

Selecting a Child Care Center or Family Child Care Home

The majority of child care centers, including preschools, and family child care homes in California must be licensed by the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services if they care for children from more than one family not related to the licensee. Child care programs that are exempt from licensing are those on public school sites, Federal property, or at a private elementary school that cares for more than 95 percent of its own children.

This licensing is designed to ensure that facilities provide a safe and healthy environment for children in day care. A licensed facility will meet the CCLD's standards for admission policies, daily practices and procedures, emergency plans, facility design and structure, indoor and outdoor space, equipment, nutrition, background clearances, staff qualifications, and adult-staff ratios. You should call the Division's Mission Valley Regional Office at **(619) 767-2200** to see if a child care facility in San Diego County you are considering meets these licensing requirements. You should also request to see the licensee's facility file which will contain information from evaluation visits conducted by the Division and any complaints against the facility that were substantiated by the Department. Child care centers are inspected annually, while family child care homes are inspected prior to being licensed and every three years thereafter.

You can get assistance in finding quality care for your child from the YMCA Childcare Resource Service by calling **(800) 481-2151** and asking to speak to a child care consultant. Information on this and other services provided by the Service can be found on its website at www.ymcacrs.org. Before making a final selection of a child care center or home you should visit several more than once and follow the 5 Steps to Quality Child Care under For Parents and Looking for Child Care on this website. They are Look, Listen, Count, Ask, and Be Informed.

A great deal of information for parents looking for child care is also available on the California Department of Social Services Child Care Licensing website at www.cclld.ca.gov/PG411.htm. It will answer the following questions:

- What types of licensed child care are available?
- How can I find a child care facility for my child?
- How do I choose a day care that's right for my child?
- What should I consider when looking for child care?
- What should I look for if my child is an infant?
- What should the facility provide for my child?
- What should I look for in regard to basic health and safety practices?
- What should I discuss with the day care provider?
- What will the provider need from me in order to enroll my child?
- How can I ensure a positive child care experience?
- What rights do parents have?
- What should I do if I have a concern regarding a provider?
- How can I file a complaint against a facility?
- How can I get help with day care costs?
- Where can I find information on child health and safety?

Selecting a Nanny or Babysitter for Home Child Care

Before entrusting your child to a nanny or babysitter you should check each candidate's references and work history, and then make sure he or she is registered with TrustLine by calling **(800) 822-8490** and providing the candidate's full name and driver's license number. It's that easy and it's free.

TrustLine is a database of nannies and babysitters that have cleared criminal background checks in California. It's the only authorized screening program of in-home caregivers in the state with access to fingerprint records at the California Dept. of Justice and the FBI. It was created by the California Legislature in 1987 to give parents an important tool to use in selecting a caregiver for their children. It is administered by the California Department of Social Services and endorsed by the California Academy of Pediatrics. All child-care providers registered with TrustLine have submitted their fingerprints to the California Dept. of Justice and have no disqualifying criminal convictions in California. TrustLine also examines the California Child Abuse Central Index for substantiated child abuse reports and verifies the applicant's identification number with the California Department of Motor Vehicles or the Immigration Naturalization Service. Since 1999 applicants also received a clearance from an FBI criminal record check. All employment agencies are required to use TrustLine. Thus nannies and sitters obtained through an agency will either be registered or in process of being registered. If a candidate you are interviewing is not registered tell him or her to call TrustLine at **(800) 822-8490** or go to its website at www.trustline.org for information on how to register.

The TrustLine website also contains a set of tips on choosing a child-care provider. It lists questions to ask and things to do after selecting a good caregiver. The latter include the following:

- Set up clear job responsibilities.
- Continually assess how the arrangement is working.
- Drop in unannounced at random times to time to see how your child is doing.
- Leave emergency contact information.
- Call TrustLine periodically to make sure your caregiver is still registered. It is updated continually and caregivers who have committed a disqualifying crime subsequent to their clearance are removed.
- Ask your child how he or she is getting along with the caregiver.

The following additional tips deal with relations with a caregiver:

- Fire any caregiver provided by an agency who offers to work independently for less.
- Notify the agency immediately if you have any concerns about the caregiver it provided.
- Lock up all financial records, checkbooks, credit cards, personal ID information, etc.
- Do not allow the caregiver to have access to the home computer.
- Do not lend money to the caregiver.
- Supply a limited amount of cash for necessities and require receipts and an itemized accounting of all expenditures.

In hiring a caregiver privately seek referrals from a trusted source first. If possible avoid using a "help wanted" ad. And do not respond to an ad by a person seeking employment as a caregiver. Interview all prospective caregivers. For your safety, do it in a public place, e.g., a coffee shop, not at your home. And don't give out your home address. Ask the applicant to do the following:

- Fill out an employment application that asks for personal information, education, employment history, applicable licenses and certificates, personal references, etc.
- Provide proof of citizenship or legal residency, a state-issued photo ID, and a Social Security card.
- Provide his or her driver's license number and automobile insurance policy information if driving is involved.
- Register with TrustLine.
- If the applicant is not already registered and refuses to apply, and you want to conduct a background investigation to verify personal information that it not a matter of public record, e.g., education, credit, and medical records, you should ask the applicant to sign an investigation authorization form. For the investigation you can hire a private investigator or do it yourself. You can find an investigator in San Diego on the California Association of Licensed Investigators' website at www.cali-pi.org. The authorization form will be provided by the investigative agency. The investigator would check criminal, civil, and credit records, the applicant's driving history, the applicant's Social Security number, etc.

If you decide to do the investigation yourself you should first check the applicant's employment history and personal references. Then you should check the public records of criminal and civil court cases in San Diego County in the past 10 years. They are available at the following four locations:

Central District	330 W. Broadway	San Diego	92101	(619) 615-6358
East County Dist.	250 E. Main St.	El Cajon	92020	(619) 441-4461
North County Dist.	325 S. Melrose Dr.	Vista	92083	(760) 726-9595
South County Dist.	500 3rd Ave.	Chula Vista	91910	(619) 691-4439

You should also call the San Diego County Courthouse at **(619) 544-6401** to find out whether there are any outstanding San Diego County warrants on the applicant. All you need is his or her first and last name and birth date. Warrant information is available to the public and it's free. A search of outstanding San Diego County warrants can also be made on the County Sheriff's web site at www.sdsheriff.net. Just click on Warrant for Arrest. For records of cases and warrants in other counties you must contact the court clerks and sheriffs in those counties.

And be sure to check the local and national sex offender registries. Information on registered sex offenders in California is available on Megan's Law website at www.meganslaw.ca.gov. You can search by name, address, city, ZIP code, county, parks, and schools, and obtain a map of approximate offender locations, or a list of offender names. The latter also provides pictures and personal profile information on the offenders. Although this information is updated frequently, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Offenders may have moved and failed to notify local law enforcement agencies as required by law; thus, the locations of offenders without established addresses are not included. And remember that not all sex offenders have been caught and convicted, and that most sex offenses are committed by family, friends, or acquaintances of the victim. You can also click on the links on the left of the home page to learn how to protect yourself and your family, facts about sex offenders, and sex offender registration requirements in California, and to obtain answers to frequently asked questions. You should also check the U.S. Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Website at www.nsopw.gov.