Washington State Department of
Early Learning

Licensed Child Care in Washington State

A GUIDE FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

At the Department of Early Learning (DEL), we work every day to help make sure children in Washington grow up safe, healthy and filled with a love of learning. If you are a licensed child care provider, or want to become one, that is your job too!

Licensed child care providers are business owners. They want to use and build on their knowledge of child development, and meet our state's health and safety rules. This guide is for family home child care providers and child care center providers. It answers common questions about:

- **How to become a licensed provider**
- **How DEL staff will work with you as a licensed provider**
- **Your rights and responsibilities as a licensed provider**
- **Resources to support you as a business owner**
- **State laws and rules about licensed child care**

Kids' Potential, Our Purpose!

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Getting Licensed

Why should I get licensed? Getting a child care license shows parents that you meet the state standards to ensure children are in a safe and healthy environment. Plus, as a licensed provider, you will have training and support to help you as a business owner.

Do I need a license? If you are caring for several children on a regular basis, you may need a license. Families choose different kinds of child care to meet their needs. Some caregivers do not need a license. Those include informal parent cooperatives, and family, friends and neighbors who provide occasional care.

How do I get licensed? Start by going to an orientation session. You can find a session near you by calling your local DEL office or our toll-free line at 1.866.482.4325. You can also visit www.del.wa.gov.

At this session, you will learn about:

- How to get licensed
- State rules to help make sure you offer safe, healthy care
- Local resources to help you succeed as a licensed child care provider
- State Training and Registry System (STARS) training to support you as a provider

At the session, you will get an application packet. You can ask questions about the application process at this session, or you can call your local DEL office. DEL also contracts with the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network to help you apply (see page 8). Once you send in your finished application, a DEL licensor will work with you to review your plan, visit your facility and complete the licensing process. DEL has 90 days to respond to your application and decide whether to issue you a child care license.

Washington State Department of
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Is this job for me?

Providing child care is both rewarding and challenging. Here are some things to think about when deciding whether this is the job for you:

- Can you set firm guidelines for children AND adults?
- How do you feel about spending long hours with several children during the week?
- How do you plan to take care of yourself both physically and emotionally?
- Are you open to other families' cultures, races and lifestyles?
- Can you pass a background check?

For family home providers:

- How does your spouse/partner feel about you offering child care in your home?
- Is your family willing to make their home a public place?
- Will your children understand that you will be giving a lot of attention to other children?
- Will your children be able to share their space and toys?
- Do you have a plan for if your own children get sick?
- Do you have funding to start your own business, including equipment, licensing fees and any remodeling you may need to do?
- Does your neighborhood or landlord allow you to run a business from your home?
- The public will have access to your child care licensing file kept by the State of Washington. Are you willing to make your business open to public disclosure?
- Do you or any of your household members have a pending or past criminal history that would disqualify you from child care?
- Do you have an outdoor play area at your home that you are willing and able to fence?

Steps to getting licensed

Getting a child care license can take several months. Here are the basic steps.

Step 1

Talk with child care providers. Ask them about what they like about being a licensed provider, what is hard and any tips they have for you.

Step 2

Talk with your family about your plans, and check if there are any neighborhood rules about running a business in your home. Review the licensing application on DEL's Web site to understand the requirements. (Wait until after you attend an orientation session to complete the application.)

Step 3

Go to a DEL orientation session, which is required to apply for a license. Call DEL toll-free at 1.866.482.4325 or visit our Web site at www.del.wa.gov to find a session close to you. These are all-day sessions that last about seven hours. Research any county or city rules you must follow, including zoning and permits.

Step 4

Create your business plan for becoming a licensed child care provider. Contact the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network at 1.800.446.1114 to get help with writing this plan. Think about marketing your business, getting insurance and business licenses, and buying equipment such as books, games, toys and cribs. (See "Resources" on page 7.)

Step 5

Fill out the DEL licensing application and background check forms. Ask your references to send a letter of support to DEL or answer the questionnaire.

