



CHOOSING

Quality Child Care

A GUIDE FOR ALASKA'S FAMILIES



800.278.3723

threadalaska.org

welcome

Welcome to **thread's** guide to choosing quality child care. In this guide you will find information and resources to assist you in your search for child care.

Choosing affordable, high-quality child care is an important family decision. There are many factors to consider. **thread's** family guide to choosing quality child care can help you find a child care program that is the right fit for your family.

Get information here about how to start your search, conduct an interview with programs, identify quality programs that match your child's needs, plan for the cost of care, and support your child's transition. You'll also find information about the types of care available and important safety elements like licensing and ratio requirements in Alaska.

thread can help you with individualized searches of licensed and regulated child care programs in Alaska, including detailed profiles of family child care homes, child care centers, pre-kindergarten programs, after-school programs, and Head Start options.

Call **thread** at 800.278.3723 to speak directly with a Specialist, or use our quick search tool online at **thread**alaska.org.

It is **thread's** pleasure to serve you and your family. We are here to support you in making an informed decision about your child care needs!

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thread's mission: To advance the quality of early education and child development by empowering parents, educating child care professionals, and collaborating with our communities.

thread offers statewide services & support:



Helping families make informed choices about child care and community resources information.



Providing support to early educators and programs by building off strengths to continuously improve quality.



Partnering with businesses, policymakers, and communities to ensure Alaska's families and workforce have access to affordable, quality child care.

A plan to find child care

- ☐ **Contact thread** for free child care referrals (detailed program profiles) and resources. Language interpretation is available. Specialized referrals are available for military families or families who have children with special needs.
- ☐ **Review referrals**, resources, and this guide with the Interview Checklist for Quality:
 - Health and safety indicators
 - Group sizes and ratios in care
 - Different child care settings
 - Average cost of care
 - Family involvement policies
 - Early educators' training and continuity of care
 - Learn & Grow levels
- ☐ **Learn about community resources** such as child care subsidies and financial assistance programs.
- ☐ **Check each program's compliance history** with its licensing office.
 - Municipality of Anchorage Child Care Licensing: 907.343.4758
 - State of Alaska Child Care Licensing Offices (outside of Municipality of Anchorage):
 - Statewide: 1.888.268.4632
 - Southcentral & Northern Interior Alaska: 907.269.4500
 - Southeast Alaska: 907.465.4756
 - Online: akccis.com
 - Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (for pre-K and Head Start): 907.465.2800
- ☐ **Select the programs** that best match your family's needs.
- ☐ **Call each program** to check availability and schedule a time to visit. Ask about waitlists if there are no vacancies.
- ☐ **Visit selected programs** using the interview checklist.
- ☐ **Bring your child on visits** to programs and observe their response to different learning environments.
- ☐ **Choose a program** that best fits your family.
- ☐ **Get your child started in care.** Periodically visit your child at the program and ask about their experiences.
- ☐ **Contact thread for updated referrals** if you are unable to find child care or if your child care needs change.



Interview checklist for quality

Your family's child care needs are where quality care expectations begin. When interviewing an early childhood education program, consider this checklist of quality indicators:

Health and Safety:

Is this a safe and healthy place for my child?

- ☐ Supervised at all times
- ☐ Positive guidance techniques and behavior strategies
- ☐ Staff experience, training, and education



Is the program a clean and secure environment?

- ☐ Sanitation practices for diapering, bathroom, potty training
- ☐ Food and beverage handling, kitchen cleanliness
- ☐ First Aid kits available, secured medications and cleaning supplies
- ☐ Medication administration training for staff



Is there an emergency preparedness plan?

- ☐ Disaster response plan (fire, flood, earthquake, etc.)
- ☐ Procedure if a child is injured, sick, or lost
- ☐ Child abuse prevention training and reporting

Family Involvement:

Does the program work with parents?

- ☐ Open door policy and daily communication
- ☐ Conferences with parents
- ☐ Program feedback from parents and staff
- ☐ Family participation opportunities



Group Sizes, Ratios, and Learning in Care:

Will my child receive one-on-one attention in a group?

- ☐ Ask about child to early educator ratios

Will my child be able to grow and learn?

- ☐ Age-appropriate learning materials (toys, books, puzzles, art, etc.)
- ☐ Daily schedule for early educator and child interaction, activities, indoor and outdoor playtime, playground equipment and fenced area



Early Educator Training and Staff Turnover:

Is the program set up to promote quality care?

