

A Guide to Child Care in Addison County

Addison County is a wonderful, family-friendly community. Our area has many resources for children and parents, including high-quality child care. Child care, particularly infant and toddler care, is in high demand. We hope this guide helps families to think about their needs.

Admission

Early childhood programs understand that enrollment can be stressful for families. Each program has its own system for enrolling new children. Most early childhood programs in Addison County are independent nonprofit businesses. Their individual mission and philosophy guide how classrooms are filled. In general, the following criteria are considered to create balanced classrooms:

- Date of application
- Classroom gender balance
- Age range
- Sibling status
- Children and families with special needs
- Enrollment contracts

Programs may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, special need, medical condition, ancestry, or citizenship.

Enrollment

Usually programs start their fall enrollment in late winter/early spring by contacting families on their waiting lists. Most children start child care in late August at the same time as public schools, but sometimes there are openings during the school year.

When a program has an opening, they contact a family on their waiting list. Families should reply as quickly as possible. If a family does not accept a space or does not respond, the program will return to their waiting list to find the next child on the list who fits their overall criteria. If a family does not get a slot at their first-choice program but they are willing to be flexible, they will have more choices.

Waiting Lists

Almost all child care programs have waiting lists. These waitlists are not first-come, first-serve, because programs want to create balanced groups. It is a good idea for families to get on as many waiting lists as possible when they know they need child care.

This is especially true for infant and toddler care. It is not uncommon for families to call and ask to be put on a waiting list as soon as they know they are expecting a child.

Infant and Toddler Care

Families needing child care for children under age 3 have a particular challenge. Quality child cares have very low child/staff ratios in infant and toddler classrooms, and so the number of available openings is very low. This is a local, state, and nationwide problem with no easy fix.

Finding care may demand creativity. For example, if a family can work out a flexible schedule so they only need part-time care, their options might be greater, but there is still no guarantee. The county referral specialist can give choices and once a child is over the age of 2, there are considerably more options.

Universal Preschool

When a child is 3 or 4 years old, families may look at preschool programs that are available in schools and community programs. The school districts partner with local community programs to provide free preschool

education for 10 hours/week, 35 weeks/year. Eligible children are 3 and 4 years old (by September 1). Many local, high-quality programs are preschool partners, including full-time child care programs. Contact the program to enroll and they will help with tuition paperwork. More information is available at: mbaker61.wixsite.com/uprek

Finding and Paying for Child Care

Addison County has a Referral Specialist who keeps an up-to-date list of local programs and available spaces. This referral support is free and helps connect families with programs that have openings and match their needs.

Addison County's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (subsidy) helps eligible families pay for child care. Families qualify based on gross income, family size, and their need for service. The Eligibility Specialist helps families determine if they are eligible and apply for assistance. Contact the Referral Specialist at referral@mjcvt.org, and the Eligibility Specialist at subsidy@mjcvt.org. Both can be reached at 802-388-4304.

Choosing a Quality Program

When families are choosing a program, they will want to consider location, cost, and schedule. Families should also look for a high-quality child care that can meet their child's needs. High-quality early childhood programs have:

- small groups with a high ratio of teachers to children
- responsive, nurturing, and consistent caregivers
- a focus on play and child choice
- predictable and responsive routines
- communication with families about their child's activities, skills, and needs
- accommodations to be inclusive for all children

Health and safety protections such as adult supervision, handwashing, outlet covers, and safe storage of cleaning products should be obvious. Look for a program that has consistent, nurturing staff who are positive and responsive to all children. Child care providers should talk with children (even babies) and provide new materials and activities to explore through play.

Teachers should be interested in individual children's needs and interests and communicate with families on a regular basis. Families should visit the program if at all possible and watch to see how other children act in the classroom and with the staff. Do children seem relaxed, happy, and busy? That's a sign of a good program!

Resources for Families

- Child care program information by town: brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us (Please note that the program vacancy information on the state website is not reliable)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children, "What to Look for in a Program": naeyc.org/our-work/families/what-look-program
- Child Care Consumer Line: 1-800-649-2642 (option 3) for families who have questions, concerns, or complaints about child care providers
- Vermont's quality recognition program STARS shows when a program meets higher quality standards and works on continuous improvements. Look for a program with a higher rating! Learn more at dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/providers/care/STARS
- Celebrating Our Children, an information guide to all things Early Care and Learning in Addison County: addisonindependent.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Celebrating-our-Children.pdf

Conclusion

Families should be aware that the demand for child care changes significantly from year to year. In some years, early childhood programs have vacancies all year and in other years, demand far outreaches the system's capacity.

Guide created by Addison County Building Bright Futures Council. View this guide online by scanning QR code:

