

Child Care



Exploring child care options can be a big job. As you look for a child care setting, first consider your child's temperament. Children who are flexible and easygoing will often do well in active group settings. Thoughtful, cautious children might need a smaller, less busy setting. Strong-willed children with intense feelings will do well in a setting with a caregiver who can get to know them and meet their needs. (Of course, *all* children would benefit from this!)

No matter your child's temperament, you'll want to consider possible child care settings carefully. Don't be afraid to ask for more than one visit or to ask many questions. When visiting a child care center, look for child-sized furniture, sinks, and toilets. Do you see safe and appropriate toys? Are there separate areas for sleeping, diapering, and eating? Observe what the staff and caregivers are doing. Are the children engaged in play or interactions with each other? With the adults? Is there a TV on? Do the children look happy? If any babies or toddlers get upset, how do the staff respond?

It's always nice to know if the program is certified, licensed, or accredited. You can ask for references and to speak with some current families about their experiences.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Do staff take the children off grounds? In vehicles? On foot? Other means?
- What is your sick policy? What happens if my child gets sick or hurt?
- Are toys and surfaces washed and sanitized regularly?
- Are all infants put to sleep on their backs?
- Is the center/home stocked with first aid materials? Do staff members know first aid and infant and toddler CPR?

- Do staff practice fire drills and other safety measures on a regular basis? How often? Are there written policies in place?

RESPONSIVE CARE

When caregivers adapt to meet children’s needs it’s called *responsive care*. With this approach caregivers observe children closely. They find meaning in children’s gestures, gurgles, cries, and glances. Caregivers wonder why children behave the way they do. They guess and then watch to see if they’re correct. Is the crying baby tired? Hungry? Wet? Frustrated? Caregivers then change their behavior based on what they learn. They also pay attention to *the style of the individual child*. This ensures that all children are treated as whole beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Some more questions to ask:

- Can primary caregivers visit without calling? Any time of day?
- Do you follow state caregiver–child ratios?
- How do you help new children adjust? Can I observe my child in their classroom?
- How do you handle it when a baby or child cries for a long period of time?
- What is your discipline policy? How do you handle aggression (and biting)?

PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

You may want to find out if there is a specific curriculum or if the teachers follow the children’s interests. You may want to ask:

What are some examples of activities for my child’s age group?

- Are children allowed time for free play? How much time?
- Is there an outside play area here or nearby? How much time do children get to play outside?
- What is your program’s philosophy about children, growth, and learning? About caring for infants and toddlers?
- Is TV/video/screen time part of the children’s day? What and when?

