

Choosing Quality Child Care

Finding and keeping quality child care can be challenging. Here are some tips to help you get started.

What is Quality Child Care?

Child care should support a child's emotional, social, intellectual and physical well-being. Quality child care is not baby-sitting.

Caregivers are key to quality child care. They should...

- understand how children grow and learn
- be affectionate and responsive, open and informative
- provide a stable and stimulating environment
- seek out community resources and support
- be willing to develop common goals.

Quality child care settings have common characteristics...

- clean, safe and secure
- a caring, learning environment
- a small number of children with each adult
- space for quiet and active times, indoor and outdoor play
- a balance of interesting activities
- flexible, yet predictable daily routine
- a variety of easily available toys and equipment
- nutritional meals and snacks

How do you find Quality Child Care?

First, identify your needs and priorities.

- Consider your child's age
- Do you have more than one child requiring care?
- Are you eligible for a government subsidy?
- What fee can you afford?
- Do you prefer center or home based, licensed or unlicensed care?
- What hours?
- In what location -- near your child's school, your home, your work?

Provincial (or State) and local child care offices can offer guidance.

Community information services can be invaluable. It is also helpful to talk to neighbors and friends who use childcare. Just give yourself plenty of time and find care that suits you and your child.

Once you have a list of caregivers and day care centers, it is time to start telephone interviews. Jot down the questions you want to ask. See the Article **A Checklist for Choosing the Best Family Daycare Home** for a list of potential questions!

Visiting potential centers and family day care homes is the next step.

Look around.

Is this a quality child care setting?

Listen.

Would you feel good about your child spending time here?

The relationship between you and the caregiver is extremely important.

It should be one of mutual respect, trust and cooperation.

The interview is the time to ask plenty of questions.

Don't forget to discuss hours, fees, discipline, sickness, vacations, the involvement of parents.

Check references before you make a final decision. And write a contract or letter of agreement -- it can save unnecessary misunderstandings in the future.

Being an Effective Child Care Parent

A parent's responsibility does not end with finding child care.

The three-way relationship between the parent, caregiver and child requires an ongoing commitment.

Communication is vital.

Take the time to hear about your child's day.

Agree on mutual expectations.

Voice concerns

Express appreciation.

Live up to the agreement.