

Choosing Quality Child Care on Short Notice



This checklist is designed to help you choose a child care program if you don't have a lot of time. The questions can be your guide during a phone interview (or, if possible, an in-person visit) along with explanations for what to listen or look for in response to each question.



★ Start here:

- ☐ Do you have space for my child(ren) starting on (date) ?
- ☐ What rates do you charge for child care? What other fees are charged? Do you offer any discounts?
- ☐ What are the hours you provide child care?
- ☐ **If needed:** Do you accept state or other subsidy payments for eligible families?
- ☐ What languages do providers speak?

Ask over the phone and observe in-person:



Are you required to have a child care license? If so, is the license up-to-date and in good standing?



When was your most recent inspection? Were there supervision or health and safety concerns found?



Do all adults complete background checks before spending time with children?



What steps do you take to keep children healthy and safe?



What previous child care experience do providers have?



Are providers certified in infant and child CPR and First Aid? Do providers take regular trainings on child development; health and safety in child care; and diversity, equity, and inclusion?



Do you provide healthy meals and/or snacks, or do families bring food from home?



What types of interactions can I expect to see between the providers and children?



How do you handle guidance and discipline at my child's age and development?



What would a typical day look like for my child?



What are your policies on excluding children for illness or behavior?

What you should know:

Most states allow you to check a provider or program's licensing status online. [Find your state's licensing info here.](#)

Many states post inspection reports online. [Learn how to view inspection reports in your state.](#)

No adult should be left alone with a child without clear, comprehensive background checks on file. [Learn more about background checks.](#)

Listen/Look for how the provider or program prevents **illness** (frequent handwashing and sanitizing), **injury** (layout of space; appropriate play equipment), **abuse** (background checks, discipline policies, training), and **missing children** (secure indoor/outdoor spaces, policies to count children at transitions). Providers should also have a detailed plan for **emergencies** that could happen in your area.

Providers should have at least one year of experience caring for children your child's age.

Training in CPR, First Aid, and health and safety helps providers keep children safe and prevent illness and injury in child care. Training on topics like child development, anti-racism, anti-bias, and inclusion helps providers understand how children learn and grow and create equitable, inclusive child care environments.

If the provider or program serves food, ask if they are a part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which supports providers with serving healthy food.

Listen/Look for back-and-forth interactions happening between providers and every child, all day long. Providers should treat children and their feelings, thoughts, and ideas with respect.

Providers should use positive guidance rather than punishments and aim to teach appropriate behaviors as children grow.

Listen/Look for activities geared toward children's interests and development. Activities should allow for learning through play, interactions, reading, art, music, etc. Screen time should not be a regular activity.

Listen for specific illnesses, symptoms and behaviors that might cause a child to be excluded from care. Listen for how providers handle discipline and how they work to prevent suspension and expulsion from child care.