

# CHECK IT OUT: CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL

Choosing a child care setting for your infant, toddler or preschooler is a big decision. Quality is one of the most important factors to consider, as research shows that quality early learning settings help children develop skills that are crucial to their success now and once they enter school. But quality is not always easy to spot. This checklist will help you recognize the key elements of quality and make a more informed decision when considering a child care or preschool setting for your child.

## At your visit: Questions to Ask

Do you have a parent handbook? Quality programs should offer you a copy.

What are the qualifications of the director and teachers? How long have they been working with children? Experience working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers as well as training or college coursework in early childhood development and education lead to quality adult/child interactions.

How do you keep families informed about your program and their children's progress? Quality centers will post lesson plans, send parents information such as a newsletter, host regular parent/teacher conferences and keep you informed about your child's activities.

What is your ratio of teachers to children? Maximum group size?

*These determine the level of care and attention your child may receive. Quality programs have smaller teacher/child ratios and limit group sizes.*

How does the program deal with children with challenging behavior?

*Quality programs have steps in place to prevent disruptions, communicate with the child, redirect the child and communicate with the family. Time out is not effective in dealing with disruptive children.*

## At your visit: Things to Look For

### Positive, nurturing teacher/child interactions

Does the teacher make eye contact with the children, smile and listen without interrupting?

Is the teacher at eye level with the kids when they are interacting?

Is the teacher interacting with children during activity times indoors or outdoors?

Do you hear the kids talking more than the teacher? Child voices should dominate.

Does the teacher ask the children questions where they can give more than a yes/no answer?

Are the children supervised at all times? Children should never be left alone and should always be within sight and sound of teachers.

### Caring for infants

Are babies placed on their backs to sleep?

Do babies spend part of their play time on their tummies?

Do caregivers respond promptly to crying babies?

Are babies held while being fed?

### Positive child/child interactions

Are kids playing either together or side by side?

Are children encouraged to work together to resolve differences or conflicts?

Do kids move freely from activity to activity?

### Classroom environment

*Is there ample space and materials to encourage play and learning within the children's reach, including:*

Books, books and more books

Blocks and puzzles

Pretend play area with puppets, costumes, etc.

Art/writing materials and musical instruments

Textured materials, such as sand and water

Science materials, like plants, funnels, magnifying glasses, etc.

### Outdoor environment

Is there an outdoor play area, with shade, that is used daily?

Are items from the classroom brought outdoors to be played with?

## After your visit: Questions to ask your child

**Trust your instincts and also your child's reactions to the teachers and environment.**

Do you think you would like to go play there?

What did you like best about the classroom?

What did you like best about the teacher?



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