

A Guide to Finding Child Care in Rutland County

Rutland County, Vermont, is a wonderful, family-friendly community with many resources for children and parents. For working families, finding child care that is the right fit means considering numerous factors. Child care, particularly infant and toddler care, is in high demand. Fortunately, there are several high-quality early childhood options.

Guide created by Rutland County Building Bright Futures Council
Updated 2023



Admission and Enrollment

Early childhood programs in Rutland County are predominantly small businesses, who work together to assist families in making their child care decisions. While there are occasional openings during the year as families move, jobs change, and a family's need for child care changes, the majority of children will start in late August, in alignment with the public school calendar.

However, the admission criteria at each program varies according to the program's mission and philosophy. In general, depending upon the individual program, the following criteria are considered:



- Date of application - You should begin your search as soon as you know you are pregnant.
- Balance of children's individual needs
- Age range
- Sibling status
- Children and families with special needs
- Enrollment contracts

None of the programs discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, special need, medical condition, ancestry, or citizenship.

Waiting Lists

Most center-based programs have waiting lists, as do several of the home-based programs. It is wise to get on as many waiting lists as possible as soon as you know you have, or will have, a need for care. This is especially true for infant and toddler care. It is not uncommon for families to call and ask to be put on a waiting list as soon as they know they are expecting a child.

Universal Prekindergarten (Act 166)

Act 166, passed by the Vermont Legislature in 2014, provides for publicly funded prekindergarten education for a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually for all 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children not enrolled in kindergarten. The application for pre-qualification, frequently asked questions, and other information are available on the Vermont Agency of Education website.

* It is important to note that not all programs participate in Act 166, and many private programs require full-time enrollment. Funds provided to programs on behalf of districts help offset the cost of care for participating children through the typical school year.

Notification of Acceptance

Many programs build their classrooms in alignment with their mission and philosophy. When a family is notified that their child has been offered a space in a program, the news can create anxiety in families who have not yet been notified. If a family declines a space, a program will return to their waiting list to find the next child on the list who fits their overall criteria.

* It is very important that if a family is offered a spot in a program that they either accept or decline right away.

Please know that early childhood programs understand that this can be stressful for families. If a family does not get a slot at their first-choice program, but they are willing to be flexible, perhaps have a slightly longer drive, there will be more options.

Infant and Toddler Care

Families needing child care for children under age 3 have a particular challenge. For obvious reasons, quality early childhood programs have very low child/staff ratios in infant and toddler classrooms, and consequently the number of available openings is critically low. This is a local, state and nationwide problem, not unique to Rutland County, with no easy fix.

Finding care may demand creativity. For example, if a family can work out a flexible schedule so they only need part-time care, their options might be greater, but there is still no guarantee. The county referral specialist will work with you to suggest a number of alternatives and once your child is over the age of 2, there are considerably more options.



What to Look For in a Program

LOOK... Visit several child care homes or centers. Does it look safe? Do the teachers enjoy talking and playing with children? Do they talk with each child at the child's level? Are there plenty of toys and learning materials within a child's reach?

LISTEN... Do the children sound happy and involved? Do the teachers speak in cheerful and patient tones? A place that is too quiet may mean not enough activity. A place that is too noisy may mean that there is a lack of control.

COUNT... Count the number of children in the group. Then count the number of staff members caring for them. A program is able to focus attention on your child, if the teacher to child ratio and size of group is low.

ASK... Ask about the background and experience of the Early Educators. Child care providers with special skills may be able to offer more to your family. Ask how long the staff have been with the program. If the staff have been with a program for a long time, it may be a sign that the program is responsive to the staff's needs as well as the family's needs. Ask about food programs they participate in.

If you have any questions or concerns, discuss them with the provider whenever they come up.

Child Care Support Services of Rutland County (CCSS)

Child Care Support Services (CCSS) provides services and information that help improve the lives of families, children, and the people who seek to care for them. CCSS staff are available to assist with matters related to finding and paying for quality child care, specialized child care, starting a child care program, or education and information related to child care. Funded by grants from the Vermont State Child Development Division and the Federal Child Care & Development Fund, CCSS:

- Provides referral services for families in need of childcare
- Determines eligibility for families to receive state financial assistance for childcare
- Provides information and educational literature for families in need of childcare

CCSS is located at 88 Park St, Rutland, VT 05701.

The Child Care Financial Assistance Program, also known as subsidy, can help your family pay for child care: dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ccfap. Or call (802) 773-4365 or email Ann Hughes (ahughes@vacvt.org), Carrie Flood (cflood@vacvt.org), or Marcy Fenton (mfenton@vacvt.org).

Referral Specialist

Rutland County has a referral specialist (Meghan Fredette) who keeps an up-to-date list of all the programs in the county and keeps current information about potential openings. You can contact the referral specialist at (802) 747-0033 or referral@vacvt.org.

Resources for Families

- Child care program information by town: brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us (Please note that the program vacancy information on the state website is not reliable)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children, "What to look for in a Program": naeyc.org/our-work/families/what-look-program
- Department of Children and Families - Child Development Division website: dcf.vermont.gov/cdd
- Vermont Child Care LYNX: vtchildcarelynx.org

Conclusion

Families should be aware that the demand for child care varies significantly from year to year. In some years, early childhood programs have vacancies all year, and in other years demand far outreaches the system's capacity.