

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

QUALITY CHILD CARE: Recognizing and Choosing the Best for Your Children

With nearly 12 million children under age 5 spending almost 40 hours in child care each week, it is not surprising that child care plays a huge role in many children's growth. The quality of care children get in the first five years can affect them for the rest of their lives. It can prepare them to enter school with the skills they need to succeed.



What does quality child care mean to you? You definitely want your children in a safe place. You also want your children to be in the care of a "warm" provider, where they will be happy and in a program where they are active and learning. You consider all this when choosing child care.

What Is High-Quality Care?

To identify the quality of care a child care program you'll need to examine the "process" and the "structure" of the program. The process just means looking at what goes on in the child care program. For instance, high-quality child care has planned activities for your child that have a purpose. When looking at the program's structure, you are considering the actual place: the number of providers and teachers, and the number of children, the staff's training and experience, the safety features, and so on.

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Why Is High-Quality Care Important?

There are several items that will help you detect the level of quality a program offers.

1. Health and safety

- Proper equipment will reduce safety or health risks.

- Monitoring of visitors reduces risk or threats to children's safety.

- Clean environments reduce illness and spread of germs.

2. Learning Environment

- Young children need a lot of supervision and guidance.

- Children need to develop socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.

3. Staff Training

- Providers and teachers know and understand child development and how best to work with children.

- Your child will receive care that is right for his age and skill levels.

- Children need to form a bond with their provider and feel safe and loved.

4. Parent Policies

- It's important for parents to be welcomed and involved in the child care program.

- Good child care involves parents and works with parents to meet specific needs.

5. Program Administration

- Programs with licenses have passed standards for health and safety, ratios, and equipment.

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- Programs that are accredited will have passed national standards for providing quality care.

Making Your Visit

Visiting the child care program before you sign up is a crucial step. Here are some tips to make the most of that visit:

- **Speak over the phone and get basic information.**
Talk by phone to help you to decide if you want to visit the program. You may have to arrange a time to speak because providers may be busy taking care of children.

- **Arrange for a visit.**

- **Take a checklist with you.** Visit a program more than once, and at different times of the day, so that you can get a sense of the flow of an average day.

- **When visiting a center program, speak to providers who would care for your child.** Make sure you speak directly with the child care provider who would be caring for your child.

- **Ask to speak to other parents using the program.** Get a different view point on the kind of care provided, their experience and level of satisfaction.

Will This Child Care Program Be Good for My Child?

*A Checklist of Questions for Parents to Ask When Visiting a Program**

Health and Safety Questions		Supervision	
1. Do all adults and children wash their hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before eating?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	12. Are children watched at all times, even when sleeping?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Are diaper-changing tables cleaned and disinfected with a bleach solution after each use?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	13. Are adults warm and welcoming. Do they pay individual attention to each child?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Can the program show records of all the children's required shots?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	14. Do adults handle children's behavior in positive ways, without yelling or using any physical punishment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Are medicines labeled and out of children's reach? Are adults trained in giving medicines and keeping records of what was given to whom?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	15. Are there enough adults to serve the children? (Ask local experts about the best staff/child ratios for different age groups.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Are cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials locked up, away from children's reach?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	16. Do you know how many caregivers are there per group of children? (Hint: Your child will get more attention if each caregiver has fewer children to take care of.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6. What is the plan if a child is injured, sick or lost?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Learning Environment	
7. Are first aid kits easy for adults to get to?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	17. Is program arranged in specific areas such as blocks, art, books, dress-up, table toys and puzzles?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
8. What is the plan in case of disaster – fire, flood, earthquake, terrorism, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	18. Are lesson plans posted for everyone to see? Do they allow for children to be creative and actively involved? Are children learning while they play?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Can all adults be seen by someone else at all times when with children, throughout the rooms and/or through interior windows?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	19. Is playground equipment in good condition? Are there sand or wood chips or a padded material underneath? Is the playground fenced to at least 4 feet? Is the playground (or yard) checked daily for dangerous objects?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
10. Have all adults been trained on preventing child abuse, spotting potential signs of abuse, and on rules on reporting suspected abuse?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
11. Have all adults had their backgrounds checked nationally?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

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Providers and Parents Working Together is Key to Quality Care

One of the most important aspects of any child care program is the relationship you form with your child's provider. When parents and child care providers work together, everyone benefits. In a good partnership, parent and provider work together to develop and achieve goals that are best for the child within the program setting.

Child care programs that support positive parent and provider partnerships will have some of the following qualities:

- Parents and providers communicate on a daily basis.
- Parents trust and feel at ease with the child care program.
- Parents have many opportunities to be involved.
- Providers ask parents for their input and feedback.
- Children in the program are happy, well-adjusted and learning.

Policies for Parents	
20. Is it ok for you to drop in any time you want to?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
21. Are you given written policies?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
22. Will you have a formal conference about your child at least once a year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Staff Training	
23. If a child care center, does the director have a college degree and at least two years of experience?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
24. Does the lead teacher in the classroom have at least a credential like a CDA** and one year of experience? In family child care, does the provider have at least one year of experience working with young children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
25. Is everyone trained in first aid and infant/child CPR?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
26. Is there a training plan for everyone working with children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
27. In a center, is there a written salary schedule and are there benefits?	
Administration	
28. Are written personnel policies and job descriptions available?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
29. Are center staff evaluated formally once a year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
30. Are parents and staff surveyed annually about their satisfaction?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Administration (contd.)	
31. Is the program as a whole evaluated annually in a formal way?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
32. Is the program accredited by a national organization?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<p>*Questions are based on research findings.</p> <p>** CDA is Child Development Associates credential. Teachers and assistants might also have an Associate's Degree from a community college or a Bachelor's degree.</p>	



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Choosing a high-quality child care program for your child takes time and patience. No child care program is more important than the care a parent gives. But, a good program can help you to make sure your child is getting care that provides a solid foundation to lead a happy and successful life.

For More Information

- **Child Care Aware**, www.childcareaware.org, 1-800-424-2246. Child Care Aware helps parents find quality child care and resources in their community. Their website has information on what to look for when seeking quality child care, as well as a checklist on evaluating programs and providers that parents can use.
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**, www.aap.org/healthtopics/childcare.cfm. The AAP web page has child care related information, including information on high-quality care and a checklist for parents.
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children**, www.naeyc.org, 1-800-424-2460.

The site has information for parents and teachers about quality child care, catalogs of early childhood books and posters, information about conferences, and FAQs about program accreditation.

- **National Resource Center**,

<http://nrc.uchsc.edu/parents.htm>. The NRC promotes health and safety in out-of-home child care settings. Its web-based resource, *Healthy Kids Healthy Care*, reviews all major areas of health and safety for parents and child care providers. Also has resources on state licensing regulations, and indicators of quality when choosing child care.

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