

Choosing a Day-Care Center

What to look for, and how to get help.



- A good licensed day-care program does more than just babysit.
- It encourages children to play and learn in a safe, healthy, nurturing environment.
- It helps children gain social skills and prepare for school.

Start Your Search Early

- It can take time to choose the right day-care program. If possible, give yourself at least 3 months to make a decision.
- Talk to relatives, friends, and neighbors. They may be able to recommend day care centers or tell you which to avoid.
- Lower-income families may be eligible for free or low-cost day care, or for an income tax credit.

Visit More Than One Center

- Always visit a day-care center before enrolling your child, no matter how highly it was recommended.
- Check all areas, including classrooms, toilets, kitchen, and indoor and outdoor play areas.
- Visit more than one center to compare the types and quality of services provided.
- Talk to the center director and teachers. Visit classes, especially ones your child will be in.
- Talk to other parents to find out what they think about the center.

Questions to Ask

- Is the center properly licensed as required by law?
- What languages are spoken?
- What are the hours? Are weekends available?
- Do parents need to bring supplies (diapers, towels, etc.)?
- Have all staff had required health exams, medical tests, and criminal background checks?
- Can children be given medicine (such as asthma medicine)?
- How does the center handle medical and other emergencies?
- Is there enough staff to give all the children the attention they need?
- Do the director and teachers have experience, special training, and college degrees in child care?
- Is the staff always available to answer parents' questions?
- Is there a variety of learning and play activities to help children develop and learn?



Things to Look For

- Is the current license posted where you can see it easily? Look for the date and the number and ages of children the center is authorized to care for.
- Is the staff warm and friendly? Do they talk to children with affection and respect and listen to them with interest?
- Are children supervised at all times both indoors and outdoors?
- Are there any safety hazards, such as peeling paint or broken equipment?
- Do the children look happy? Can they choose their own activities for part of the day?
- Are there plenty of toys and equipment (such as blocks, puzzles, books, clay, and musical instruments) that encourage play and learning?
- Does the staff always discipline children in an appropriate way (never spanking, being mean, shouting, making fun of them, or withholding food)?



Before You Decide

- Compare all the centers you visited. Consider what is most important to you.
- Be sure the center you choose has a current license and meets your needs for location, hours, and cost.
- After you make your decision, visit the center one more time before you enroll your child.
- Ask yourself: Am I comfortable leaving my child here?