

Planning Counts

Good Planning
... Great Child Care Experience



child care
resources
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All parents want the best for their children. If you work outside the home or attend school, your challenge is to meet your child's needs while you're working to provide for your family. A high quality child care program offers a wonderful opportunity for your child to engage in early learning experiences that support his or her optimal development and readiness for school.

Turning this opportunity into a reality means thinking ahead. Beyond the search for a quality child care program, here are some things to think about...

- How will I help my child make a smooth transition to new people, places and routines?*
- What will I do if my child care provider has an emergency or becomes ill?*
- How will I build a good relationship with my child's teacher and stay involved in my child's day?*
- What should I do when it's time for my child to go to kindergarten or move up to middle school?*

With some advance planning, a little flexibility and an understanding of what your child needs during the critical early learning years, you can turn this good opportunity into a truly great experience for your child and family.

Planning Counts is the third in a series of brochures. For more information, see *Compliance Counts* and *Quality Counts*!

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Once you find and choose a child care program that meets your needs and preferences, it's time to start thinking about how you can ease your child into the new routine. Whether this is your child's very first experience in child care, or if your child is moving to a new program or simply transitioning to a new classroom at his or her current program, your child will need time to adjust to the change.

Some children may be excited and enthusiastic, while others may be fearful and have a harder time adjusting to the new situation. Your child may become nervous or anxious about separating from you for the first time or apprehensive about leaving the program he or she enjoyed. These are all normal reactions. Rest assured, there are things you can do to ease the transition.

Whether you're a first-time parent and everything feels new or you're an experienced parent looking for new answers to old questions, Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) can help!



Planning for the Transition

- ***Expect an adjustment period.*** Every child is different—some adjust quickly and others take longer. There could be a regression in your child’s behavior, especially after being out sick or after a holiday or extended vacation. Regression can come in many forms such as wetting pants, thumb sucking, tantrums, etc.
- ***Do your homework.*** Learn as much as possible about the program and its schedule. Review the schedule and discuss with your child what will be happening throughout the day. Be sure to prepare your child for schedule changes and upcoming events.
- ***Share your enthusiasm.*** Be positive when you talk with your child about the program, staff, and the activities they provide.
- ***Start slowly.*** Take your child for a visit first and provide an opportunity for your child to explore the environment and interact with the teachers. Be sure you spend time in the setting along with your child, especially at the beginning. If possible, have your child attend for just a couple of hours before making the shift to a full day.
- ***Follow a routine.*** Having routines and sticking to them can make everyone’s life easier. Establish routines around bedtime, wake up time, and arrival and departure times. When you arrive at child care, give your child some time to settle in and have a good-bye ritual that your child can depend on. Be on time at the end of the day so that your child trusts that you will pick him or her up at the same time every day. Reestablish these routines quickly after vacations and holidays.
- ***Update your program staff.*** Share any significant events or changes at home that might impact your child’s day.

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- **Take your time.** Allow plenty of time for your child to transition from one activity to the next. Give five minute warnings before leaving rather than making an abrupt departure. This helps your child know what to expect.
- **Make it comfortable.** At the beginning (and as long as necessary) let your child bring something that reminds him or her of home, such as a picture or a special toy. Be sure to check with your program staff first to see if this is acceptable.
- **Get the daily news.** Find out what happened during your child's day so you can talk about it on your way home or at dinner or bed time. Some families have a snack or a bag of activities that can be done in the car on the ride home.
- **Relax.** When you arrive home, know what works best for your child to unwind. Some will need your undivided attention, so plan to actively listen to your child for at least ten minutes. Others will need quiet time instead. Find activities that will help ease the transition from child care to home.
- **Stay involved.** Continue to monitor the child care environment to ensure that your child is with people you trust and that he or she is safe and learning while in care (refer to the *Quality Counts* brochure).
- **Plan frequent check-ins.** Check with your child care provider regularly to see how your child is adjusting. Get input about ways to resolve any adjustment issues.
- **Watch and listen.** Listen attentively to what your child says about the program, what he or she likes and dislikes, and his or her fears and interests. Observe how your child behaves at home for clues about how your child is adjusting to the new environment.

Planning for the Unexpected

No matter how well you plan, emergencies happen! Even the best child care arrangement is not immune to the occasional surprise along the way, so it's important to be prepared to the extent possible. Whether your child care program must close for the day due to bad weather or illness, or if your own child becomes ill, a good back-up plan can mean less stress when the unexpected happens.