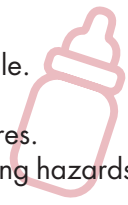
- ☐ Participates in Learn & Grow (Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System)
- ☐ Background checks for staff
- ☐ Program inspection reports and evaluations by the regulatory agency
- ☐ Staff professional development and training plans
- ☐ Program policies & procedures and parent handbook



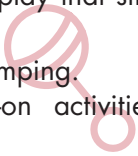
Meeting your child's needs

When choosing a program, it is important to consider your child's individual needs and stage of development. Children thrive in environments with consistent, positive adult interaction, age-appropriate activities and materials, and a schedule with time for active and quiet play.

Infants grow and develop through responsive interactions with their early educator as they experience the world through their senses. This may look like:

- Cuddling and talking with early educator.
 - Feeding and nap schedule that matches home schedule.
 - Being held while bottle fed.
 - Colorful toys that make sounds and have varied textures.
 - Safe toys and materials are nontoxic and are not choking hazards.
 - Area to crawl around and to walk/toddle safely.
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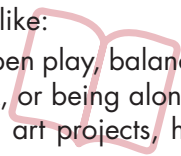
Toddlers are on-the-go and need opportunities to explore their environment through gross motor activity and a variety of play that stimulates their senses. This may look like:

- Access to push toys, climbing, sliding, jumping.
 - Opportunities for messy play, hands-on activities, building, creating, and playing pretend.
 - Being read to and looking at books with early educators.
- 

Preschoolers are curious and highly interactive with their surrounding world. They like to take things apart, use their imaginations, and explore the function of things through building, moving, and making. This may look like:

- Encouragement of messy sensory play, pretending, socializing, and physical activities.
 - Opportunities for putting together and taking apart objects.
- 

School-age children have a structured schedule in school all day. They should have many choices for activities before and after school. The opportunity for play is important. This may look like:

- Plenty of room and equipment for active open play, balanced with quiet places for reading, doing homework, or being alone.
 - Opportunities for socializing, messy play, art projects, hands-on activities, cooking, or putting on plays.
- 



Licensed and regulated child care

Licensed and regulated child care programs include **child care centers, group homes, family child care homes, Pre-K and Head Start**. It's important to understand a child care license is issued by the State of Alaska Department of Health, or the Municipality of Anchorage, and should not be confused with a business license. **thread** only refers to licensed programs.

Licensed programs must meet the following requirements:

- Complete a federal background check for each provider present who is over the age of 16.
- Health standards are met and inspected with annual monitoring visits.
- Ensure one person with a current CPR and first aid card is on duty at all times.
- Maintain specific child-to-caregiver ratios determined by the type of care.
- Ensure each staff member receives 24 hours of training per year.

Accredited care is a voluntary national accreditation system by which programs measure themselves against a national set of standards. Programs ensure practice of quality standards guided by evidence-based criteria. Accrediting associations include:

- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) for family child care programs
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for child care centers
- National Afterschool Association for school-age programs (NAA)



Types of care

Family Child Care: Cares for up to 8 children in a private home setting

Group Home: Cares for up to 12 children in a residential or business property with at least 2 licensed care providers

Child Care Center: Cares for 13 or more children in a facility setting with multiple educators/classrooms grouped by age

Preschool Program: Certified by Alaska Department of Education & Early Development to care for 9 or more children ages 3 to 5 years

Head Start/Early Head Start: Income-based enrollment for birth to 5 years

School-Age Program: Cares for 9 or more children of school age

Summer Camp/Program: Regulated by state and/or federal guidelines, and may be accredited by the American Camp Association

Tribal: Child care that is tribally approved and/or regulated by local tribal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) grantees

Learn & Grow

Learn & Grow, Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS), provides families a way to understand and evaluate program quality. Its mission is to advance the quality of early care and learning to foster the success of children.

Learn & Grow includes 5 levels of progressive program quality that incorporate the following 4 quality standards:

- Administration and leadership
- Early childhood educator qualifications and professional development
- Learning environment, adult-child interactions, and child outcomes
- Family and community engagement

Programs enrolled in Learn & Grow receive supports from **thread** to advance through the levels of quality and are distinguished by a Learn & Grow icon in **thread's** child care referrals.



Ratios and group sizes

State of Alaska & Municipality of Anchorage Family Child Care		
Ages of Children	Licensed	Group Home
Infants and Toddlers	Up to 3 (Only 2 may be nonambulatory**)	Up to 5 (Only 4 may be nonambulatory**)
Total Children* (Under age 13 years)	Up to 8	Up to 12 (No more than 10 with no other children under 30 months)
*Total children means the total number of children in care at any time. ** Nonambulatory means not physically or mentally capable of achieving mobility to exit a building without the aid of another individual.		

