



A Guide to Finding
Quality Childcare

Great Start Collaborative

The Great Start Collaborative of Berrien County is a partnership of community leaders, business owners, charitable and faith-based organizations, health and human service agencies, educators, and parents. It is committed to establishing and maintaining a network of county-wide supports and services that work together to achieve better results for young children and families.



The Collaborative

- Engages community partners in the planning and coordination of services.
- Addresses the factors that influence a child's readiness for school and life.
- Promotes community awareness of early childhood issues.
- Advocates for quality early childhood programs and services.

Our goal is that every child in Berrien County is safe, healthy, and eager to succeed in school and life.

For more information on the Great Start Collaborative, please contact Kristen Chism, Director at 269-471-7725 x 1270 or kristen.chism@uwsm.org.

How Can You Get Involved? Join the Parent Coalition

The Parent Coalition is a group of volunteer parents who serve as a "voice" for parents in their community. These parents assist in building public support for early childhood as an investment, support and participate in the assessment and strategic planning work of the Great Start Collaborative, and strengthen the commitment of parents in the community, on behalf of young children. For more information, contact Heather Steinbrook, Parent Liaison at heather.steinbrook@berrienresa.org.



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a program supported by United Way of Southwest Michigan that gives free books to children of Berrien and Cass County ages birth to five. Each month a new, carefully selected book will be mailed in your child's name directly to your home. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a free gift to your children! All you have to do is read to your children. To sign up, call 269-982-1700 or find the registration form at www.uwsm.org.



Great Start to Quality

Who is Great Start to Quality for?

It's for you – families looking for licensed child care and early childhood programs!

How do I find Great Start to Quality?

You can search for licensed child care on Great Start to Quality at www.greatstarttoquality.org

What can Great Start to Quality do?

Plenty! You can search for child care and access this database 24 hours, seven days a week. Great Start CONNECT provides parents with the opportunity to quickly and conveniently search for and contact child care providers who match their needs. Families can also use Great Start CONNECT to find community resources and supports through their local Great Start Collaborative and their Great Start Regional Child Care Resource Center.

What if I don't have Internet?

Simply call 1-877-614-7328 to get connected to the Great Start to Quality Southwest Resource Center. The resource center can assist you in searching for licensed child care and early learning programs.

Five Steps to Choosing Quality Child Care

1. Start Early

Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering – a child care center or care in someone else’s home – finding the right child care option can take some time.



2. Make the Call

Begin your search by contacting your local experts – Child Care Resources. Child Care Resources can give you the facts about child care – what to look for, what things to consider and how to make the best choice for you and your child. In addition to what is in this packet, make sure to ask them these things:

- What are the licensing requirements in my area?
- How can I get information about complaints and licensing violations?
- Are there any child care financial assistance programs that my family qualifies for?

3. Visit and Ask Questions

Make sure you visit the child care options you are considering. Find out the five key indicators of quality:

- **Adult to Child Ratio:** Ask how many children there are for each adult. The fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. Babies need an adult to child ration of no more than 1:4 (one adult for four infants); while four-year-olds can do well with a ration of 1:10 (one adult for ten children).
- **Group Size:** Find out how many children are in the group. The smaller the group, the better. Imagine a group of twenty-five two-year-olds with five adults, compared to a group of ten with two adults. Both groups have the same adult to child ratio. Which would be calmer and safer? Which would be more like a family?
- **Caregiver Qualifications:** Ask about the caregivers’ training and education. Caregivers with degrees and/or special training in working with children will be better able to help your child learn. Are the caregivers involved in activities to improve their skills? Do they attend classes and workshops?
- **Turnover:** Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It’s best if children stay with the same caregiver at least a year. Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child. Getting used to new caregivers takes time and energy that could be spent on learning new things.
- **Accreditation:** Find out if the child care provider has been accredited by a national organization. Providers that are accredited have met voluntary standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) are the two largest organizations that accredit child care programs.



4. Make a Choice

Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family. Don't forget to use your intuition and pay attention to your "gut" feeling – if you felt great about a facility, use it! Drop by unannounced to make sure you are comfortable with your decision and that the indicators of quality are consistently being followed.

5. Stay Involved

The work isn't over when you find good care for your child. You and your child's caregiver are partners now. Here are some ways to be involved:

- Have parent-caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions.
- Offer to volunteer time when needed, like participating in clean-up-days or fixing broken toys.
- Be there for your child's birthday party.
- Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud.
- Join in special events, like field trips, Career Day, or holiday celebrations.
- Even if you cannot get time off from work during the day, you can still check in at drop-off and pick-up times. Ask the caregiver how things are going and how your child is doing.
- Visiting and participating in events at your child's provider sends a strong message. It tells your child and your child's caregiver that you think what your child is doing and learning is important.
- Find out more about efforts in your community to improve the quality of child care. Is your caregiver involved? How can you get involved?