Step 6

Mail the completed application and fee to your local DEL office (go to www.del.wa.gov to find contact information).

Step 7

Sign up for the required 20 hours of STARS classes within the first six months if you are providing care in a center. All providers are required to take classes on CPR, first aid and HIV/AIDS/bloodborne pathogens training. You can find these classes at local hospitals, your local Red Cross chapter and county health departments. Get tuberculosis (TB) tests for household members ages 16 and older and for all assistants ages 14 and older and center staff.

Step 8

Create a personnel file for yourself and all assistants, even if those assistants are family members. You can find a list of what items to include in the file in Washington Administrative Code.

Step 9

Work with your DEL licensor to get your facility ready!

Why does DEL run background checks on my staff and me? By state law, DEL must run background checks on anyone who will work with or be around children in licensed child care facilities. This helps make sure licensed providers offer safe, healthy places for children.

DEL will look at a person's criminal history, character, and child abuse and neglect history. Background checks and, in some cases, fingerprinting, will be done for:

- You
- Any staff who work with you
- If you are a family home child care provider, any people living in your home who are ages 16 or older

Your DEL licensor can help you with the background check process.

Licensed child care facilities

Family home child care providers offer care in the home where they live. Depending on their license, family home providers may care for up to 12 children through 11 years old. DEL licensors visit family home child care providers at least once every 18 months.

Child care center providers offer care in commercial, privately owned, school or faith-based spaces. Depending on their license, child care center providers may care for children ages one month through 12 years. DEL licensors visit child care centers at least once a year.

School-age center providers offer care for children ages 5 through 12 when school is out. School-age centers are most commonly located on school grounds, in a commercial space or privately owned space in a faith-based facility. DEL licensors visit school-age centers at least once a year.

LICENSE TYPES Washington has three types of licenses:

An **initial license** is a six-month license so a provider may offer care while DEL decides whether the provider can meet the state licensing rules over time. A provider may have up to four six-month initial licenses if progress is being made.

A **full license** may be issued when DEL decides that a provider can meet state licensing rules. A full license must be renewed every three years.

A **probationary license** may be issued to providers who are not meeting state licensing rules or who have had many complaints or concerns come up about the care they offer. DEL will only issue this kind of license when we are sure the health or safety of children is not threatened, and we have reason to believe the provider will improve. DEL licensors will work with the provider to create a plan to meet state licensing rules.

A probationary license may be issued for up to six months if there is continued improvement. It can be extended for six more months as part of the improvement plan.

NOW THAT YOU'RE LICENSED...

How do I work with my DEL licensor? We want to work with you to help you offer high-quality care. DEL licensors have a variety of roles. As a licensed provider, you can expect your licensor to:

- Share information about child care quality, safety and health, and child development.
- Connect you with local resources.
- Monitor your facility to help make sure you are meeting state licensing rules.
- Follow up if DEL gets complaints about your facility, and work with you to create a plan to fix any issues.
- Be available for your questions.
- Take action to ensure children are in a safe and healthy environment in accordance with Washington laws and rules.

How do I find training and other ways to improve quality? Caring for children is not always easy! DEL and our partners around the state offer many ways for you to learn and grow.

Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC) is contracted by DEL to offer STARS training to help you provide high-quality care. Child care center directors, program supervisors and some staff must finish 20 hours of STARS training within six months of being licensed or hired. You must finish 10 hours of training each year after that.

To learn more about STARS, talk to your licensor or visit www.stars.del.wa.gov.

Talk to your licensor or call your local child care resource and referral agency to learn about scholarships, classes and other ways for you to continue your education.

How does DEL set the licensing rules I follow? We at DEL want to be sure all licensed providers offer a safe, healthy place for children that follows state rules. We do this by setting rules under the law that clearly lay out what is expected of providers. These rules are called *Washington Administrative Code*, or WAC.

Licensing rules affect you as a business owner, and they affect the children in your care. We want to make sure all voices are heard during the rulemaking process. For rule changes, DEL will file public notices, hold public hearings and take written comments.

