



Checklist for Child Care Centers

You should visit several child care centers before selecting one. This checklist will help you, as a parent; look at certain aspects of each center. Then compare one center with another.

Before you visit, read and be familiar with the items on this checklist. Phone the centers you would like to visit, and set up an appointment at each one, allowing yourself 20-30 minutes per visit. Let the director know the ages of your children and that you are interested in learning more about the program.

Sometimes it is more convenient to visit without your child. However, if you do take your child along, note if and how the adults greet the child and whether the child finds the center attractive and friendly.

Practical Considerations:

1. Name/and address/phone number of center
2. Hours center is open
3. Fees charged
4. Ages of children licensed for
5. Care of sick children?
6. Location easy to reach?

Checklist

For the following items use a rating of:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 0 | Can't tell |
| 1 | No, not in center |
| 2 | Somewhat |
| 3 | Yes, center has |

Physical Facility, Health, Safety

- Floors are carpeted or have nonskid covering.
- The center is clean.
- Adults do not smoke in the same room with children.
- No children are seen in the center with soiled diapers or training pants.
- Detergents, cleansers, and medicines are out of reach or locked up.
- Electrical outlets are covered with safety caps.
- Toys and equipment are in good repair, with no sharp edges, splinters, or loose parts.
- At least one adult in the center has first-aid training, and first-aid supplies are available.
- Each child has an individual space to store coats and belongings, such as a cubby, box, coat hook, or drawer.
- A space can be made dark and quiet for naptime, and a clean cot is set up in this space for each napping child.
- The toilet is easy for the children to get to.
- Outdoor play area has both a bare surface for riding toys and a soft surface, like sand or grass, for playing
- The center is homey, warm, cheerful, and inviting.

Caregiver Competencies

- Enough caregivers are with the children so that individual attention can be given if needed. For example, an upset child can be held, talked to, etc.
- You can see caregivers communicating effectively with children - explaining in clear steps what they want the children to do, answering children's questions patiently, frequently kneeling down to the child's eye level when talking.
- Children appear happy, comfortable, and relaxed - laughing, smiling, involved in play.
- Children enjoy one another - smile at each other, hold hands, hug, help each other more than they fight or argue.
- Caregivers seem warm and affectionate with the children, smiling, cuddling, speaking pleasantly.
- Caregivers use children's first names or nicknames when talking to or about them. Caregivers do not refer to children by unpleasant names, such as "smarty," "brat," etc.
- Caregivers are seen working and playing with the children more than standing back and directing or ordering them around.
- At least one caregiver knows where all the children are. For example, if a parent comes to pick up a child, a caregiver knows who and where the child is.
- Caregivers encourage children to do some things for themselves, patiently giving time and help and praise so that the child can learn to master the skill, such as getting a drink alone, washing hands, putting away a coat or toy.
- The caregivers are people you would like your child to copy or imitate. In other words, children are apt to "do as caregivers do, more than as they say."

Program Materials

- Attractive and well-written story and picture books are available for the children.
- Caregivers encourage listening and talking through planned activities like storytelling, word games, puppetry, doll play, and show and tell.
- The center has materials for quiet play, such as puzzles, and active play, such as riding toys.
- Children can get at least some materials by themselves and are encouraged to take care of and put away materials.
- There are enough toys and materials so that each child can participate without having to wait more than a few minutes.
- For at least part of the day, children can choose what they want to do, either individually or in small groups.
- Caregivers encourage both boys and girls to play with all the materials - such as climbing and riding toys, dress-up clothes, tools, dolls, cars, and trucks. Caregivers do not give children the idea that a certain activity is only for boys or only for girls.
- Children have the opportunity to use creative materials, such as paint, crayons, big blank pieces of paper rather than coloring books, paste, clay or playdough, scissors, and pencils.
- The children's art work is displayed in the center and is also sent home for parents.
- Three or more of the following are available for the children's use: large and small riding toys, pull toys, pounding toys, beads for stringing, puzzles, small and large blocks, nested toys, small building toys like Tinkertoys, dress-up clothes, dolls.
- The outdoor play area has three or more of the following: cartons or boards for building, sandbox with sand toys, low slide, riding toys, balance beam, tires, see-saw.
- Children are in small enough groups within the center so that the children appear to be secure and "at home" rather than lost in a crowd.
- Children may watch only appropriate television programs if there is a TV. They are not forced or encouraged to sit in front of the TV for long periods of time.

Home Center Coordination

- Meal and snack menus are posted so that parents know what the children are eating at the center.
- The menus are nutritious and contain foods your child likes.
- If possible, ask what the caregivers do if a child does not like a certain food being served, and see if you agree with their methods.
- The caregivers use discipline and guidance methods similar to your own and are consistent and fair with the children.
- The center has a bulletin board for parents and posts the program schedule and other messages.

Total Score _____

Your Comments and Thoughts

1. Overall, how do you feel about this center?

2. Overall, how would your child feel about this place?

The total score reflects both how good or poor the center is based on both subjective and factual points as well as how much you were able to observe. In general, go by the following:

- 100-123 points - **EXCELLENT CENTER**, worth getting on a waiting list to enroll your child.
- 80-100 points - **GOOD CENTER**, worth serious consideration.
- 60-80 points - **POSSIBLY ADEQUATE**, think this over carefully though.
- 40-60 points - **LOOK ELSEWHERE**.
- 0-40 points - **DEFINITELY OUT**, probably in violation of licensing requirements.

If you have a lot of items on the checklist with 0 points because you were not able to tell, then this will lower the overall score a lot. In this case, look at how you scored the rest of the items.

If most of your other scores are 3's, then this could be a very good center despite the fact that the total score is lower than it should be.

The above is meant to be a guide only and is not meant to be a recommendation of any kind. Above all, trust your own judgment and feeling about a center. You know your child best and can tell which center will be right for your family.