

# Specialized Child Care Handbook



*For Families,  
Child Care Providers,  
Child Care Support Teams,  
and Social Workers.*



Child Development Division

# Introduction

Child care is second only to the family as the place where a child's development unfolds. Children's brains develop quickly when they are young, and we now know that a child's environment affects early brain development.

For parents under stress, quality child care with specific supports can help strengthen their family and promote their child's development.

This booklet helps child care providers understand how to become specialized providers; helps parents understand their role in finding and using child care; and explains the role of child care specialists and social workers.

- Protective services child care is for children and families served by the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families.
- Family support child care is for families experiencing significant stress in areas such as shelter, safety, emotional stability, substance abuse, and children's behaviors.
- Special needs child care is for children who have special physical or developmental needs. Children with special needs typically have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

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# **The Family's Role in Specialized Services Child Care**

## **Finding Child Care**

### **1. Contact a Child Care Referral Specialist.**

*A child care referral specialist* can be a useful resource in your search for child care. These specialists work in community child care support agencies throughout the state (see page 16).

The child care referral specialist can help you think about what you want for your child and family and provide you with helpful information (e.g., questions you should ask providers and what to look for during a visit).

### **2. Visit and Talk to Child Care Providers.**

Visit and talk to the child care providers you are considering before deciding which program to use. Talking to providers beforehand can help both you and your child feel comfortable with the program you choose and helps build a relationship with the provider. Both you and the providers should agree upfront about the days and times of your visits.

### **3. Read about the Child Care Programs.**

Ask for a program's handbook and/or contract. These materials can help you better understand the program. Contact the provider if you have any outstanding questions or concerns.

Families (including foster families) who are eligible for child care because of a protective services need must use specialized child care providers. *Be sure to give this information to the child care referral specialist.*

#### **4. Find a Specialized Child Care Provider.**

Find out whether the child care programs you are considering are *specialized child care providers*.

This means a provider has:

- Taken the six-hour basic specialized care training, which provides an overview of child development, how to communicate with families, how the Vermont child protection system works, and community resources available to support children and families.
- Signed a *Specialized Child Care Provider Agreement*, which means the provider agrees to allow professionals, such as therapists and trainers, into the program to support children.
- Agreed to maintain good regulatory standing, which means they have not been substantiated for serious violations or had a pattern of regulatory violations in the past 12 months.
- Agreed to take six hours of specialized training annually—in addition to any trainings required by regulation.

You may want to talk to the child care program director or family child care provider about any specialized training you feel may help them meet the special needs of your child and family.

## Paying for Child Care

Families eligible for any of the three specialized child care services are typically eligible for Child Care Financial Assistance (formerly known as *subsidy*)—a Child Development Division program that helps eligible families to pay for child care.

While financial assistance does help with the cost of child care, it typically does not cover the full cost. You are responsible for making any additional payments due to the child care provider.

If you need help paying the difference between the financial assistance you get and what the provider charges, talk to your local *specialized child care specialist*. These specialists are based in community child care support agencies throughout Vermont (see the list on page 16).

When a child gets child care financial assistance because of a protective services need, payments can only be made to specialized child care programs. Families and *specialized child care specialists* need to make sure a program is a specialized child care provider before enrolling a child.

**Important Note!** *If you disagree with the determination of eligibility for specialized child care services and/or financial assistance, contact your specialized child care specialist. You can also contact CDD at 1-800-649-2642.*

# Starting Child Care

## 1. Complete Enrollment or Admission Forms.

Before your child attends a program, fill out the enrollment forms. This gives the provider needed information on your child's health, immunizations, special needs, and emergency contacts.

## 2. Agree on a Schedule.

Discuss a schedule with the provider. Only bring your child in on the agreed upon days and times. Notify the provider if there is an unexpected change in schedule, your child is sick, or there is some other reason your child will not attend. A change in a protective services child care schedule needs to be approved by the social worker.

## 3. Arrange for Transportation.

- Let the specialized child care specialist know if you need help with transportation to child care. He or she may be able to help arrange for transportation if it's needed.
- An adult always needs to bring the child into the child care program and sign the child in. When the child leaves for the day, an adult needs to come in to sign the child out.
- If your child is sick, notify the transportation provider to avoid an unnecessary trip.
- Let the child care provider know who is approved to pick up your child. Written permission is needed for a child to leave with anyone other than a parent.

# Making the Most of Child Care

## 1. Talk and share information.

Child care works best when the family and the provider are comfortable talking with each other. Information helps the provider understand how to best meet your child's needs and plan a good day for him or her. Share what you know about your child, including what's going on at home. You can talk about...

- ***Daily and special events.*** Things that happen—both good and bad—in a child's life can affect his/her behavior at child care.
- ***Family and/or friends (especially changes).*** Children can be upset about changes in their lives (e.g., relatives or friends move in, the child's father or mother moves out, someone dies), even though they don't talk about it at home. Changes are important to children and may impact their behavior at child care.
- ***Eating, sleeping, and so on.*** Details about your child can help the provider understand and care for him/her. *Did he/she sleep well last night? What did she/he eat for breakfast?*
- ***What's new and exciting?*** Going to a birthday party, having a sleepover with a friend, and spending time with a grandparent are all examples of events that can leave your child tired or excited and impact their behavior at child care.

