

A Parent's Guide To

Choosing Safe and Healthy Child Care



Revised July 2019



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More and more, research tells us that our children's healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences during the first few years of life. If you are a parent/guardian who works during these early years, choosing good child care is one of the most important decisions you will ever make for your child.

To help you make the right choice for your child, researchers have identified 13 guidelines to think about when choosing a child care program. Research shows that if a program follows guidelines, it is more likely to be a safe and healthy place for your child. Considering these guidelines can help you find a place where you can feel comfortable leaving your child.

You might want to visit several different child care programs, either centers or family child care homes, before you decide which one is best for your family. Call each child care program and schedule an appointment for your visit. Once you are there, stay for at least an hour to watch activities, check the surroundings, and ask questions. Place checkmarks on this form to note which guidelines are met in each of the programs you visit. The checklist provides a place to make notes on up to 3 different child care programs.

<i>Child Care Program Names (fill in):</i>	<i>Child Care Programs</i>		
<i>A</i>			
<i>B</i>			
<i>C</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Supervision</i> <i>Hint: Discipline should be positive, clear, consistent, and fair.</i>			
✓ Are children supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?			
✓ How do the caregivers/teachers discipline children?			
<i>Handwashing and Diapering</i> <i>Hint: Hands should be scrubbed with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and then rinsed and dried. The water faucet should be turned off with a paper towel.</i>			
✓ Do all caregivers/teachers and children wash their hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom or changing diapers?			
✓ Is the place where diapers are changed clean?			
✓ Do caregivers/teachers always keep a hand on the child while diapering?			
✓ Do caregivers/teachers remove the soiled diaper without dirtying any surface not already in contact with stool or urine?			
✓ Do caregivers/teachers clean and disinfect the surface after finishing the changing process?			





		<i>Child Care Programs</i>		
		A	B	C
	Director Qualifications			
	✓ Does the director of a child care center have a bachelor's degree in a child-related field?			
	✓ Has the director worked in child care for at least 3 years?			
	✓ Does the director understand what children need to grow and learn?			
	Lead Teacher Qualifications			
	✓ Does the lead teacher in a child care center have a bachelor's degree in a child-related field?			
	✓ Has the teacher worked in child care for at least 1 year?			
	✓ Does the teacher give children lessons and toys that are right for their ages?			
	Child: Staff Ratio and Group Size			
	<i>Hint: Your child will get more attention if each caregiver/teacher cares for fewer children.</i>			
	✓ How many children are being cared for in the child care program?			
	✓ How many caregivers/teachers are there?			
	Immunizations			
	✓ Is your child up-to-date on all of the required immunizations?			
	✓ Does the child care program have records proving that the other children in care are up-to-date on all their required immunizations?			
	✓ Are the caregivers/teachers up-to-date on all of the recommended immunizations?			
	Toxic Substances			
	✓ Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies and pest killers kept away from children?			
	✓ Has the building been checked for dangerous substances like radon, lead, and asbestos?			
	✓ Is poison control information posted?			
	Emergency Plan			
	✓ Does the child care program have an emergency plan if a child is injured, sick, or lost?			
	✓ Does the child care program have first aid kits?			
	✓ Does the child care program have information about who to contact in an emergency?			





		<i>Child Care Programs</i>		
		A	B	C
Disaster Drills				
✓	Does the child care program have a plan in case of a disaster like a fire, tornado, flood, blizzard, earthquake or acts of violence?			
✓	Does the child care program do practice drills once every month?			
Child Abuse				
✓	Can caregivers/teachers be seen by others at all times, so a child is never alone with one caregiver/teacher?			
✓	Have all caregivers/teachers gone through a background check?			
✓	Have the caregivers/teachers been trained how to prevent child abuse, how to recognize signs of child abuse, and how to report suspected child abuse?			
Medications				
✓	Does the child care program keep medication out of reach from children?			
✓	Are the caregivers/teachers trained and the medications labeled to make sure the right child gets the right amount of the right medication at the right time?			
Staff Training/First Aid				
<i>Hint: When infants are sleeping, are they on their backs with no pillows, quilts, stuffed toys, or other bedding in the crib with them?</i>				
✓	Have caregivers/teachers been trained how to keep children healthy and safe from injury and illness?			
✓	Do they know how to do first aid and CPR?			
✓	Have they been trained to understand and meet the needs of children of different ages?			
✓	Are all child care staff, volunteers, and substitutes trained on and implementing infant back sleeping and safe sleep policies to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, crib death)?			
Playgrounds				
✓	Is the playground inspected for safety often?			
✓	Is the playground surrounded by a fence?			
✓	If there is a sandbox, is it clean?			
✓	Is the playground equipment safe, with no sharp edges, and kept in good shape?			
✓	Are the soil and playground surfaces checked often for dangerous substances and hazards?			
✓	Is equipment the right size and type for the age of children who use it?			



For more information on choosing a safe and healthy child care setting, contact your local child care resource and referral agency by checking Child Care Aware, a national consumer education parent hotline and web delivery system at: <https://www.childcareaware.org/>.

The 13 areas above are based on the 2002 research paper by R. Fiene, *13 Indicators of Quality Child Care: Research Update* available at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02/>.

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