

CHILD CARE CHOICES

The Child Care Resource and Referral Service for Johnston County

REFERRAL POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policy:

Unbiased Referral Statement

It is the policy of Child Care Choices to offer its services to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, national origin, gender, disability or political affiliation.

Child Care Choices is a resource for the people of Johnston County to provide persons with referrals for childcare arrangements of providers listed in their referral data base to groups or individuals.

Child Care Choices will **NOT** make recommendations and it is specifically understood that it is up to the individual persons to choose what situation is best for them. Child Care Choices does not endorse, license or recommend any type of childcare facilities or arrangement. Although all legally operating childcare providers can and are encouraged to register with Child Care Choices, Child Care Choices does not investigate, assure the quality of service provided, or have any responsibility for any service provided by any listed childcare provider. **It is the individuals responsibility to select and investigate the childcare provider.** Further, Child Care Choices will offer information and education to any individual wishing to receive this information offered by Child Care Choices.

Procedures:

When appropriate contact is made, Child Care Choices will do the following:

- Callers will speak with trained Child Care Choices staff members who are familiar with the local childcare community.
- The staff will interview the caller to verify his/her childcare needs.
- Using the information gathered during the interview, the Child Care Choices staff will complete a search using the NACCRAware referral data base, which is updated frequently.
- Callers will be given a minimum of 3 referrals whenever possible.
- Various childcare options will be discussed, along with indicators of quality childcare.
- All callers are encourage to visit and observe more than 1 childcare facility.
- Child Care Choices staff will remind callers that Child Care Choices makes referrals, **NOT** recommendations.
- A Child Care Choices staff member will discuss the regulatory roll of The Division of Child Development (DCD) and encourage the caller to visit their website and/or review provider files at the DCD for more specific information prior to making a final selection for childcare.

- Callers are encouraged to follow-up with Child Care Choices staff if they have any questions or concerns, or if they need additional referrals.
- Information on all callers and his/her childcare needs is recorded in the data base.
- Following the referral call, the Child Care Choices staff member will offer the following educational informational materials:
 1. A Child Care Choices brochure.
 2. An informational letter summarizing our referral policy.
 3. A checklist of quality childcare indicators.
 4. A list of sample interview questions to use during facility site visits.
 5. A copy of Child Care Choices Complaint Policy.
 6. Other materials that may be helpful to the caller.
- To measure the quality of the Child Care Choices referral service, all callers are mailed follow-up surveys and random follow-up calls are made. This follow-up information is then recorded in the NACCRAware referral data base.

It is specifically understood that Child Care Choices assumes and accepts no responsibility other than the services offered above. It is specifically understood it is the family's responsibility to select and investigate the childcare provider and make the appropriate choice as to what best suits their situation.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Maintaining privacy and confidentiality is required of all employees and volunteers. The use or disclosure of information, obtained in accordance with the administration of services provided, is restricted to purposes for which it was gathered.

Child Care Choices will never give out a mailing list of providers without prior approval by the Director of Child Care Choices. All requests for mailing lists or any information other than normal referral information must be approved by the Director of Child Care Choices.

North Carolina law requires that childcare professionals report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. If an employee or volunteer is alerted to a situation that meets reporting requirements, a report should be made to the Director of Child Care Choices who will then report the information to the appropriate authorities. This is a requirement and is not contrary to this confidentiality agreement.

PROVIDER LISTING POLICY

All legally operating childcare programs may list their information on the NACCRRAware data base. "Legally operating" is defined by the NC Division of Child Development as any childcare arrangement that is regulated by the state, or is exempt from state regulations by law.

All providers are encouraged to register their programs with Child Care Choices in order to assist us in our efforts. However, they may choose to not receive referrals at any time and their

program will be placed on a “hold” status. This will allow us to continue to hold the most complete and accurate information about the childcare community in Johnston County. Child Care Choices will update the provider’s vacancies monthly by contacting the providers. All other information will be updated frequently. However, it is recommended that providers call our office as soon as possible when changes are made, to ensure that parents are given up-to-date information.

Child Care Choices reserves the right in the exercise of its sole discretion to refuse listing any provider (a) which furnishes inaccurate, false or misleading information, or (b) which fails to conform to the policies and procedures of Child Care Choices, or (c) against which a complaint has been filed (in accordance with the complaint policy set forth in these policies and procedures).

