

# Summary of NC Child Care Law

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## **What Is Child Care?**

The law defines child care as:

- three or more unrelated children under 13 years of age
- receiving care from a non-relative
- on a regular basis, of at least once a week
- for more than four hours per day but less than 24 hours.

It is only when all of these conditions exist that regulation is required. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for regulating child care. This is done through the Division of Child Development and Early Education.

The purpose of regulation is to protect the well-being of children while they are away from their parents. The law defining child care is in the North Carolina General Statutes, Article 7, Chapter 110.

The North Carolina Child Care Commission is responsible for adopting rules to carry out the law. Some counties and cities in North Carolina also have local zoning requirements for child care programs.

## **Star Rated Licenses**

Centers and homes that are meeting the minimum licensing requirements will receive a one star license. Programs that choose to voluntarily meet higher standards can apply for a two through five star license. The number of stars a program earns is based upon the education levels their staff meet and the program standards met by the program.

## **Child Care Centers**

Licensing as a center is required when six or more preschool children are cared for in a residence or when three or more children are in care in a building other than a residence. Religious-sponsored programs are exempt from some of the regulations described below if they choose to meet the standards of the Notice of Compliance rather than the Star Rated License. Programs that operate for less than four consecutive months, such as summer camps, are exempt from licensing. Child care centers may voluntarily meet higher standards and receive a license with a higher rating. Centers will be visited at least annually to make sure they are following the law and to receive technical assistance from child care consultants.

Licensed centers must meet requirements in the following areas.

## **Staff**

The administrator of a child care center must be at least 21, and have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent. Lead teachers in a child care center must be at least 18 and have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential or its equivalent. If administrators and lead teachers do not meet this requirement, they must begin credential coursework within six months of being hired. Staff younger than 18 years of age must work under the direct supervision of staff 21 years of age or older.

## **Ratios**

Ratios are the number of staff required to supervise a certain number of children. Group size is the maximum number of children in one group. Ratios and group sizes for licensure are shown below and must be posted in each classroom.

Age	Teacher:Child Ratio	Maximum Group Size
12-24 mos	1:6	12
2 years	1:10	20
3 years	1:15	25
4 years	1:20	25
School Age	1:25	25

*Small centers in a residence that are licensed for six to twelve children may keep up to three additional school-age children, depending on the ages of the other children in care. When the group has children of different ages, staff-child ratios and group size must be met for the youngest child in the group.*

## **Space and Equipment**

To meet licensing requirements, there must be at least 25 square feet per child indoors and 75 square feet per child outdoors. Outdoor play space must be fenced. Indoor equipment must be clean, safe, well maintained, and developmentally appropriate. Outdoor equipment and furnishings must be child size, sturdy, and free of hazards that could injure children.

## **Curriculum**

The Division of Child Development and Early Education does not promote or require any specific curriculum over another unless programs are using curriculum to get a quality point for the star-rated license. Child care programs choose the type of curriculum appropriate for the ages of the children enrolled. Activity plans must be available to parents and must show a balance of active and quiet, and indoor and outdoor activities. Rooms must be arranged to encourage children to explore and use materials on their own.

### **Health and Safety**

Children must be immunized on schedule. Each licensed center must ensure the health and safety of children by sanitizing areas and equipment used by children. Meals and snacks must be nutritious, and children must have portions large enough to satisfy their hunger. Food must be offered at least once every four hours. Local health, building, and fire inspectors visit licensed programs to make sure standards are met. All children must be allowed to play outdoors each day (weather permitting) for at least an hour a day for preschool children and at least thirty minutes a day for children under two. They must have space and time provided for rest.

### **Transportation**

Child care centers or family child care homes providing transportation for children must meet all motor vehicle laws, including inspection, insurance, license, and restraint requirements. Children may never be left alone in a vehicle and child-staff ratio must be maintained.

### **Records**

Centers and homes must keep accurate records such as children's attendance, immunizations, and emergency phone numbers. A record of monthly fire drills practiced with safe evacuation of children must also be maintained. A safe sleep policy must be developed and shared with parents if children younger than 12 months are in care.

### **Discipline**

Each program must have a written policy on discipline, must discuss it with parents, and must give parents a copy when the child is enrolled. Changes in the discipline policy must be shared with parents in writing before going into effect. Corporal punishment (spanking, slapping, or other physical discipline) is prohibited in all centers and family child care homes. Religious-sponsored programs which notify the Division of Child Development and Early Education that corporal punishment is part of their religious training are exempt from that part of the law.

### **Parental Rights**

Parents have the right to enter a family child care home or center at any time while their child is present.

Parents have the right to see the license displayed in a prominent place.

Parents have the right to know how their child will be disciplined.

The laws and rules are developed to establish minimum requirements. Most parents would like more than minimum care. Child care resource and referral agencies can provide help in choosing quality care. Check the telephone directory or talk with a child care provider to see if there is a child care resource and referral agency in your community. For more information visit the Resources in Child Care website at: [www.ncchildcare.net](http://www.ncchildcare.net). For more information on the law and rules, contact the Division of Child Development and Early Education at 919-662-4499 or 1-800-859-0829, or visit our homepage at: <http://www.ncchildcare.net>.

### **How to Report a Problem**

North Carolina law requires staff from the Division of Child Development and Early Education to investigate a licensed family child care home or child care center when there has been a complaint. Child care providers who violate the law or rules may be fined up to \$1,000 and may have their licenses suspended or revoked. If you believe that a child care provider fails to meet the requirements described in this pamphlet, or if you have questions, please call the Division of Child Development and Early Education at 919-662-4499 or 1-800-859-0829.