- *What kind of discipline is used?* Knowing how families teach good behavior is important to child care providers. It helps everyone work together to help the child develop good social skills.

## **Ending or Changing Child Care**

If you decide to stop using child care or to move your child to another program, be honest with the child care provider about your plans. You should also discuss your plans with the *specialized child care specialist*. When it is clear that a change is going to happen, it is important for you and the provider to talk to your child about the upcoming change.

## **Important Points to Remember**

- Child care providers must respect your child and family's privacy. To discuss your child or family's needs with anyone other than the Family Services social worker, the provider must have your written permission.
- You and your provider should talk regularly about how you feel child care is going. By developing a good relationship with ongoing communication, you can help prevent problems and provide your child with positive role models for talking and sharing.
- If you are pleased with your child care provider, say so! The provider will be grateful for the positive feedback.

- If a child care provider suspects that a child has been abused or neglected, she or he must call the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families. While any person can call to make a report, child care providers and other professionals, such as doctors, social workers, and teachers, are required by law to report their concerns. This is part of Vermont's child protection system.

### **Family Service Division**

The mission of the Family Services Division (FSD) is to protect children and strengthen families—in partnership with families and communities.

Every year, FSD works with thousands of Vermont families who are struggling and need help to keep their children safe from abuse.

- If you are worried or unhappy about child care, talk to your provider about it. If that is difficult, the social worker or specialized child care specialist can help you figure out what to do.
- You can also call Vermont's Child Care Consumer Line at 1-800-540-7942. Concerns, complaints, or praise can also be made online at [www.brightfuturesinfo.org](http://www.brightfuturesinfo.org).
- It is never too late for you to ask questions and share ideas with a child care provider.

# **The Provider's Role in Specialized Services Child Care**

Your first responsibility as a specialized child care provider is to offer good care. You should also work respectfully with families, enjoy being around children, and have a sense of humor.

## **Becoming a Specialized Child Care Provider**

To become specialized, you must do the following:

- Agree to maintain good regulatory standing, which means you have not been substantiated for serious violations or have had a pattern of regulatory violations in the past 12 months;
- Be open to program improvement;
- Take the basic specialized care training, which provides an overview of child development, how to communicate with families, how the Vermont child protection system works, and community resources available to support children/families;
- Be committed to ongoing specialized training; and
- Sign a *Specialized Child Care Provider Agreement*, which is sent to CDD for approval.

You should be approved as a specialized child care provider before enrolling children with specialized child care needs. This helps ensure child care financial assistance payments begin without delay.

## **Being a specialized child care provider comes with specific benefits such as:**

- Increased knowledge and skill development;
- Priority access to some trainings, including those sponsored by the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families;
- Priority for special services such as literacy programs;
- Eligibility for specific grants and priority for other ones;
- Completion of a component of STARS, Vermont's child care quality and recognition system; and
- Enhanced professional partnerships in the community.

## **Responsibilities Include:**

- Attending an additional six hours of advanced specialized care training annually;
- Maintaining good regulatory standing;
- Keeping accurate attendance and recording it on financial assistance program invoices;
- Keeping a written record of the children's activities and progress;
- Establishing a way for adults to bring children into child care and have them signed in, even if they are transported by taxi or small bus/van;

- Reporting all suspicions of abuse or neglect to the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families at 1-800-649-5285;
- Maintaining strict confidentiality; and
- Making appropriate referrals to other resources after discussing it with the family and getting their consent. *Specialized child care specialists* can help inform and guide you about the best ways to make referrals.

*The following specific information is important to specialized child care providers who are caring for children with a protective services need:*

- Know the name of the social worker assigned to children receiving protective services child care;
- Report any unexplained absences beyond two days to the social worker;
- Notify the social worker and specialized child care specialist if there is a change in schedule;
- If a child is in state custody, any concerns you have about the child should first be discussed with the social worker or foster parent;
- If a child is in foster care, be sure the foster parents understand that it is appropriate to share relevant information about the child; and
- Maintain strict confidentiality.

# The Child Care Support Team's Role in Specialized Services Child Care

There are 12 Community Child Care Support Agencies located throughout Vermont (see page 16 for the complete list). These agencies provide child care information and referral services to families; help families determine their eligibility for child care financial assistance (*subsidy*); and offer training and support to child care providers.

Within each of these agencies are support people who ensure that specialized child care is delivered appropriately. The people doing this work are often called *specialized child care specialists*.

