or Early Intervention

Their website lists prenatal and parenting classes, a monthly parenting newsletter, a weekly parenting blog, and tons of local and regional resources for families.

Follow them on social media to learn more about everything above, plus parenting tips, local family-friendly events like library story-times, health and resource fairs, holiday activities, play groups, and more!

Call *Pollywog* at (541) 917-4884 or visit www.pollywogfamily.org.

Family Connections

Family Connections is the Child Care Resource and Referral agency of Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties, which can further assist families specifically looking only for either all-day child care or preschool.

Family Connections can provide guidance and extra tips on finding child care, and have access to up-to-date info about openings in licensed child care programs.

To contact Family Connections, call (541) 917-48-99 or email connect@linnbenton.edu.

Find Child Care Oregon

For independent-minded families who want to search for child care themselves, they can access the official Oregon online database of licensed child care for children aged birth to twelve years old at www.FindChildCareOregon.org (Search For Child Care, Login as Guest).

Pro-tips

- Do a different search for each city or zip code.
- If you're not looking for a Recorded Preschool and only want all-day child care, aka "daycare," in the "Regulation" drop down box, only check off Licensed Center, Licensed Home, and Licensed-Exempt.
- For those wanting assistance with their search, call 211 on your phone and ask for child care assistance. Their call center is open 7 days a week: Mon-Fri, 7 am - 11 pm; Sat-Sun, 8 am - 8 pm. 211 support representatives can conduct the search of child care for you and email you the results.

Subsidized Child Care Programs

Families whose joint family income is within 200% of the Federal Poverty Level can qualify for subsidized child care programs that assist with costs. They include:

- Employment Related Day Care program (ERDC): An Oregon subsidy program to assist working families or student parents. For eligibility, call (800) 699-9075.
- Preschool Promise (PSP): A free Recorded Preschool program that operates in a variety of settings and with a variety of sponsor organizations. For eligibility, contact Pollywog (see above).
- Head Start/Early Head Start: 100-130% of the federal poverty level. For eligibility, visit their website: <https://www.ohsa.net/contact>

Facebook

You can find unregulated, licensed-exempt options as well as licensed providers who advertise services and new openings through regional Facebook child care groups.

Some posts on those groups are from families soliciting interested providers with listings for exactly what they need, while others are providers advertising their services or new openings to find clients.

These sites are a great way of finding additional care, especially weekday off-hours and weekends.

Linn, Benton, and Lincoln County Facebook groups meant for child care include:

- Childcare Lebanon/Albany/Sweet Home Oregon" (2,800 members)
- Childcare Providers in Albany Oregon (280 members)
- Childcare in Corvallis Oregon and Surrounding Areas (2,100 members)
- Lincoln County In-Home Childcare (10 members)
- Childcare Lincoln County Oregon (36 members)

These are all private groups, so you will need to request permission from the Group Administrator/Admin to gain access and read or make your posts.

Pro-tip: To get the best results, include as many details as possible in your Facebook post. The location where you would prefer child care, days and times, the number and ages of children that need to be cared for, a general range of how much you're willing to spend, and any special information about the child, etc.

Care.com

With a small fee, anyone can create an account to locate babysitters, nannies, etc. for short-term or emergency child care on www.care.com, which is especially for weekday off-hour care, weekends, or finding an extended care giver for special situations.

Questions/Comments/Concerns?

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