

## **Choose Your Child Care Wisely**

Many parents are faced with the daunting task of choosing someone to care for their child when they return to work or school, or whatever reason they must leave the child for the day. Finding appropriate, affordable and accessible care for a child can be a challenge. Is the selected child care setting legal? Although statistics indicate the preferred child care provider is a family member, this option is not always available, and thus the search begins for the perfect setting to leave your beloved child.

In British Columbia, any person who provides care to three or more children not related to the care provider is legally responsible to be licensed under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*. Licensing Officers are employed by the Health Authority to administer this legislation. You may not legally provide care for more than two unrelated children (or the children of one family) unless you have met all the criteria to operate a licensed child care facility or home.

Child care providers who care for two children are referred to as *License Not Required*. These care providers have the option of registering with their local *Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)* program for support, training, access to resources and the possibility of enhanced child care subsidy. Referred to as *Registered License Not Required*, they must also meet standards set out by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

All licensed child care providers come under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* and the *Child Care Licensing Regulation* sets minimum standards of care for the health and safety of all children. Licensed child care providers are required to be in good physical and mental health and have a clear criminal record check. In addition, they are assessed by Licensing Officers to ensure they have the training and experience to meet the needs of children aged new born to twelve years old. Reference letters are also confirmed and a valid first aid certificate is required.

The home or facility in which child care is provided must also meet basic health and safety standards. Child care providers are expected to follow best practices of good hygiene, ensure nutritious meals are provided, practice positive guidance of children's behaviour, and provide suitable programming that meets the developmental needs of children of all ages. The care provider must also ensure that outdoor activities and play is factored into the child's day.

Parents are in the best position to monitor their child's care setting as they are in and out of the facility on a daily basis. Licensing Officers routinely monitor licensed facilities while Child Care Consultants ensure the Registered License Not Required care providers meet the CCRR Standards. Licensing Officers are required to investigate any and all concerns that come before them, especially when children may be at risk.

Every citizen has a responsibility to ensure safe care for children. If you have a concern or questions about child care that you wish to have answered, you can phone a Licensing Officer or a Child Care Consultant in your area.

The booklet, "Parents' Guide to Selecting and Monitoring Child Care in BC" and other helpful resources can be found at the following two web sites: <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/parents.htm> or <http://www.pacific-care.bc.ca>

Children deserve high quality early learning experiences during their early years and also as they develop into young adults. Parents or guardians are encouraged to ensure that their child's care setting is legal and meets the needs of their child's health, safety and development. Remember that the quality of care that your child receives will impact them over their lifetime.

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