Start by making copies of important papers and storing them in an easily accessible place. Include your child's birth certificate and immunization records, list of allergies and medications and emergency contact information. As soon as you have chosen an early care and education or school-age child care program, begin exploring **back-up child care options** and be sure to develop short- and long-term plans.

- Explore what options (if any) your program already has in place. Some programs have sick care available or other back-up child care arrangements in place to help parents.
- If yours is a two-parent family, discuss who has better benefits, an understanding employer or more flexible work arrangements. One parent might be able to work from home, take the child to work, or arrange for a flexible work schedule for the time needed. In any case, advance planning will eliminate last minute problems.
- If you're a single parent, talk with your employer and determine in advance how the situation can be handled in the event your primary provider is unavailable or your child is ill. Many of the options for two-parent families may also be available to a single parent.
- Remember to mark your calendar for those days that your child care provider will be off or the program is closed. This information should be included in your parent handbook.
- There are family child care homes that will allow you to enroll on a temporary or emergency basis. You can complete paperwork in advance so when the time comes, you're ready!

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- Some family child care homes offer non-traditional hours and can accommodate families needing back-up care for hours beyond a typical work week.
- Drop-in child care has gained some popularity in recent years, and you can pre-register your child so that care is available in an emergency. The hourly rate may be higher than you would normally pay for child care. *NOTE: Due to their part-time nature, these drop-in programs are rarely licensed so it is critical to investigate any drop-in program prior to leaving your child in care.*
- Tap into your community. Family members, friends and neighbors are often good options for back-up care. A family member may be available to help out in a pinch, or you may have a friend or neighbor who stays at home and would be willing to take your child in an emergency. Your local college or house of worship may also be good resources. Explore all available options and refer to CCRI's Tip Sheet, *All in the Family – Relatives as Caregivers* (Tip Sheet #537) for more information about what to consider when using this type of care.
- Nannies and babysitters can be a temporary solution for back-up child care. Some agencies have a service that can provide a trained nanny or babysitter on an emergency basis. Refer to CCRI's Tip Sheet, *Temporary Care, Sitting Services and Nanny Agencies* (Tip Sheet #544) for a list.



CCRI produces dozens of Tip Sheets on a range of parenting and child development topics that span the years from birth through age 12.

Just Call or Click!

Call *Child Care Search* at (704) 348-2181 or visit www.childcareresourcesinc.org, click on Publications & Multimedia, then Tip Sheets.

Planning for Success

Communication is the key to establishing a successful partnership with your early care and education or school-age child care provider and ensuring a positive child care experience for your child and family. Remember that you bring to the relationship expert knowledge about your child and his or her needs, and the program staff brings specialized knowledge of children's development and education. Positive relationships are built on mutual trust and are maintained through effective two-way communication, shared resources and expectations and joint decisions about the child in care.



Suggestions for a successful partnership:

- **Take the lead.** Begin conversations and share information with staff at your child's program.
- **Stay in touch.** Decide the best ways to communicate information on a regular basis. Consider in-person meetings, email, notes, phone, or a notebook to enter your child's daily progress and activities. Whatever you decide, be sure to include periodic meetings to discuss your child's ongoing adjustment and progress.
- **Plan ahead.** Discuss in advance how you will address and resolve any issues that arise. Remember that the staff at your child's program have many obligations and demands on their time, so ask when is a good time to talk.
- **Share information.** Communicate often about your family, schedule, values, needs, and anything that may be happening at home that might affect your child's behavior.

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- **Ask questions.** Share concerns and raise issues as soon as they arise. Expect to share positive and negative comments about your child's behavior. Mistakes are a part of learning!
- **Be informed.** Know and understand the program's policies and procedures. Conflicts often result from lack of understanding. Make a list of questions about policies and procedures and discuss with program staff.
- **Volunteer.** If you can, offer to help out when needed. Visit often and at different times of the day.
- **Work as a team.** Try to solve problems together by planning solutions that can be used at home and in child care. Think of possible solutions and make a plan that you both can agree on. It's a win-win, and your child learns by your example the value of cooperation and how to resolve conflicts.
- **Be flexible.** Don't forget to check the success of the plan on a regular basis. Decide what to do if the plan fails, and revise the plan as necessary.

