

Wellbeing. Done Well.



# Tips for Choosing Child Care



When you're looking for child care, you want to find a program that's convenient, open when you need it, and within your budget. But most importantly, you need a child care program that makes sure your child is safe, healthy, and learning.

## Five Steps to Choosing Care

1. **Start early.** Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering—a child care center or care in someone's else's home—finding the right child care option can take some time.
2. **Get informed and make a call.** Begin your search by learning about [different types of child care providers](#), reviewing [basic health and safety requirements](#), and learning about your state's specific regulations. Use [your state's child care search](#) to help you look for providers near your home.  
  
Consider calling [child care resource and referral \(CCR&R\) agency](#) for facts about child care in your area. Ask your CCR&R agency the following questions:
  - What are the licensing requirements in my area?
  - How can I get information about complaints and licensing violations?
  - Does my family qualify for any child care financial assistance programs?
  - Is there a [quality rating and improvement system](#) for providers in my area?
3. **Visit and ask questions.** Visit the child care programs you are considering, and don't be afraid to ask questions. [Selecting a Child Care Program](#) has questions that will help you figure out whether the program is high quality and whether the provider is a good fit. It also has checklists you can print out and bring with you when you visit.
4. **Make a choice.** Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family based on your needs and values.
5. **Stay involved.** The work isn't over when you find good care. Building a strong relationship with your provider will help your child's learning and development. Here are examples of ways to be involved:
  - Have meetings with your provider regularly, and ask questions.
  - Share information about your child with your provider, including updates on what happens at home.
  - Visit regularly, including surprise visits from time to time.
  - Volunteer when needed.
  - Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud.
  - Join in special events, like field trips, career day, Black History Month, and other holidays.
  - Share in development of activities based on your child's strengths and interests.

## Selecting a Child Care Program

Choosing a child care program is one of the most important and difficult decisions you will make. If possible, make time to visit several programs to spend time watching what happens in the program and to ask lots of questions. Once you have visited and talked to the owner or director and the other adults who will be caring for and teaching your child, compare what you have seen and heard at each program to pick the best one for your family.

### Fifteen Must-Haves

[Click here](#) to print a detailed checklist and take it with you when you visit potential programs.

1. Is the program licensed? You should always ask to see a copy of the providers [license](#).
2. Are visits from parents allowed and encouraged?
3. Does the program have an appropriate number of adults looking after each group of children?
4. Are children, including infants, supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?
5. Does the director have a college degree in child development or related field?
6. Is there a planned schedule for each day or week that encourages learning and includes active and quiet play, rest and meal times?
7. Is the environment safe, clean, and well maintained?
8. Is there a written discipline policy that explains how behavioral concerns are handled?
9. Does the program feel warm and welcoming?
10. Do the adults seem to enjoy working with and caring for the children?

11. Have all the adults working in the program had state and national background checks, including fingerprinting?
12. Have the adults in the program been trained on how to prevent child abuse and how to recognize and report the signs of abuse?
13. Is there someone present at all times who has been trained in pediatric first aid and CPR?
14. Does the program have a clear, written plan to follow if a child is injured, sick, or lost?
15. Is there a written plan for responding to emergencies and disasters such as a fire or flooding?

### Five More Essential Questions

In addition to the 15 must-haves for your child's health and safety, it is important to consider a few more key questions. These five basic questions will help you determine whether potential programs will work for your family.

1. Is the program open when you need it to be?
2. Is the program conveniently located for your family?
3. Does the program provide transportation that could help you get your child to and from the program or to and from school?
4. Can your family afford this program? [Click here](#) to learn more about programs to help your family afford care.
5. Does the program offer any discounts or scholarships, or participate in a child care assistance program?

### Beyond the Must-Haves

The following questions will help you learn more about the child care program's practices, or what the provider actually does when caring for your child.

## Beyond Must-Haves, *continued* ...

- Items to look for that impact your child's **health and safety**. The questions in this section are about steps a program should take to keep your child safe.
- Questions to ask about how well the child care program is **managed**. How a program is managed has a large impact on your family and your child.
- How the child care program supports your child's **learning and development**. Your child is always learning, and the child care program you choose must take important steps to encourage that learning.
- What you should see and think about when watching how the staff **interact with you and with your child**. Children learn best when supported by a caring adult. When you are not there, how will the program interact with your child? How will that program interact with you to make sure you can get to work with peace of mind?
- What to look for if your child is an **infant**. Infants require special care, and the adults caring for them should be trained in how to meet those needs.
- Things to look for if you have an infant or child with **a disability**. A high-quality child care program knows how to meet the needs of each individual child and family.

[Click here](#) to download a printable version of all the topics and questions.

## Paying for Child Care

Child care is often one of the biggest items in families' monthly budgets. If you are not sure whether you can afford quality care, please click on the following links to review options that may be able to help.

- [Child care subsidies by state](#)
- [Head Start and Early Head Start](#)
- [State-funded prekindergarten](#)
- [Military fee assistance programs](#)
- [Assistance for high school students](#)
- [Local assistance and scholarships](#)
- [Click here for other options](#)

### Tax Credits

Tax credits reduce the amount of tax you owe and may result in a refund. To claim tax credits you need to meet certain qualifications and file a return, even if you have no other filing requirement or owe no tax.

- [Child and dependent care tax credit](#)  
This credit is available to people who pay for child care so they can work or look for work.
- [Earned income tax credit](#)  
This is a tax credit for people with moderate and low incomes.

Source: [CDC](#), *Choosing Quality Child Care For Your Children*

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**[employees.concernhealth.com](http://employees.concernhealth.com)**