We want providers to be part of DEL rulemaking. You can give input by: going to DEL public forums or formal hearings; giving comments on draft and proposed rules; and sending comments on any rule at any time to rules@del.wa.gov.

You can find all DEL child care licensing rules and laws on our Web site at www.del.wa.gov/laws/rules/licensing.aspx.

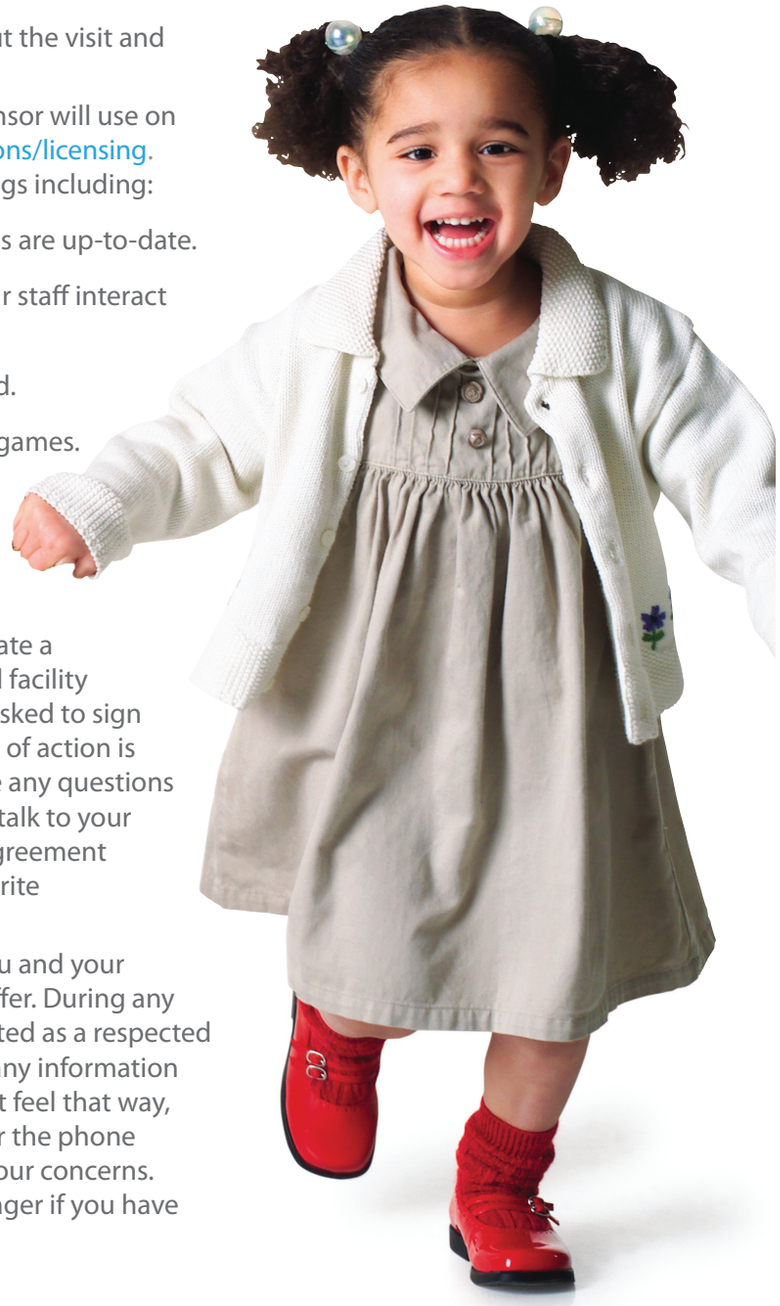
What should I expect during a DEL monitoring visit?

Your licensor will do a monitoring visit at least once every 12 months if you're a child care center provider, and at least once every 18 months if you're a family home provider. You will not know about this visit ahead of time. The visit will last between two and four hours.

Your licensor will start by talking with you about the visit and what it will include.