Even after you have successfully transitioned your child and started building a relationship with the people who will help care for and educate your child, you will likely have questions as your child enters different ages and stages of childhood. CCRI's *Child Care Search* can help!

Parent counselors are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to answer child development and parenting questions. Counselors can share a wealth of resources for your most important job — parenting!

For more information, call CCRI's Child Care Search. See back page for individual county numbers.

Planning for School

Starting school is an important time in your child's life, one that deserves special attention and requires careful planning to ensure your child's success. For a younger child, the first transition to school often happens at the start of kindergarten. For older children, another transition typically occurs from elementary to middle school. Whether your child is entering school for the first time or moving up to middle school, he or she will need your support to adapt to the new people, places and routines at school.

Many of the transition tips that helped ease your child's entry into a child care setting (listed in the previous section of this brochure) will also be useful now. If your child is anxious about starting school, try reminding your child about past experiences where he or she was successful.

Tips for school transition:

- For a rising kindergartner, you might talk about how your child felt before starting preschool and how your child discovered that school was a place he or she really enjoyed. Simply talking about the new friends your child has made can be calming and may foster more positive feelings and reduce anxiety about an upcoming move to school.
- Watch *Ready, Set, Go! Making the Move to Kindergarten*. This video designed for preschoolers walks children through a typical day in kindergarten (available in English and Spanish at local Smart Start partnerships, through CCRI's Traveling Family and Teacher Resource Center, and through Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library.)
- For a rising middle school student, you might ask your child to think about his or her many new experiences during the past few years (joining a sports team, moving to a different neighborhood or signing up for a school club, to name just a few). Encouraging your child to reflect on past successes in similar situations is an effective way to build his or her confidence during what might otherwise be a scary time.

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More transition tips for school-agers:

- ***Visit the school*** - Most schools offer an orientation session for students and their families. Don't miss it! You and your child need to know what to expect.
- ***Know the requirements*** - Each school system has specific requirements for enrollment. Be sure to check well in advance so that you will have ample time to gather the required paperwork and make any necessary appointments.
- ***Share your enthusiasm*** - Children of all ages take their cues from their parents. If you feel good about the transition to school, it's more likely that your child will feel good about it, too.

If you're working outside the home, your child's transition to school does not necessarily mean the end of child care. It's likely you will continue to need care for your child during before- and after-school hours and perhaps in the summer months or over extended breaks from school.

Even if your child spends fewer hours in care now, you still want to find and choose a high quality school-age child care program, one that supports the changing needs of your school-age son or daughter and promotes his or her optimal development.

For additional information and free referrals to quality school-age child care programs, call CCRI's *Child Care Search*. See back page for individual county numbers.

About CCRI

Founded in 1982, Child Care Resources Inc. (CCRI) is a private, nonprofit, resource and referral agency that works with families and communities across the Central Carolinas region to ensure that all children have access to affordable, high quality early learning and school-age child care opportunities that enable them to succeed in school and in life.

CCRI's services include:

- Consumer education and referrals to early care and education, school-age child care and other family and child support services for families in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Union, Rowan and Stanly counties (NC Child Care Resource and Referral Region 6).
- Training, technical assistance, on-site consultation and professional development to improve program quality.
- Financial assistance for income-eligible Mecklenburg County families to offset the cost of child care.
- Outreach to families to promote involvement in their children's development, learning and education.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program sponsorship for family child care homes.
- Supply and demand trends analysis leading to the development and implementation of targeted strategies to fill gaps in services.
- Consultation to employers on work-life policy development and early care and education and school-age child care community investment strategies.
- Public education to increase community awareness about and support for the needs of young and school-age children and their families.

Main/Mecklenburg Office

4600 Park Road, Suite 400, Charlotte, NC 28209

Child Care Search..... (704) 348-2181
Other calls..... (704) 376-6697
Fax line..... (704) 376-7865

Union County Office

105-A Cedar Street, Monroe, NC 28110

Child Care Search..... (704) 238-8800
Other calls..... (704) 238-8810
Fax line..... (704) 238-8811

Cabarrus County

Child Care Search..... (704) 786-1024

Rowan County

Child Care Search..... (704) 210-1008

Stanly County

Child Care Search..... (704) 550-0103

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