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Providers are recruited to register with Child Care Choices in various ways, including but not limited to those listed below:

- Registration packets distributed to all legally operating childcare facilities in the county.
- Other Child Care Choices information distributed through out the county.
- Child Care Choices advertisements or media coverage.
- Calling Child Care Choices after being referred by the local child care consultant, Department of Social Services (DSS), the Division of Child Development (DCD), etc.
- Phone calls from the Child Care Choices staff (as new facilities are listed by the DCD).
- Call from Child Care Choices after receiving Technical Assistance (TA) as a potential provider.
- Call from Child Care Choices after a staff member has heard about the program by word-of-mouth.

LISTING PROCEDURES

The below listed programs are childcare programs that are regulated and inspected by the NC Division of Child Development, NC Department of Public Instruction or are exempt from regulation, but are highly visible in the community.

- **Licensed Child Care Centers**
- **Family Child Care Homes**
- **Public School Pre-K Programs**
- **Unregulated Half-Day Preschool Programs**
- **Unregulated School-Age Programs**
- **Summer Programs**

The above listed programs will be listed on the Child Care Choices data base in the following way:

1. The program is identified in the community.

2. The program must be regulated by the NC Division of Child Development (DCD), NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), or exempt from regulation but legally operating. Legally operating is defined by DCD as:

- Operating for less than four consecutive months.
- Operating four or less hours per day.
- Only school-age children are in care.

3. A Child Care Choices Staff Member who will explain the purpose of their data base and give an overview of the Child Care Choices Policies contacts the program director/owner.

4. The program is then mailed a copy of the Child Care Choices policy manual and registration form. They are asked to complete and return the registration form along with a signed form confirming the fact that they reviewed the policies and understand them. These forms are kept on file at the Child Care Choices office.

5. After receiving the Registration Form, Policy Review Verification and Provider Agreement Form, a Child Care Choices staff member will enter the information in our data base.

6. The program may then be given as a referral to parents searching for childcare.

To list **Un-regulated, Legal Family Child Care Homes** and **Babysitters** with Child Care Choices criteria must be met:

1. The potential provider must be legally operating, as defined by the N.C. Division of Child Development (may not care for more than 2 children, unrelated to themselves).

2. The potential provider must be at least 21 years of age.

3. The potential provider must have a high school diploma, or equivalent.

4. The potential provider must provide an original Criminal History Check from the Clerk of Court.

5. The potential provider must have a physician's form with proof of a negative TB test.

6. The potential provider must show proof of CPR certification within the last 3 years.

7. The potential provider must have 3 letters of reference, mentioning their previous experience with children.

8. The potential provider will be given an orientation packet including early childhood development information and a checklist of safety/quality tips for unregulated homes.

9. The provider will be listed on the NACCRRAware data base and given as a referral to parents searching for childcare.

The following Referral Steps will be followed when referring a **Family Child Care Home**:

1. Parents call Child Care Choices requesting referrals for a Family Child Care Home.

2. When a Child Care Choices staff member gives an unregulated home as a referral, the staff member will explain that this provider/home is not licensed by the State of North Carolina and has not been inspected by Child Care Choices and that Child Care Choices is not responsible for checking the references provided by the child care providers.

3. Child Care Choices staff will tell the parents what criteria unregulated providers must meet in order to list with Child Care Choices. (Those criteria listed above.)

4. As with all referral calls, the parents will be reminded that the childcare referral names are given as referrals, not recommendations.

5. The parents will be mailed a follow up disclaimer letter stating items #2-4, which is attached to this policy and incorporated herein. A copy of this letter will be maintained in the

Child Care Choices files.

6. The parents will also be mailed a copy of the reference letters for the unregulated providers along with a checklist of safety/quality tips for family child care homes and a list of potential interview questions.

To list **Nanny Services** with Child Care Choices the following steps will be followed:

1. The program is identified in the community.
2. A Child Care Choices Staff Member will explain the purpose of their data base and give an overview of the Child Care Choices Policies contacts the program owner/manager.
3. The program is then mailed a copy of the Child Care Choices policy manual and registration form. They are asked to complete and return the registration form along with a signed form confirming the fact that they reviewed the policies and understand them. These forms are kept on file at the Child Care Choices office.
4. The Nanny Service must provide Child Care Choices with a copy of their screening and listing requirements for nannies, as well as, contract requirements for parents.
5. After receiving the above stated information, a Child Care Choices staff member will enter the information in our data base.
6. The program can then be given out as a referral to parents searching for childcare.