You can find the monitoring checklist your licensor will use on the DEL Web site at: www.del.wa.gov/publications/licensing. During the visit, your licensor will do many things including:

- Review your files to make sure your records are up-to-date.
- Sit quietly and watch the way you and your staff interact with children.
- Look at the spaces where you prepare food.
- Look at the play area and toys, books and games.
- Look at the diaper changing areas.
- Look at your outdoor space.



If any health or safety issues come up during the visit, your licensor will work with you to create a plan for improving them. These plans are called facility licensing compliance agreements. You will be asked to sign the compliance agreement. Make sure the plan of action is clear for both you and your licensor. If you have any questions or concerns about the compliance agreement, talk to your licensor, or check the box on the compliance agreement asking for a supervisory review. You may also write comments on the compliance agreement.

These monitoring visits should be a time for you and your licensor to talk freely about the program you offer. During any visit from your DEL licensor, you should be treated as a respected business owner and should feel free to ask for any information and support you need. If at any time you do not feel that way, please talk with your licensor about it, or ask for the phone number of your licensor's supervisor to share your concerns. You may contact an assistant service area manager if you have further concerns.

What should I expect during a DEL complaint inspection? If DEL licensors believe children are at risk, they will take immediate action. When licensors receive a complaint from a parent or others, they will visit the licensed facility. Your licensor will talk with you and your staff, and look at your facility and your records to decide whether the complaint is valid. If it is a valid complaint, your licensor will work with you to create a plan (compliance agreement) to fix the issue.

If the complaint is about suspected child abuse or neglect, DEL will work with staff from the Department of Social and Health Services Division of Licensed Resources/Child Protective Services (DLR/CPS). DLR/CPS will do a child abuse and neglect *investigation*, sometimes with law enforcement officials, while DEL completes a licensing complaint *inspection*.

You should feel free to ask your licensor questions during the complaint inspection. Your licensor will explain the purpose of the inspection to you before starting.

If a compliance agreement is put in place, your licensor will check back in with you to make sure the issues are fixed. If you have any questions or concerns about the compliance agreement, talk to your licensor, or check the box on the compliance agreement asking for a supervisory review. You will receive a letter from DEL informing you of the department's findings.

Compliance agreements that come from valid licensing complaints are posted on DEL's Web site at: www.del.wa.gov/lccis.

What do I do if I don't agree with a licensor's decision? If your licensor decides a complaint is valid, and you don't agree, you may ask for a supervisory review. In the letter you receive from DEL informing you that the complaint was found to be valid, there are instructions for requesting a review. You will need to send a copy of the letter, along with a detailed explanation as to why you believe the complaint finding is not correct, to your licensor or the supervisor within 28 days. You can ask for a review from a licensing supervisor, then an assistant service area manager, then a service area manager. At each step, you will get something in writing telling you the decision. A service area manager's decision is final.

What licensing actions may DEL take? Washington parents must be able to trust that a child care license means a safe, healthy place for children. If DEL decides a licensed provider is not able to offer safe, healthy care that ensures children's well-being, we may take action including:

Denial of license—If a DEL licensor decides a person cannot meet licensing rules, the licensor may deny that person a license.

Summary suspension—If the health or safety of children in a licensed facility is at risk, DEL may immediately suspend a license so the provider may not offer care.

Civil penalties—If a licensed facility does not meet licensing rules, DEL may fine the facility.

Revocation—If a provider has repeated or serious licensing violations that put children at risk, DEL may take away the provider's license.

