



Military Family Services
National Capital Region

Childcare in Ottawa

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OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDCARE SYSTEM IN OTTAWA AND AREA

There are five types of childcare:

1. Licensed or unlicensed facility
2. Part time care such as a preschool or nursery school
3. Caregiver in your home
4. Caregiver providing services from their home
5. Before and/or after school care.

1. Licensed childcare- centres are monitored and regulated by provincial authorities and typically involve a 2 year wait time. **Unlicensed facilities** are not monitored or inspected beyond the restriction of caregiver to child ratios, and are more readily available.

2. Preschools and nursery schools- these programs are offered in half day or full day sessions and can encourage various skills such as socialization and early literacy. Additionally, the French catholic school board offers some preschool programs that are free of charge based on eligibility.

3 & 4. Homecare providers may offer their services independently, or through an agency and many advertise their services within community or neighborhood facebook groups. While MFS NCR does not have the capacity to regularly monitor or vet homecare providers, MFS NCR may provide a list of caregivers who prioritize military families.

- 5. Before and after school care** is offered by;
- Schools (often via third party providers)
 - City of Ottawa community centres
 - Homecare providers.

Extended day programs (EDP) offered by schools are available on a first come first serve basis and spaces are limited. Each school board may have its own approach to registering for these programs, but families must have completed school registration before applying for extended day program services

Step 1 - Considerations

Budget and affordability

- Private centres or unlicensed providers may charge \$60 or more per day.
- Licensed centres enrolled in the Canada Wide Early Learning Child Care Program (CWELCC) average \$22 per day.
- The French catholic school board offers some half day preschool programming at no cost.

Child care subsidy

- Government subsidies support families meeting eligibility criteria to pay for full or partial child care fees.
- All licensed centers are subsidized directly through the City of Ottawa, via application, or are subsidized indirectly through the province's refundable [Ontario Child Care Tax Credit | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca). Unlicensed care may also garner tax credits with appropriate records or receipts.

Types of curriculum

Every child care facility offers a certain type of curriculum aligned with particular early learning philosophies or pedagogies. Look for curriculums that align with your family values and your child's needs and interests. For military families, it can be helpful to choose a program that promotes emotional stability, adaptability to change, and the development of confidence.

Montessori: emphasizes independence, hands-on learning, and a child-centered environment to foster holistic development.

Universal: a play-based learning system that focuses on inclusivity.

Reggio-Emilia child-centered, inquiry-based learning with a focus on nurturing learning environments and community involvement.

Waldorf: focused on imagination, creativity, and balanced development of the head, heart, and hands (thinking, feeling, and doing).

Forest: focused on learning through practical, hands-on experiences in an outdoor setting.

Location Preferences

- Consider whether childcare would be most advantageous close to home or close to work. Look into options that will ease commute times and family schedules.
- If your younger child has an older sibling, is there child care available in or near the school they attend?

Hours required

- Be sure to check the opening and closing hours of childcare options you are considering. Many providers will fine parents who are late to pick up their children.
- If you have a more unpredictable work schedule, seek out care providers who may offer some flexibility.
- If you are planning to grow your family, it may be worth asking providers if they will prioritize siblings of children in care in the future.
- Check your school board's and school's daily schedule as many vary by small increments which can affect your ability to drop off your child(ren) on time and/or align with your other commitments.

Step 2 - Finding childcare

Licensed or unlicensed facilities

Ministry of Ontario search engine for licensed care:

[Search for licensed child care \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.gov.on.ca)

The City of Ottawa childcare registry & waitlist:

Visit the link below to register your child and be added to the licensed child care centre waitlists of your choice. You will be prompted to select between 5-9 centre options. You may filter centres based on language preferences, enrolment in CWELCC as well as other factors. Keep in mind the waitlist times are typically around 2 years. You may wish to consider anticipated life changes in your selection of centres.

You must be on the City of Ottawa's registry to secure a spot in a licensed child care centre.

Click [HERE](#) for the ONEHSN site.

***Tip for military families: Due to possible wait times, it is recommended that you add your child to multiple waitlists as early as possible, even before an official posting. You may use the address of the Uplands Military Community Centre (330 Croil Drive K1V 1J1) as a temporary address until you have secured housing in the region, and can update your account.

***Some outlying regions have their own registries

Ex: Lanark County [Lanark County Child Care Registry | Child Care Waitlist](#)

Part time care- preschool or nursery school

Above resources, plus:

French catholic preschool programs: [Petits pas à trois | Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est](#)

French schoolboard preschool program: [Ma Mini Maternelle - Petite Enfance](#)

Caregivers (in your home, or from their home)

Above resources, plus:

Daycarebear (unlicensed care): [Daycare in Ottawa - Search results \(Page 1\) \(daycarebear.ca\)](#)

[Trusted Babysitter and Nanny services in Canada | CanadianNanny.ca](#)

Before and After Care

To search for before and after school care, families should first refer to the appropriate school board website for further direction about how to apply and what is available;

- French Language Catholic School Board: [Service de garde | Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est](#)
- Ottawa Catholic School Board: [Child Care & Extended Day Programs – The Ottawa Catholic School Board](#)
- Ottawa Carleton District School Board: [OCDSB Extended Day Program | Ottawa-Carleton District School Board](#)
- French Language Public School Board: [Énoncé de programme - Petite Enfance](#)

To find a City of Ottawa community centre offering before and after school care, visit:

[Before and after school programs - Camps and community programs | City of Ottawa](#)

***Some outlying community school boards, have differing before and after care procedures:

[CDSBEO On-site Licensed Child Care Information](#) [CE updated January 22, 2025](#) (Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario)

UCDSB (Upper Canada District School Board) [Childcare Services](#)

Step 3- Visiting/choosing childcare centres

Questions to ask about the childcare centre/provider:

*Many centres will provide an introductory manual that may answer many of the questions below.

