

Choosing Quality Child Care for a Child with Special Needs



America's most trusted child care resource.

1-800-424-2246

ChildCareAware.org

Why is Quality Child Care Important for My Child with Special Needs?

Most children, including those with disabilities and special needs, spend some time in a child care environment during early childhood, as well as while attending school.

In a quality child care environment, child care providers respond positively to differences in children's abilities, interests and experiences. Children with and without disabilities develop a greater appreciation of each other and of individual differences.

The focus is on planned developmental activities—individualized or in small groups. The environment provides needed predictability and routine, as well as novelty and stimulation.

Your child will grow and learn physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially alongside his/her peers.

Good staff to child ratios allow for individual attention and help build strong relationships with caring, consistent adults.

You and your child's child care provider will develop a mutually respectful communication system. This will help build and enhance understanding and trust, which will lead to optimal development of your child.

Children who participate in quality child care programs are better prepared to enter elementary school and are more empowered to maximize their independence and acceptance into society.

Your child will be interacting positively, making friends and learning from a diverse group of children in a "natural environment," as provided for in federal law. Some of these children will be developing more typically and will be role models for your child.

You will be more productive at work or home when you know your child is in a program that emphasizes health, nutrition and safety, as well as positive learning experiences.



How do I select a quality child care program for my child with special needs?

1. Call your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency. For help locating your local agency, contact Child Care Aware (1-800-424-2246).
2. Call the state agency or agencies responsible for children with special needs. Ask for local contacts.
3. Contact your local school district and local early intervention program for resources and help.
4. Ask other families, check community resources and join support groups.
5. Contact other national/state/local organizations such as Easter Seals (www.easterseals.com), whose members provide services to children with special needs.

Once you have several referrals, speak with the director or family child care provider in person. Ask about availability, hours, fees, accessibility and other areas of interest.

Schedule visits with the programs that interest you the most. Look, listen and ask questions in all classrooms or areas.

Remember to think about your child's needs, your family's needs and the needs of the other children and families.

What should I ask the director or family child care provider?

Ask questions like:

- » Is your program licensed by the state?
- » Are you accredited or working toward national accreditation?
- » Do you have a philosophy or mission statement that I could see?
- » May I have a copy of your policies and/or Parent Handbook?
- » What are your guidelines and procedures for involving children with special needs?
- » Are there special accommodations you will need to make to include my child?
- » How will my child be introduced to the adults and other children?
- » How do you handle sick children?
- » What do you consider "Special Needs?"
- » What ongoing educational opportunities are provided for you and your team?
- » How do you handle transitions within the program and to new programs?
- » How is discipline handled?
- » How are families involved in the program?
- » Do you have an orientation for new families?

What are the 5 key indicators of quality child care that I should pay particular attention to when I am observing and listening?

A positive and happy learning environment

- » Are the children engaged?
- » Are staff involved with children at eye level?
- » Are the rooms bright and cheerful without being overwhelming with too many sights and sounds?
- » Do the adults speak positively to and about all children?

The right number and mix of children and adults

- » Are all children receiving individual attention?
- » Do adults address children by name?
- » Are children comforted by staff or other children when it is needed?
- » Are there sufficient personnel to respond in the event of emergencies?
- » Is the tone of the discipline positive?

Trained and supported personnel

- » Are child care providers trained in early childhood education and special needs?
- » Are teaching staff available to attend school district educational meetings with you?
- » Do those who work with the children receive positive support for themselves?

A developmental focus on the child

- » Do you see and hear a variety of developmental activities taking place?
- » Do the children have opportunities to control objects or events in their environment?
- » Are activities based upon a child's level of functioning?
- » Are learning materials accessible to children with special needs?

Parents treated as partners

- » Will child care personnel help you develop goals for your child and plans to achieve them?
- » Do personnel provide parents with regular schedules of activities and events?
- » Do teachers and child care providers describe their communication practices as "open"?
- » Do parents actively participate with their child or children?

Identifying Quality in Child Care

Look, listen and ask

- Are families and children welcomed and are children greeted in a loving, respectful way?
- Is the overall atmosphere bright, cheerful and child-focused, without being overwhelming?
- Do the child care staff really listen to you and see your child and every child as a unique and special individual?
- Are the child care providers and teaching practices responsive to differences in children's abilities, interests and experiences?
- Are the majority of planned developmental activities individualized or in small groups?
- Are child care personnel willing to work with you and develop individual goals for your child and plans to achieve them?
- Does the program accept children who are not yet walking or toilet-trained?
- Are child care providers trained and experienced in CPR, first aid, early childhood education and special needs?
- Are therapeutic services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy provided on-site, if possible?
- Are daily, weekly, monthly and special event schedules shared with families?
- Do child care personnel perform child and family advocacy functions for you if necessary?
- Is communication open between staff and parents? Are child care providers always ready to respond?
- Is the facility safe, secure and physically accessible (i.e., ramps, accessible outside play area, bathrooms)?
- Is the program licensed and accredited?
- Have satisfactory criminal history background checks been conducted on each adult present?
- Has the program been inspected by the licensing agency within the last 12 months?
- Are there enough learning materials and toys? Are they safe, clean and within reach of all children?
- Are the sounds of children predominantly happy? Does it appear the children and adults enjoy being together?
- Is there a daily balance of active and quiet activities? Are they right for each ability and age level?
- Do learning materials, books and pictures reflect diversity, including children with special needs?

Tear off this sheet and take it with you as you look for a program for your child. Ask questions and feel free to take notes about what you see and hear.

Child Care Aware® is committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. In partnership with Child Care Resource & Referral agencies (CCR&R), Child Care Aware® builds consumer awareness and supports families in making choices for the care and education of their children.



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For additional resources or help finding your local Child Care Resource & Referral agency (CCR&R), call:

1-800-424-2246

TTY Line: 1-866-278-9428

ChildCareAware.org

For local information contact:



Office of Child Care



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