

Choosing a Day-Care Provider: What All Parents Should Know

Finding a good day-care provider may seem daunting, but have no fear. All you need to do is ask the right questions and make careful observations, and in the end, day care can provide lots of rewards. Your child will be learning to get along with other children and adults, exploring a new environment, and enjoying the artistic, intellectual, and physical activities provided by quality day-care centers.

So, how do you find a quality day-care center?

- First, check the phonebook, local papers, and community web sites to find day-care centers that are convenient and close to your home or office. You may want to ask your pediatrician about recommended care centers. Seek advice from other parents in your neighborhood or at work.
- Once you have found a number of local care centers, call them to see if they have space for your child.
- Ask for the names and phone numbers of other families who use the center. Contact these families to hear what they think about the center, its curriculum, and its staff members.
- Find out the ratio of care providers to children and the staff turnover rates. Children need lots of attention.

They also need consistent care from people they trust. The recommended child-to- adult ratio for children is as follows:

- For Children under the age of 2, three children to every one adult caregiver.
 - Age 2 to 2 1/2, four to one.
 - Age 2 1/2 to 3, five to one.
 - Age 3 years old, seven to one.
 - Age 4 and 5 years old, eight to one.
 - Age 6 to 8 years old, ten to one.
- Visit each of the day-care centers you are considering and spend some time there. Are the staff members warm and nurturing? Are the children appropriately supervised? Are they interested in the activities? Are they being creatively and intellectually challenged? Do they have access to a variety of games, toys, books, crafts, and other learning materials? Are they relaxed and happy? Do they interact comfortably with their caregivers? Is the environment clean and safe?
 - Ask the center's administration about its licensing and staff credentials. Centers should have well-trained, well-paid teachers to ensure they provide quality care and have low turnover rates.
 - For reassurance, visit your child at day care on a regular basis if you can. You should feel welcome there and be allowed to make unannounced visits.

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Most important, choose a center that makes you feel comfortable. Trust your instincts. You should be confident that your child is in good hands.

For more information and lists of accredited day-care as well as after-school programs you can contact:

National Assn. For The Education of Young children, 800-424-2460, www.naeyc.org

National Assn. For family Child Care, 800-359-3817, <http://www.nafcc.org>

National Early Childhood Program, 800-543-71761, www.nccanet.org

National School-Age Care Alliance, 617-778-6020, www.nsaca.org

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, 800-598-KIDS, nrc.uchsc.edu