## *Specialized Child Care Specialists*

These specialists work with families:

1. Who have children with special needs; or
2. Who are eligible for family support or protective services child care.

*Specialized child care specialists* are the link between child care providers, social workers, families, community partners, and the Child Development Division. When it all comes together, families' needs are met, children are served, and child care providers are trained and paid for their services. *Specialized child care specialists* do the following:

- Receive completed applications for child care financial assistance and keep them on file;
- Help families and social workers determine appropriate child care referrals and placements;
- Provide a forum for the team to determine eligibility for and/or continuation of family support child care;
- Provide phone and on-site consultations with specialized child care providers;
- Process the necessary paperwork to ensure child care providers are paid for services to eligible children;
- Conduct regular meetings with child care trainers, social workers, and others to review the strengths and needs of specialized services child care providers (these meetings help ensure information is current and policies are being implemented appropriately);
- Coordinate and deliver basic and advanced professional development training on issues related to specialized child care; and
- Share information about specialized child care with the community and contribute to the development and sharing of written materials to support providers and families.

# **The Social Worker's Role in Specialized Services Child Care**

The Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families protects children and strengthens families, in partnership with families and communities.

To do this, social workers help families to develop plans (called *case plans*) aimed at reducing the risk of future abuse and/or neglect. Part of the plans may include protective services child care.

Social workers can approve protective services child care, but only with a specialized child care provider. Social workers work with families and *specialized child care specialists* to make appropriate matches between providers and children/families.

If a child is in foster care and the foster family needs child care, this is considered protective services child care, and foster families need to enroll their foster children in specialized child care programs.

Factors the social workers, *specialized child care specialists*, and families consider prior to enrolling in or authorizing child care include: quality of care, specialized child care program status, program routines, location, openings, flexibility of hours, size of the program, ability to work with children with special needs, and access to transportation.

The social worker and/or family need to share relevant information about the child with the child care provider prior to enrollment and also while the child is attending as new information is known. Information can be given to the child care provider by phone, in writing, or during a meeting. Any information about the child and family is kept confidential by the child care provider.

The social worker can help families and child care providers solve problems; however, when problems arise, the first step should be for the child care provider and family to speak directly to each other.

For child protection reasons, child care providers must notify the social worker when the child has unexplained absences of two or more consecutive days. The social worker will notify the specialized child care specialist if a change in the approved schedule is needed.

The social worker relies on information from the family, the child care provider, and other community partners that are part of the case plan. This information helps the social worker stay informed about changes in the child or family's circumstances. If the child will be leaving the child care program, the social worker will discuss the move with the child care provider.

# Appendix A

## Community Child Care Support Agencies

<p><b>ADDISON</b> Mary Johnson Children's Center (802) 388-4304</p>	<p><b>BENNINGTON</b> Bennington County Child Care Association (802) 447-3778</p>
<p><b>CALEDONIA/ESSEX</b> Kingdom Child Care Connection at Umbrella (802) 748-1992 1-800-916-8645</p>	<p><b>CHITTENDEN</b> Child Care Resource (802) 863-3367 1-800-339-3367</p>
<p><b>FRANKLIN/GRAND ISLE</b> Family Center of Northwestern Vermont (802) 524-6554 1-800-427-6574</p>	<p><b>LAMOILLE</b> Lamoille Family Center (802) 888-5229</p>
<p><b>ORANGE/WINDSOR (N)</b> The Family Place (802) 649-3268, 1-800-639-0039  Child Care Project (cc referrals) (603) 646-3233, 1-800-323-5446</p>	<p><b>ORLEANS/ESSEX (N)</b> NEK Community Action Inc (802) 334-4072 1-877-722-6680</p>
<p><b>RUTLAND</b> Child Care Support Services / Vermont Achievement Center (802) 747-0033 1-800-775-2390</p>	<p><b>WASHINGTON</b> Family Center of Washington County (802) 262-3292</p>
<p><b>WINDHAM</b> Windham Child Care Assoc. (802) 254-5332 1-866-254-5332</p>	<p><b>WINDSOR (SOUTH)/ WINDHAM (NORTH)</b> Springfield Area Parent Child Center (802) 886-5242 1-800-808-4442</p>

# Family Services District Offices

Social workers may be reached during regular business hours: Monday to Friday, 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

<b>BARRE</b> (802) 479-4260	<b>BENNINGTON</b> (802) 442-8138
<b>BRATTLEBORO</b> (802) 257-2888	<b>BURLINGTON</b> (802) 863-7370
<b>HARTFORD</b> (802) 295-8840	<b>MIDDLEBURY</b> (802) 388-4660
<b>MORRISVILLE</b> (802) 888-4576	<b>NEWPORT</b> (802) 334-6723
<b>RUTLAND</b> (802) 786-5817	<b>SPRINGFIELD</b> (802) 885-8900
<b>ST. ALBANS</b> (802) 527-7741	<b>ST. JOHNSBURY</b> (802) 748-8374

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call 1-800-649-5285 to report it. Our 24-hour Child Protection Line makes it easy for you to share your concerns about a child with a trained social worker.

Your call could protect a child, get help for a family, and may even save a child's life.

The Department for Children and Families,  
as part of an integrated Agency of Human Services,  
fosters the healthy development, safety,  
well-being, and self-sufficiency of Vermonters.

The Child Development Division (CDD)  
improves the well-being of Vermont's children  
by ensuring safe, accessible child development  
services and integrated family support services.

This booklet was produced by CDD,  
in collaboration with state  
and community partners.

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*[dcf.vermont.gov/cdd](http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd)*