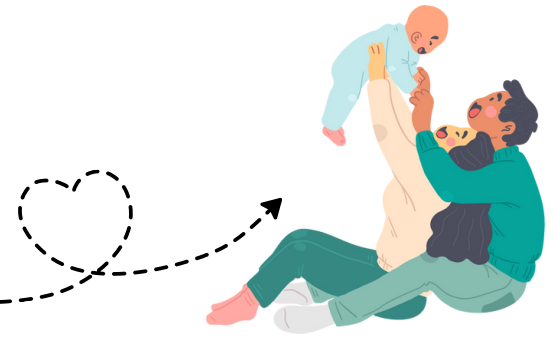




# STARTING THE CENTER SEARCH



1

## Defining Different Types of Child Care Options



**Step one is identifying the types of care that you are open to for your family. Below are some brief explanations of your options.**

### In-Home Center

A center offered in a residential building, often the home of the caregiver. Generally provided for small groups of children with one to two caregivers on site. Ratios are usually smaller for in-home care and vary by state. If there is one caregiver present in the home, the number of children is unlikely to exceed six.

### Child Care Center

Medium to Large centers with a dedicated director and staff members. Children are generally grouped by age and the ratios of children to caregivers are determined by age of children in the classroom. With multiple caregivers, your child could be in a large or small classroom.

### Preschool Programs

Programs for children ages three to five years, generally in a school building or as part of a faith-based program. Children tend to have one or two specific teachers. Generally half-day programs for two, three, or five days a week.

### School Age Programs

Before and after school programs. Sometimes includes summer or school break times. These are frequently part of a larger center or program that partners with schools for pickup and dropoff.

### Military Family CDC or FCC/CDH

Military families have options such as the Child Development Centers (CDC) that offer a sliding scale for tuition which is based on total family income. A CDC is modeled after a civilian Day Care Center. Some installations offer Family Child Care (FCC) or Child Development Homes (CDH) in private residences on or off the installation. FCC/CDH is modeled after civilian In-Home Day Care. Learn more about [DoD program options here](#). Other options include school-age programs and 24/7 centers. [Search here](#) to see what options are available near you.

### State-Sponsored

Program guidelines vary by state. These programs are often listed on state government websites. Find your state [website here](#).

## 2

### Choose Your Care Commute



**Step two is determining the care radius that makes sense for your family.**



**Tip:** Search for care close to home rather than work. Here's why:

- Leaving work early to run errands? Run your errands and pick your kids up on the way home.
- Your house is the anchor of your "community." When your child is sick or the center closes for the day, the sitters, neighbors and backup care places will be easier to access close to home. If you need help with pickups, for example, neighbors will be close by.

## 3

### Begin Your Search



**Step three is compiling your list of potential care options.**

Utilizing the [Military Child Care.com portal search](https://militarychildcare.com) can be helpful if you are planning to apply for military fee assistance. However, the tips below will help you best leverage it with clear expectations of the platform's strengths and weaknesses.

#### Start with Google

Google has the best map capabilities, even if the results are not as comprehensive. Begin your search near your home and move out from there.

#### Department of Defense Military Child Care Search

If you plan to use military fee assistance, when you identify a few possible options, check to see if the center is listed as participating.



**Tip #1:** This search is not all-inclusive, nor is it always up-to-date. Only use this search if you intend to utilize DoD fee assistance programs like MCCYN (Military Child Care In Your Neighborhood). The intention of using this search is to see if a center has or is participating in the MCCYN fee assistance program. This will decrease your wait time.



**Tip #2:** Child care listings may appear in the MCCYN search that are no longer licensed or may no longer be participating in military fee assistance. This is why it is helpful to begin with Google first to get more up-to-date options.



**Tip #3:** To manage expectations, it's important to understand upfront that this search is not intuitive. You cannot search with a map and the listings that do show may not have links or the links may be broken.



**Tip #4:** You will also find that many centers listed on the DoD search are listed under different names than in a civilian search. (e.g. The DoD site lists Bouncing Babies Day Care, but when you try to find it in licensing and on Google, you find it is actually called Rainbow Care).

# 4

## Review Licensing Details



**Step four is checking on licensing to help ensure your child's safety.**

Child care licensing is critical in selecting a quality care option for your family. ALL non-DoD licensed centers must meet quality and safety standards to maintain their license. Actual standards vary by state.

Educate yourself on the requirements on your particular state's license to ensure you are equipped to ask the right questions.



**Note:** Just because a center has a violation does not mean that you should completely discount it. Providers can get violations for non-threatening issues like misfiling paperwork. Review the violations and if you still have questions or concerns, make a note to include in the tour or interview. Remember, only you can decide if you are comfortable with a center.

Find licensing requirements and up to date information for your state and day care facility [here](#).

# 5

## Get Clear About What's Most Important



**Step five is preparing to contact your selected care options.**

It is time to start compiling your requirements versus your nice-to-haves, or preferences. The non-negotiables are the items you will ask about when you first contact the center. This is different from the preferences and general questions you will ask while on tour.

### Non-Negotiables

Identify mandatory elements for your family that are "deal breakers" when choosing a care option. Establishing these expectations early helps maintain focus during the decision-making process.

### Preferences

Preferences are important but not essential. While the ideal facility should meet these preferences, you may be open to adjustments.

These could be either non-negotiables or preferences, but are beneficial to include on the first call. The items listed below are just examples to get you thinking.

- Extended hours of operation
- Accepts Military Fee Assistance
- Accepts State Fee Assistance
- Waitlist times & fees
- Weekly costs & deposits
- Discounts (Sibling, military, etc.)
- Can schedule a tour



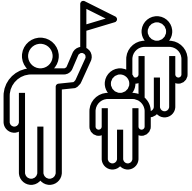
Now you can contact those centers and narrow your list down based on your "deal breakers". The tour is when you will dig in on your preferences.

# 6

## Questions to Ask on Tour



**Step six is scheduling a tour to get more information and a feel for the location.**



At this stage, you should have already discussed your non-negotiables, leaving only general questions or preferences to address. We strongly suggest jotting down all of your inquiries, as it can be challenging to remember everything you want to ask while absorbing new information.

When you meet your tour guide, inform them that you have some questions prepared in case they remain unanswered during your visit. Bringing this up early will foster accountability for both parties, ensuring you feel at ease and well-informed. Below, we've included some example questions for your reference.

### General Questions

- Costs:
  - Enrollment fee or other associated fees?
  - School breaks or vacation weeks charged?
- What causes daycare closures?
  - Staff training days?
- Drop off and pick up windows?
- Security Measures
  - What security measures are in place for the building, locations the children may go during the day (on and off property) and for pick up/drop off?
- Conflict resolution and behavior modification support
- Enrollment Process

### Additional Considerations

- Open on weekends
- Vaccination & safety regulations
- Closed Circuit TV or viewing possibilities
- Open for overnights
- Late pickup charges
- Willing/experienced with breastmilk/formula
- App or parent portal available
- Willing/experienced with disposable/cloth diapers
- Potty training support
- Outdoor play and field trips
- Educational versus child care centered
- Transportation to and from local elementary schools

After following these steps, you should have a list of suitable care options for your children, ensuring their safety and reliable care. This guide aims to assist parents new to center-based care. If you can't find options, please reach out through our [case management portal](#) for personalized help.