

WHAT IS QUALITY?

Child care should be a safe and healthy place for children, but that is just the beginning. Quality child care goes above and beyond just health and safety. A quality program will provide an environment where children are learning, growing, exploring, and forming healthy relationships.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Before you visit a child care program, you may be able to learn about their licensing status, health and safety records, and quality ratings using online resources. You may also be able to gather basic information like availability and cost over the phone.



However, an in-person visit is the best way to evaluate a program’s quality and whether it will be a good fit for your child and family. When scheduling your visit, plan to stay for at least an hour. Give yourself time to tour the entire facility and ask plenty of questions. You want to be present long enough to get a good feel for the environment and to see caregiver interactions. A rushed visit can leave you with unanswered questions and an incomplete picture of the program.

WHO WE ARE

Child Care Aware® of America is our nation’s leading voice for child care. We advance a child care system that effectively serves all children’s growth, development and educational advancement and creates positive economic impact for families and communities.

To learn more about our mission, visit childcareaware.org



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Make the Most of Your Child Care Visit



When you are trying to find the right child care program, you’ll probably have a lot on your mind. Things like location, cost, and hours will be some of the factors you may use to make your choice. As you consider your options, be sure to make quality a top priority!

WHY QUALITY?

A child’s brain goes through amazing changes and growth during their early years. The experiences that children have during this time will influence how they learn and develop. Quality child care offers supportive, nurturing relationships with trusted adults and positive learning experiences for children. This allows parents to work or attend school with peace of mind while they’re away from their children.



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COME PREPARED

Have a list ready of the questions that you want to ask and the things you plan to look for during your visit. The following elements are considered quality indicators. This means that programs with these features are better equipped to provide quality care for your child. This list of quality indicators can help you create your own checklist for a child care visit:

Low Adult to Child Ratio

Ask how many children there are for each adult. The fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. Babies need an adult to child ratio of no more than one adult for three or four infants. Most 4-year-olds can do well with a ratio of one adult for 8-10 children.

Small Group Sizes

Find out how many children are in the group. The smaller the group, the better for your child. Babies need a group size of no more than six to eight in a room. Four-year-olds should be in a group of no more than 16-20 children.

Child Care Provider Qualifications and Experience

Ask about the child care providers' training and education. Child care providers with special training in working with children are better able to help your child learn. Some specific qualifications that you can ask about are:

- ✓ **Years of experience** – look for caregivers with at least 2 years' experience
- ✓ **Training to work with children** – a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a degree in early childhood education or a related field
- ✓ **Ongoing professional development trainings**
- ✓ **Health and Safety Training** – CPR and first aid, recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse, and safe infant sleep practices
- ✓ **Background checks** – ask if checks for caregivers and staff include fingerprints
- ✓ **National accreditation** –NAEYC, NAC, NECPA, and AdvancED accredit Child Care Centers, and NAFCC accredits Family Child Care Homes

Health and Safety Measures

Ask about practices in place designed to keep children healthy and safe. This includes frequent hand-washing, regularly cleaning and sanitizing toys and surfaces, safe infant sleep practices, daily inspections of indoor and outdoor play area and equipment, and others.

Adult – Child Interactions

Watch the interactions between the provider(s) and the children. Providers should seem warm and friendly to adults and children, greeting each child and showing an interest in their activities. You should hear caregivers having respectful, two-way conversations with children (even babies!) throughout the day, getting down to the child's level to talk, listen, and respond.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Look for a variety of developmentally-appropriate toys, books, and art supplies available to children during the day. Children should have the opportunity to participate in planned activities that will interest and challenge them. There should be plenty of time for free play, indoors and out. Caregivers should use positive guidance when children need assistance.

Low Staff Turnover

Check how long the child care providers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It is best if children have the same child care provider for at least a year. Getting used to new child care providers takes time and energy that could be spent on learning new things.

Policies and Procedures

Ask for a copy of the parent handbook or written policies. These should include the provider's "Open Door Policy" welcoming parent drop-in visits, ideas, and involvement. Ask if the program has an emergency plan for how they'll care for children and contact parents in case of an emergency. Look for their discipline or guidance policies and information on when children should stay home due to illness. Policies and procedures should also include details about rates, fees, and payment schedules.



ASK QUESTIONS!

Make sure to add any questions that are specific to your child's and family's needs. This may include asking about diapering or toileting practices, naps or rest time, allergy or dietetic needs, screen time usage, etc. In the end, you know your child best—will your child be happy there?

Learn more about how to find and choose quality child care and access comprehensive checklists for your visit at <http://childcareaware.org>.