The following Referral Steps will be followed when referring **Nanny Services**:

1. Parents call Child Care Choices requesting referrals for a Nanny.
2. When a Child Care Choices staff member gives a Nanny Service as a referral, the staff member will explain that this service is not licensed by the State of North Carolina and has not been inspected by Child Care Choices and that Child Care Choices is not responsible for checking the information provided by the service.
3. Child Care Choices staff will provide the parents with the screening/listing criteria for the Nanny Services, as well as the contract requirements for parents.
4. As with all referral calls, the parents will be reminded that the child care options are given as referrals, not recommendations.
5. The parents will be mailed a follow up disclaimer letter stating items #2-4, which is attached to this policy and incorporated herein. A copy of this letter will be maintained in the Child Care Choices files.

PARENT REFERRAL POLICY

Child Care Choices will list all legally operating childcare arrangements. Child Care Choices does not license, endorse, or recommend any particular type of childcare or provider. Child Care Choices does not ensure the quality of any provider. The Parent Referral Counselor will explain that Child Care Choices offers referrals, **NOT** recommendations. Child Care Choices is not a regulatory agency and is not responsible for investigation of complaints (See Complaints Policy).

In regards to Parent Referrals the following procedures will be followed:

- Parent Referral Counselor will speak with each caller to identify his or her needs.
- With the permission of the caller, some referral calls may be recorded for quality assurance purposes.
- Caller's data will be entered into the NACCRRAware data base.

- Parent Referral Counselor will educate callers on choosing quality childcare, by phone, parent workshops, and dissemination of written materials.
- Parent Referral Counselor will explore various childcare options with the callers to determine their needs and preferences.
- Based solely on the information provided by the caller, the Parent Referral Counselor will search the NACCRAware data base for childcare programs that may meet the needs of the caller.
- This search will generate a list of possible referrals.
- The Parent Referral Counselor will give the caller at least 3 referrals (when available).
- The Parent Referral Counselor will not recommend a particular type of care or describe any particular program in judgmental terms (positively or negatively).
- The Parent Referral Counselor will discuss with families the difference between the STAR rated license system, national accreditations, GS 110-106 Notice of Compliance, as well as regulated and unregulated providers.
- The Parent Referral Counselor will explain to callers how to access information regarding investigations of a childcare program from the Division of Child Development (DCD). This material will also be mailed to the caller in an information package, following the referral call.
- Callers may be referred to other agencies that may be of assistance to them.
- Parents will be mailed information concerning upcoming workshops, activities, or events hosted by Child Care Choices (through Newsletters, calendars, media, etc.)
- All information obtained by Child Care Choices is kept confidential; No information will be given out without the caller's permission.
- Follow-up information will be obtained from at least 15% of the callers to Child Care Choices, this may be in the form of phone calls or mail surveys.

COMPLAINT POLICY

Child Care Choices will follow a strict policy concerning incoming complaints regarding childcare programs and/or families. Child Care Choices staff will:

- Be supportive of both parents and providers in their efforts to resolve complaints and ensure quality care.
- Report alleged child abuse and neglect, as required by law, and alleged violations of childcare licensing standards, to the appropriate agencies for investigation, as well as encourage parents and/or providers to do so.
- Offer technical assistance to providers to help them improve the quality of care and avoid future complaints.
- List all legally operating childcare programs, which provide their information to Child Care Choices, on the NACCRAware data base. "Legally Operating" is defined by the NC Division of Child Development as any childcare arrangement that is regulated by the State, or is exempt from State regulation by law. Child Care Choices reserves the right, in the exercise of its sole discretion, to suspend referrals to any program if there is a threat to the health and safety of the children being cared for. This decision will be made by the Director of Child Care Choices

and may include input from the staff.

Tell callers who inquire specifically about a program that has been put on suspension of referrals, for any reason, that this program is not receiving referrals at the present time. Child Care Choices staff will not disclose details of any complaint about a program, will not disclose that an investigation is under way and will not express a personal opinion about the program. For further information, callers will be referred to the provider or appropriate state agency.

In regards to **Complaints** the following procedures will be followed:

When receiving a complaint all incoming complaints will be referred to the Parent Referral Counselor. In the absence of the Parent Referral Counselor, any staff member of Child Care Choices may receive incoming complaints.

When responding to a complaint, the staff member will use open-ended questions to help the caller clarify what they believe to be happening. The staff member will inform the caller of NC law requiring the reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect or the violation of a childcare law or standard.