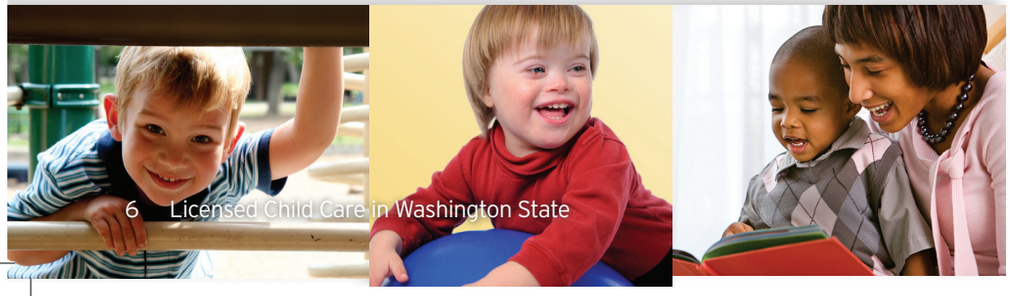
Probation—DEL may issue a probationary license to a provider who is unable to meet a licensing rule or has been the subject of several complaints that do not pose an immediate risk to children.

Modification—DEL may change a license if needed to meet licensing requirements.

Do not refer—If licensors have questions about whether a provider is able to meet licensing rules, DEL may place a provider on "do not refer" status. This means a note will be put in DEL's computer system, and child care resource and referral agencies would not refer families to this provider. (Of course, if children's health and/or safety are at risk, DEL will take other licensing action.)

You may ask for a hearing if you are fined, disqualified from providing child care, or if your license is suspended or revoked. More information about that process is available on DEL's Web site at www.del.wa.gov/laws/Appeals/default.aspx.

DEL will send or deliver to you a letter telling you about any licensing action taken. The letter will explain what you can do if you disagree with DEL's decision.



RESOURCES

Where can I find information to help me offer safe, healthy, fun care?

Children grow and learn so much in their earliest years. It is your job as a licensed provider to help them grow and learn! There are many places for you to go for more information. Local child care resource and referral agencies, public libraries and the DEL Web site are a good start.

Your DEL licensor is a good source of information about:

- How to talk to and play with children in your care
- How young children grow and learn
- How to make sure you're offering a safe, healthy, nurturing place for children
- How to get and use *The Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks*
- Local training and classes

Where can I find information to help me as a business owner?

There are several Web sites that offer resources and information to help you plan, market and run your business. Here are just a few:

Childcare.gov: Your official source for all U.S. government child care information
www.childcare.gov

Includes information on small business development, loan forgiveness programs, funding opportunities for child care programs and more.

The Internal Revenue Service Small Business and Self-Employed Tax Center
www.irs.gov/businesses/small/index.html

Includes information on business expenses, recordkeeping and more.

State of Washington Government Web site: Doing Business in Washington
http://access.wa.gov/business/

Includes information on starting a business in Washington, hiring and managing employees, and more. Also includes links to other resources, including the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries Small Business Center, and the Washington State Department of Licensing.

The U.S. Small Business Administration
www.sba.gov

Includes information on writing a business plan, marketing your business and more.

Washington Small Business Development Center
www.wsbdc.org

Includes information on writing a business plan, conducting market research and more.

Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network

Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals is an R&R Network program that provides scholarships to licensed child care center staff, licensed or exempt school-age care staff, and licensed family care providers who wish to pursue a degree or credential. These scholarships link education, compensation and commitment to enhance the quality of care. DEL helps fund this program to help you advance your education as a child care provider.

There are other professional development and training resources. Visit www.del.wa.gov/requirements/info/professional.aspx.

For questions about Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals, e-mail scholarships@childcarenet.org or call toll-free 1.866.308.3224.

The **Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network** (R&R Network) supports families and caregivers through a statewide network of 11 local child care resource and referral programs.

The 11 local resource and referral programs (R&Rs) offer licensing application assistance to those interested in becoming licensed child care providers. Your local R&R can help you:

- Develop a business plan
- Find training and professional development opportunities
- Complete a license application and other regulatory paperwork
- Set up your child care learning environment
- Establish good record-keeping practices
- Prepare for your licensing visit
- Market your business
- Connect with other providers in your area

Once you are licensed, the R&R will list your program in the referral database and refer families to you based on the family's child care needs and the services you offer. Licensed providers also receive regular R&R newsletters, which include current information on professional development opportunities and trainings, timely health and safety information, fun craft and snack ideas, and important efforts or changes taking place in the state's early learning system. Services offered by the R&R Network are supported through funding from DEL, fees for service, and other local, state and national public and private funders.

