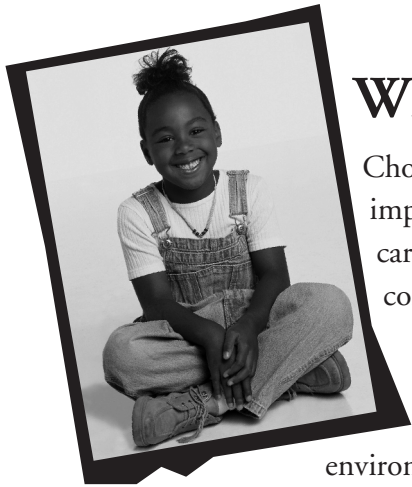


# The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS



## Why Choosing Quality Child Care Matters

Choosing child care is an important decision. Good child care arrangements can improve the daily lives of children and parents. In addition, children in high quality care have higher levels of success when they enter school. Yet, it can be difficult and confusing to know what to look for in a program. What exactly is quality child care?

Many parents feel that having their child feel safe and secure and getting lots of individual attention is the mark of quality child care. A safe, loving, stimulating environment is important. Your child also needs a place to be challenged to learn, reach his potential and eventually prepare for elementary school.

The right place will make both you and your child happy with your selection. Here are some suggestions of what to look for when you visit a program and the reasons why these criteria are so important.

## Health and Safety

In evaluating child care options, there is nothing as important as the assurance for the health and safety of your child. While the enforcement of state and local health codes reduces the spread of disease, and the enforcement of state and local building codes addresses building safety, there are areas you should look at in order to protect your child from harm. Look around to check that equipment is sturdy, toys are not broken, areas for adults have locks on the doors, and make sure that the provider screens visitors and maintains a list of persons approved by you to pick up your child.

Although children need to be protected from dangerous situations and materials, they also need opportunities to experiment and test new skills. Most safety problems in child care are on the playground and due to falls from climbing equipment. Check to see that the playground is fenced, there is soft surfacing material under the climbing structures and that equipment is not too high. The play equipment should be well-maintained and appropriate for the ages of the children, and the ground must be free of dangerous or dirty materials.

Notice whether providers wash their hands after diapering, toileting, and wiping children's noses. This practice by providers is associated with fewer illnesses and infectious diseases. It may sound simple but these routines are essential for the health of your child.

## Training and Education



The providers of child care and the relationships they have with the families they serve are one of the most important elements in quality child care. Research shows that being assigned to providers with more education and training helps children be

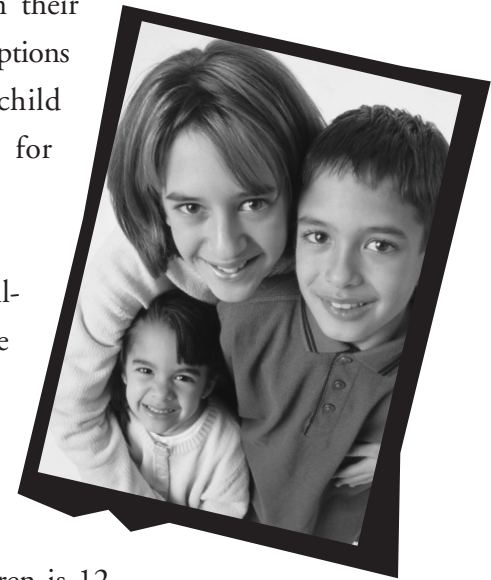
more cooperative, stick with tasks and become ready for school. Trained providers understand how children grow and learn and they know how to provide the materials and activities that are most appropriate to the ages and interests of the children.

Providers of child care who have experience with children and are trained in early childhood development are more likely to organize activities and materials that allow children to grow and learn. Ask your provider about the training or college they have had since high school. Providers committed to furthering their own education are more likely to promote a learning environment in their child care program.

Your relationship with your child's caregivers is the key to good quality. It is essential to have open communication allowing you to express your feelings and views. In turn, your caregiver(s) should be available to listen and provide valuable support when you need it. You should always feel well informed about and welcome as both an observer and a contributor to the program.

## Group Size and Child To Staff Ratios

Although licensing provides minimum standards for group size, research shows that smaller group sizes work best. Generally, the child care quality is higher as the group size gets smaller. The fewer children in a group, the more attention each child will get from the caregiver. Most programs will try to be fully enrolled to reduce costs, but you can check to be sure your child is not changing groups or caregivers often just to keep within the licensing limits. Children need stable relationships with their caregivers to develop a sense of security in their lives. Frequent disruptions and changes in child care are difficult for children.



The number of children compared to the number of adults is called the child to staff ratio. For example, if the group size of children is 12 and there are two adults, the child to staff ratio is 12 to 2 or 6 children to 1 staff member. A smaller number of children per adult is particularly important for infants and younger children. High quality centers have ratios as low as 1 adult to 3 children for infants and toddlers. When the child to staff ratios are lower, caregivers can spend more time with your child.

# Learning Environment

Quality child care offers activities that are appropriate for each child's age, interests and abilities. Materials are easily accessible. Children are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process and to experience a variety of activities. There is respect for different family cultures and backgrounds. Art projects look creative and varied and express each child's interests.

Overall, the room size, equipment and its arrangement must be safe, clean and adequately serve the number of children in the group. In a quality program, most of the day is spent in space divided to invite small group activities. The room arrangement and the placement of equipment and materials will allow you to identify different activity areas such as block building, story time, and dress-up. Look for space that invites both quiet and active play. Children choose their own activities for much of the day. A smaller part of the day is for activities that the children do as a group and outdoors.

# Licensing and Accreditation

Many parents wonder what the difference is between licensing and accreditation. Licensing is when a facility meets the minimum standards required by the state for a child care program to be open. These requirements include standards for health and safety, staff, equipment, ratios, group size and more. In some states the required standards are set at a higher level than in other states. Some kinds of care may be exempt from licensing and you should check with your local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agency for information specific to your state. Your local CCR&R can also help you check with your state's child care licensing office to see if there have been any substantiated complaints about a provider. To find your local CCR&R agency, visit the Child Care Aware web site at [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org) and search using Child Care Connector or call 1.800.424.2246.

Accredited child care meets higher quality standards set by a national organization. These child care programs have met standards beyond those established by the state licensing agency. These requirements include standards for curriculum, staff and parent communication, and more. You can view accreditation as a process by which programs seek to offer the best quality care. Ask your provider about being accredited. Encourage her to become accredited if the answer is no.



## Additional Information

There are numerous resources available to learn more about choosing a quality child care program. Here are a few suggestions:

Child Care Aware is a non-profit initiative, committed to helping families find the best information on locating quality child care resources in their community. Contact Child Care Aware at 800.424.2246 or [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) at 800.424.2460 or [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) at 515.282.8192 or [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)

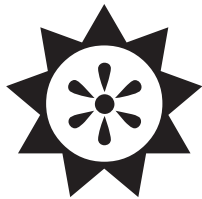
The Daily Parent is prepared by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Washington, DC with funding by the Citigroup Foundation.



COPYRIGHT © 2001 NACCRRA,  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION...**

About choosing and using child care and before and after school care, call the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency which serves your community. To find the number of the CCR&R in your area, call: Child Care Aware 1.800.424.2246  
[www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)



**How can I be sure that my child care  
is of good quality?**

**THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE  
RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES**

**1319 F Street, NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20004**