- What is your transition process when a child starts childcare for the first time? How do you transition children into different age groups?
- Do you follow a curriculum? What does your daily schedule look like?
- What is your educator to child ratio? (The Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA) states that the maximum ECE to child ratios are - Infant 1:3 /3:10, Toddlers 1:5, Preschool 1:8)
- Are all your educators registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators? Do the staff have appropriate and up to date first aid and CPR training?
- What does your cleaning schedule look like? (If you drop by unannounced, you will get a good sense of how strict that routine is.)
- What is your immunization protocol?
- What is included in the monthly fees? What is not included?
- What happens when the child care provider is sick?
- What is the policy and procedure if my child is sick?

Questions to ask about parent/provider communication:

- How will you communicate with me regarding my child's successes and/or challenges during the day? (ex: daily communication book, Hi Mama, Storypark)
- What is your policy and procedure regarding escalation of concerns/issues (by either the parent or the childcare centre/provider)?

- What is your policy or procedure should I decide to withdraw my child from the childcare centre/provider?
- Under what circumstances or criteria would you no longer be able to support my child in attending the childcare centre/provider? What is your policy?

To Note

- Are there working smoke detectors? Are there emergency exits? Are recent emergency and lockdown plans posted?
- Do they use safety gates? Are the outlets covered?
- Did you feel welcome and invited into the environment?
- Is there natural light in the space? (This can do wonders for a child's mood.)
- Are the children there happy and engaged in the program?
- Did you leave feeling confident that your child would be well cared for at this facility?

Parents and Caregivers of a child with complex needs have additional factors to consider when finding suitable and appropriate care for their child(ren).

You may wish to consider writing an "All About Me" or "One-Page Profile" about your child to provide to the child care centre/provider. This document usually includes information about your child's qualities and strengths; his/her likes and dislikes, what is important to your child and how best to support your child. It is important to be positive and realistic about your child's care needs.

Additional considerations when seeking care for a child with complex needs

General questions to ask about the childcare centre/provider:

- Does the childcare centre/provider have an inclusion policy?
- Do any of the staff have specific education, training, qualifications or previous work experience related to children with complex needs?
- What additional resources or partnerships are available to the child care centre/provider in order to support a child with complex needs?
- What accommodations are possible to ensure individualized care specific to my child's needs?
- Does the childcare centre/provider incorporate any particular models of practice or evidence-based approaches within their curriculum and learning environment?
- Does the center allow a transition period for integration?

Questions to ask about specialist services:

- My child is currently undergoing a specialist assessment. Can the specialist observe my child within the child care environment for the purposes of the assessment?
- Can my child access their therapies (such as SLP, OT, ABA therapy) at the child care centre/provider location? Can my child's therapist provide individualized therapy within the child care environment?
- What specialized equipment and/or items is the childcare centre/provider currently equipped with (ex: toileting, feeding, seating, sensory-related etc.)?

- Can I provide the childcare centre/provider with my child's own specific equipment and/or items to be used within the child care environment that will remain solely for my child's use?
- Do you currently work with Children's Inclusion Support Services (CISS)?

Questions to ask about your child's needs:

- My child has food-related sensory aversions/intolerances or follows a special diet. Can I provide my child with their own snacks and lunch?
- My child is non-verbal. What communication tools and strategies do you use that encourage and help develop communication abilities?
- My child has a history of wandering/eloping. What safety measures are in place to ensure my child's safety (for both indoor and outdoor spaces)?
- My child has behavioural challenges. How do you support children who have behavioural needs? What support or strategies are provided/implemented if my child's behavioural challenges escalate?
- My child requires specific medication/treatment. Are you able to administer this medication/treatment? What education or training would be required for staff to be able to administer/provide the medication/treatment?
- My child has difficulty in engaging with peers and needs help with socialization. How do you encourage socialization? What strategies or approaches do you implement?

Additional support and services:

Children’s Inclusion Support Services (CISS) provides support, in English and French, to licensed childcare programs (nursery schools, childcare centres and home childcare agencies) that promote the inclusion of children with special needs within the City of Ottawa. [Children’s Inclusion Support Services | Andrew Fleck Children's Services \(afchildrensservices.ca\)](#)

Military Family Services (MFS NCR)– MFS NCR has various supports and resources for families related to complex needs such as a sensory lending library, partnerships with community specialists and navigation of potential financial supports. [CFMWS | MFS | NCR | CFMWS](#)