State of Alaska & Municipality of Anchorage Licensed Child Care Centers			
Ages of Children	Number of Children	Number of Caregivers	Maximum Group Size
Through 18 months	5	1	10:2
19 – 35 months	6	1	12:2
3 – 4 years	10	1	20:2
5 – 6 years	14	1	28:2
7 – 12 years	18	1	36:2



Cost of care and supports

The average regional cost for child care may vary. Please contact individual child care programs for more detailed cost information.

Budgeting for Child Care

Child Care Aware® of America's budgeting resources help you learn how to create a budget and what costs you may need to consider. Visit: childcareaware.org/budgeting-child-care

Child Care Assistance

Contact a child care assistance office below to check your eligibility for a financial subsidy and enroll:

State of Alaska Child Care Assistance Program

Call: 907.269.4500 or 1.888.268.4632

Visit: health.alaska.gov/en/services/child-care-assistance

Child Care Assistance Regional Offices

Municipality of Anchorage: 907.644.5000

Mat-Su Valley: 866.746.4080

Northern Interior: 855.479.2212

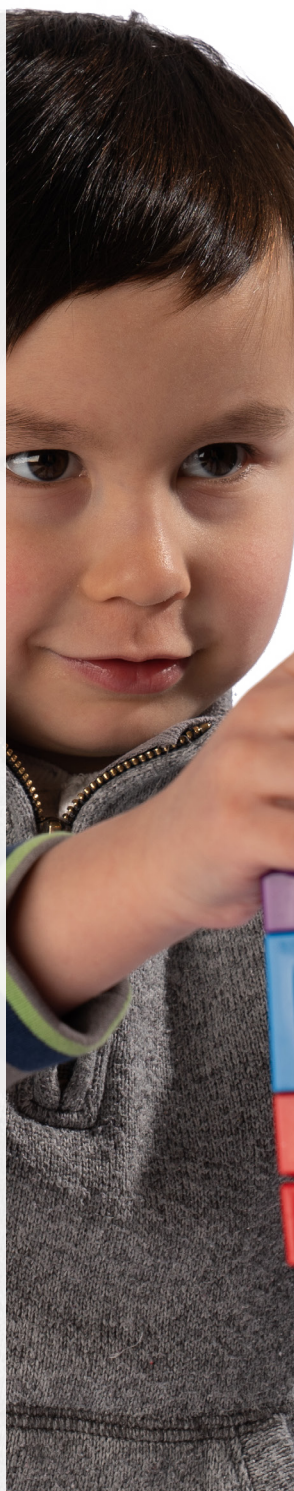
Southeast: 855.479.2212

Coastal: 866.746.4080

Alaska IN!

Alaska Inclusive Child Care (Alaska IN!) is a supplemental funding program for families who participate in the Child Care Assistance Program and have children with diagnosed special needs. The additional funding helps early educators pay for training, accommodations, and support needed to meet your child's needs while in care.

Visit: health.alaska.gov/en/services/alaska-inclusive-child-care





Tribal Child Care Assistance

Contact the tribal association in your local community for information on financial assistance.

Southcentral: Cook Inlet Tribal Council
Call: 907.793.3300 Visit: citci.org

Kenai Peninsula: Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Call: 907.335.7667 Visit: kenaitze.org

Kodiak: Kodiak Area Native Association
Call: 907.486.9800
Visit: kodiakhealthcare.org

Southwest: Bristol Bay Native Corporation
Call: 800.478.4059 Visit: bbna.com

Southeast: Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Call: 800.344.1432 x7140
Visit: ccthita.org

Northern Interior: Tanana Chiefs Conference
Call: 800.478.6822 Visit: tananachiefs.org

North Slope: Arctic Slope Native Association
Call: 800.478.3033 Visit: arcticslope.org

Military Subsidy Programs

Child Care Aware® of America is proud to partner with the United States Military and Department of Defense to serve and support their families through the Fee Assistance and Respite Child Care Programs. Visit: childcareaware.org/fee-assistancerespite

Specialized Referrals

Specialized child care referrals from **thread** are available for military families and families who have children with special needs.



A comfortable transition into child care

Starting child care is a big family event. Use these quick tips to make it a smooth transition.