“Abuse occurs when a parent or care giver injures or allows another to injure a child physically or emotionally. Abuse may also occur when a parent or care giver puts a child at risk of serious injury. Neglect occurs when a child does not receive proper care, supervision, or discipline, or when a child is abandoned. North Carolina law requires any person who suspects child abuse or neglect to report the case to the county department of social services. In addition, any person can call the Division of Child Development at 919-662-4527 or 1-800-859-0829 and make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect in a childcare operation. Reports can be made anonymously. A person cannot be held liable for a report made in “good faith”. (NC Department of Health and Human Services, March 2000).

Classification of Complaints

REFERRED COMPLAINTS

Complaints of Abuse and Neglect: The callers will be referred to the local Department of Social Services (DSS). Also, the caller will be informed of the law, requiring the reporting of knowledge of suspicion of abuse or neglect. Child Care Choices will report these complaints to DSS and the Division of Child Development (DCD). Child Care Choices reserves the rights, in the exercise of its sole discretion, to suspend referrals to any programs if there is a threat to the health and safety of the children being cared for.

Complaints involving Violations of Child Care Law or Licensing Standards: The caller will be referred to the NC DCD to report the complaint. Child Care Choices will report these complaints to the Division of Child Development (DCD). Child Care Choices reserves the right, in the exercise of its sole discretion, to suspend referrals to any

program if there is a threat to the health and safety of the children being cared for.

Child Care Choices has requested notification from the NC Division of Child Development of pending investigations. Upon receipt of substantiated complaints, Child Care Choices will contact providers to offer Technical Assistance with their Action Plan.

NON-REFERRED COMPLAINTS

General Complaints: This type of complaint may involve personal disputes with the provider. This type of complaint will not involve abuse/neglect or any violation of childcare laws or standards. All complainants will be encouraged to discuss their concerns with their childcare providers, if they have not done so.

Documentation of Complaints

All complaints received by Child Care Choices (both REFERRED and NON-REFERRED) will be recorded on a Complaint Response Form. The description of the complaint will not contain Child Care Choices staff opinions, subjective characterizations, editorializing or conclusions.

Review of Complaints

- All incoming complaints will be forwarded to the Director of Child Care Choices for immediate review.
- Any action to be taken regarding incoming complaints will follow the procedures set herein.

Suspension of Referrals

Child Care Choices reserves the right, in the exercise of its sole discretion, to suspend referrals to any program if there is a threat to the health and safety of the children being cared for. In the event that referrals are suspended to any program, Child Care Choices will notify the program in writing of its suspension.

The suspension of referrals will remain in effect:

- Until the situation regarding the removal is resolved;
- Until Child Care Choices receives a closing correspondence about the investigation from the NC Division of Child Development;
- Until the Director of Child Care Choices is satisfied that the conditions caused the suspension no longer exists.

Appeals

Upon receipt of a suspension notice, the provider may submit a written appeal to Child Care Choices within 10 business days.

Child Care Choices will consider the appeal, along with any documentation provided, and render a decision within 10 business days of receiving the appeal.

This decision may be to continue the suspension, to reinstate the providers, to reinstate the provider with conditions, or such other decision, as Child Care Choices deems appropriate. Child Care Choices will communicate the decision in writing to the provider within 10 working days of this decision.

In the event that an appeal for reinstatement is denied, no further reinstatement requests will be considered before 3 months from the date of the denial.

ADVOCACY POLICY

The role of Child Care Choices is to provide education and information regarding the affordability, availability, and quality of childcare. By educating parents, providers, policy makers and the general public, it is our goal to empower individuals to make more informed decisions regarding childcare issues. Education may include dissemination of written materials such as, newsletters and fliers, media events, or phone calls. Child Care Choices will educate, communicate and advocate for issues that affect the best interest of children. Child Care Choices does not take a position on individual matters.

ADVOCACY PROCEDURES

Child Care Choices is responsible for the educational content of materials and method of dissemination. Child Care Choices will forward to the Partnership for Children of Johnston County's Executive Director any policy issues requiring specific position by the Partnership for Children. The Executive Director, or the Board of Directors will make formal positions regarding legislation or other policy matters for The Partnership for Children of Johnston County. The Executive Director of The Partnership for Children of Johnston County can also bring policy issues to the attention of the director of Child Care Choices and request distribution of educational informational materials.