

Five Steps to Choosing Quality Child Care



1. Look

Begin by visiting several child care homes or centers. On each visit, think about your first impression. But don't stop there. Does the place look safe for your child? Do the caregivers/teachers who will care for your child enjoy talking and playing with children? Do they talk with each child at the child's eye level? Are there plenty of toys and learning materials within a child's reach? You should always visit a home or center more than once. And stay as long as possible so you can get a good feel for what the care will be like for your child. After you start using the child care, continue to visit from time to time.

2. Listen

What does the child care setting sound like? Do the children sound happy and involved? What about the teachers' voices? Do they seem cheerful and patient? A place that's too quiet may mean not enough activity. A place that's too noisy may mean there is a lack of control.



3. Count

Count the number of children in the group. Then count the number of staff members caring for them. Obviously, the fewer the number of children for each adult, the more attention your child will get. A small number of children per adult is most important for babies and younger children.

4. Ask

It's very important that the adults who care for your children have the knowledge and experience to give

Accreditation

What does it mean for you and your child?

Accredited homes and centers voluntarily measure up to national standards of quality that have been established by national child care organizations. Programs that are accredited have gone beyond minimum licensing standards and have made a commitment to provide the kind of care, attention, and stimulating activities that you and your children require.

Caregivers in accredited programs take part in ongoing child development training. Trained caregivers are more likely to understand children's needs at different ages, plan appropriate activities, and interact with children in warm and stimulating ways. They are also more likely to provide positive guidance for children, rather than harsh discipline.

Parents who use accredited programs are very happy with them! These programs undergo in-depth self-assessments, independent observation, and approval by professional experts.

them the attention they need. Ask about the background and experience of all staff: the program director, caregivers, teachers, and any other adults who will have contact with your child in the home or center. Find out about the special training each one has and whether the program is accredited. Quality care providers and teachers will be happy to have you ask these questions.

5. Be Informed

Find out more about efforts in your community to improve the quality of child care. Is your caregiver involved in these activities? How can you get involved? For more information, contact your local child care resource and referral agency.

Check it Out!

The following points are a good way to measure the quality of a child care home or center.

Caregivers/Teachers

- Do the caregivers/teachers seem to really like children?
- Do the caregivers/teachers get down on each child's level to speak to the child?
- Are children greeted when they arrive?
- Are children's needs quickly met even when things get busy?
- Are the caregivers/teachers trained in CPR, first aid, and early childhood education?
- Are the caregivers/teachers involved in continuing education programs?
- Does the program keep up with children's changing interests?
- Will the caregivers/teachers always be ready to answer your questions?
- Will the caregivers/teachers tell you what your child is doing every day?
- Are parents' ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- Do the caregivers/teachers and children enjoy being together?
- Is there enough staff to serve the children? (Ask local experts about the best staff/child ratios for different age groups.)
- Are caregivers/teachers trained and experienced?
- Have the caregivers/teachers participated in early childhood development classes?

Setting

- Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment? Can the caregivers/teachers see the entire play area at all times?
- Are there different areas for resting, quiet play, and active play? Is there enough space for the children in all of these areas?

Activities

- Is there a daily balance of play time, story time, activity time, and nap time?
- Are the activities right for each age group?
- Are there enough toys and learning materials for the number of children?
- Are toys safe, clean, and within reach of the children?

In General

- Do you agree with the discipline rules?
- Do you hear the sounds of happy children?
- Are children comforted when needed?
- Is the program licensed or regulated?
- Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- Will your child be happy there?

Tear off this sheet and take it with you as you look for a program for your child. Ask questions and feel free to take notes about what you see and hear.