The R&R Network is a private, non-profit 501(c) 3 organization. For more information or to find your local R&R, visit www.childcarenet.org or call toll-free 1.800.446.1114.

Washington State Department of Early Learning

GLOSSARY

Department of Early Learning (DEL)—State agency created in 2006 to oversee licensed child care, the state-funded preschool program (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) and other efforts to help make sure all children in Washington are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and life.

DEL licensors—Staff at DEL who work with licensed child care providers to offer safe, healthy child care for children. Here is how supervision of child care licensing work is handled at DEL:

DEL Licensors and Health Specialists → Licensing Supervisors → Assistant Service Area Managers → Service Area Managers → DEL Director

Communicable disease training—All child care providers must have training on HIV/AIDS and bloodborne pathogens, including how those diseases are spread, how to prevent the spreading of the diseases, and confidentiality.

Facility Licensing Compliance Agreement (FLCA)—A plan a DEL licensor and provider will create to fix any safety or health issues at a facility.

Monitoring checklist—The list DEL licensors use to inspect safety and health during a monitoring visit at a licensed child care facility.

Orientation session—Workshop for people interested in becoming a licensed child care provider.

Professional development—Support for child care providers to continue their education. DEL and our partners fund programs and services including the State Training and Registry Program (STARS), Building Bridges to Higher Education, and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals.

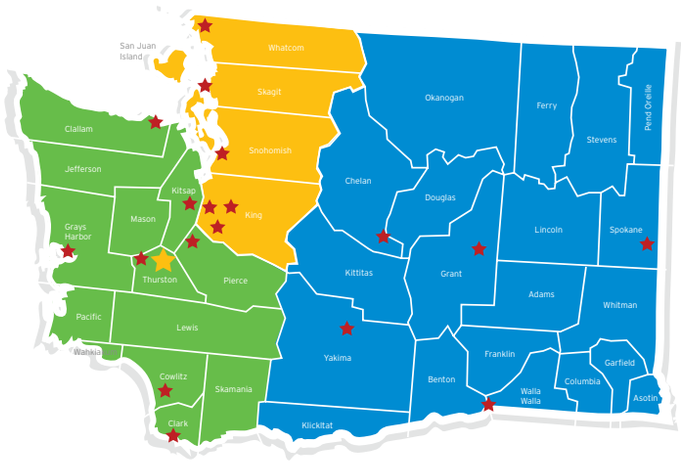
Resource and referral agency—State network of agencies that helps parents find licensed child care, and offers resources and training for licensed child care providers.

Revised Code of Washington (RCW)—Set of current Washington State laws, including laws for DEL (RCW Title 43.215). You can find these on DEL's Web site (www.del.wa.gov) in the section called Laws, Rules and Performance Standards.

Washington Administrative Code (WAC)—Set of current rules for state agencies, including rules for the Department of Early Learning (*WAC Title 170*). You can find these on DEL's Web site (www.del.wa.gov) in the section called Laws, Rules and Performance Standards.

DEL office locations

ABERDEEN
BELLEVUE
BELLINGHAM
BREMERTON
EVERETT
KELSO
KING SOUTH
MOSES LAKE
MOUNT VERNON
PORT ANGELES
SEATTLE
SPOKANE
TACOMA
TRI-CITIES
TUMWATER
VANCOUVER
WENATCHEE
YAKIMA



Northwest Southwest Eastern

CONTACT US

Department of Early Learning State Office
P.O. Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Toll-free: 1.866.482.4325
Web site: www.del.wa.gov

My licensor

Name_____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

My licensing supervisor

Name_____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

If you think a child is being abused or neglected, call toll-free 1.866.END.HARM

Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed forests, controlled sources and recycled wood or fiber
www.fsc.org Cert no. SW-COC-003445
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