Anticipate Transition

Talk with your child about things that might happen at the program to prepare them for a routine and schedule. Spend time with your child at the program before they begin. Ask about their experience.



Establish Your New Routine

Anticipate transition by visiting the program a few times with your child before they begin care. Goodbyes are important and you can establish a new routine for drop-off and pick-up times. Sneaking away, even if your child is upset, is not as effective as saying goodbye and letting your child know when you will be back. Starting care is a big family event; try to avoid other major changes in your child's life when they begin care.



Get To Know Your Program

Build a relationship with your early educator by taking time to share information about your child and family and get to know the teachers at your program. If concerns arise, talk about them right away to problem-solve together. Frequent change can be difficult for children. Watch for signs including high staff turnover or unfamiliar adults, harsh and cold behavior towards the children, lack of supervision, unexplained injuries or changes in your child's mood or attitude. Consistency in your child's care and communication with the program is important and can help make sure your child is in a positive environment.

? Questions or concerns about a program

By spending time at the program and talking to your child about their experience in care, you are investing in your child care program. Parents who have built a relationship with their child's early educator may find it more comfortable to address concerns with them directly. You are the ultimate advocate for your child's care, and if your voice is not heard, the concern may not be addressed.

If you have concerns about an early educator, program, or questions about regulations, please contact child care licensing.

Regional Child Care Program Offices:

Southcentral Regional Office (statewide)

Call: 907.269.4500 or 888.268.4632

Email: ccpo@alaska.gov

Municipality of Anchorage

Child Care Licensing in Anchorage

Call: 907.343.4758

Email: hhscccl@muni.org

Visit: muni.org/Departments/health/childcare

Northern Regional Office

Child Care Licensing in Fairbanks

Call: 907.269.4500

Southeast Regional Office

Child Care Licensing in Juneau

Call: 907.465.4756

Helpful community resources

Listed below is contact information for statewide resources and services you may find helpful. Please contact **thread** directly for further assistance and visit threadalaska.org for even more resources. **Language interpreter services are available, 800.278.3723.**

Alaska 2-1-1 is a statewide health and social services referral service. It is free and confidential, supported by United Way of Anchorage.

Call: 2-1-1 or 800.478.2221

Visit: alaska211.org

Child Care Aware of America offers information about finding child care, national organizations, glossary of terms, and a plan for budgeting for child care.

Visit: childcareaware.org

Denali KidCare provides health insurance coverage for children through age 18 and for pregnant women who meet income guidelines.

Visit: health.alaska.gov/en/services/denali-kidcare

Early Intervention / Infant Learning Program provides developmental screening and specialized services for children from birth to three who have developmental delays and/or disabilities.

Call: 877.477.3659

Visit: health.alaska.gov/en/services/ilp-free-developmental-screening

Help Me Grow Alaska is a free and confidential service to link families to community-based resources and developmental screening.

Call: 833.HMG.ALASKA

Visit: helpmegrowak.org

Office of Children's Services (OCS) focuses on the safety and well-being of children. Call or report online if you suspect a child is being abused or neglected.

Call: 800.478.4444

Visit: dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs

Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) offers free healthy food, nutrition and breastfeeding information and counseling, health screening, and referrals.

Call: 907.465.3100

Visit: health.alaska.gov/en/services/wic

thread customer service promise

thread is committed to providing high-quality customer care and support:

Parent choice of a child care program is based on family preferences. **thread** offers referrals to licensed child care programs, not recommendations.

Confidentiality of information received during services regarding your family and/or child care is used for referral services, research, and grant purposes. All personal or identifying information remains confidential. **thread** does not share or sell mailing lists of client names.

Commitment to diversity is what **thread** stands by, serving all families and children statewide without bias or discrimination because of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. Language interpretation is available.

Free of charge for all child care referral services. **thread** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that accepts charitable contributions. If you are interested in making a tax-deductible donation, please visit **thread**alaska.org.

Feedback on our services is always welcome. It is our pleasure to serve you and your family. If you have questions, concerns, or would like to give feedback, please contact **thread**. Feedback is important to us so we can continue to provide the best services possible.

Best practices are followed to ensure the best quality Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) services. **thread** is committed to providing high-quality service to Alaska following national standards for the early childhood education field set by Child Care Aware of America and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Share your story

Sharing your child care story is a powerful way to support **thread's** efforts to ensure high-quality child care is accessible for all Alaska's children and families.

Visit **thread**alaska.org to share your child care story.



info@**thread**alaska.org



800.278.3723



threadalaska.org



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