



Child Care Checklist for Parents

Parents . . .

If you are looking for child care, you probably have a good idea of what you want—a place that is safe, happy, and loving, where children can learn and have fun. At the same time, child care must also meet your needs. Child care should be convenient, affordable, and offer care when you need it.

Finding child care that has the quality and convenience you want, at a reasonable cost, can be a real challenge. It is rare to find the perfect situation, but it is possible to find a very good situation that will meet your needs.

Know Your Options

Family child care homes

The caregiver, who is often a parent, provides care in his or her home. Family child care homes that voluntarily choose to license with the state agree to meet certain minimum standards. Family child care homes care for a small group of children—usually six or less. Group Child Care Homes are facilities that provide care for six to twelve children, often in a residential home. They must be licensed. Family child care and group homes offer a home-like setting and the opportunity for siblings to stay together.

Child care centers

Child care centers care for larger groups of children. Children are usually grouped by ages, which allows the child care center to more easily provide the appropriate environment and opportunities for all children. Child care centers are licensed by the state or the city and must meet basic standards for health and safety.

In-home care

The caregiver comes to or lives in your home. In-home care works well if you need care for an infant or toddler, after-school care, or evening and weekend care. In-home care is convenient, but can be costly. You may also be responsible for paying social security and workers compensation for your in-home provider. In-home caregivers are not regulated by the state. If you participate in the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP), ask ahead of time if you qualify for subsidy if you have an in-home care provider.

Drop-in care

Some family providers and center programs allow drop-in care. You will usually need to visit with the provider and sign your child up beforehand. Then when you need child care, you can call to see if the provider or center happens to have an opening that day. This type of child care works well as a back-up for times when your regular care won't work.

Other Programs

Head Start

Head Start is a full day or part day program that cares for children and provides educational learning activities. Head Start programs can be located in centers or schools. Services are usually free. Families who have low income or who have a child with special needs may be eligible.

Public schools

In many communities, public schools offer programs for pre-kindergarten children and some also offer before- and after-school programs for school-age children.

Save time and energy by using the phone to narrow your search. It is a good idea to contact at least three different caregivers. To get the best response, avoid calling at busy times such as arrival, departure, or lunch time.

Five Steps to Selecting Good Child Care

2. Conduct a Telephone Interview

Save time and energy by using the phone to narrow your search. It is a good idea to contact at least three different caregivers. To get the best response, avoid calling at busy times such as arrival, departure, or lunch time.

1. Get Organized

Finding quality child care means doing your homework. If possible, begin gathering basic information several months before you think you will need child care.

- Contact your child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R) for names of family providers, center programs, and other helpful information.
- Ask your friends and co-workers for recommendations.
- Check to see if your community has a Head Start program or a public school sponsored pre-kindergarten or after-school program.

NAEYC* Recommended Ratios

Family Child Care Homes with one caregiver generally should have 6 or fewer children (maximum of four children under 24 months).

Adult-Child Ratios

Birth to 12 months	1:4
12-24 months	1:5
24-30 months	1:6
30—36 months	1:7
3-year-olds	1:10
4-year-olds	1:10
5-year-olds	1:10
Kindergarteners	1:12
6- to 8- year-olds	1:15
9- to 12- year-olds	1:15

*National Association for the Education of Young Children

Caregiver	#1	#2	#3
AVAILABILITY			
What ages are accepted?			
Are there any openings?			
Is there a waiting list?			
HOURS & LOCATION			
What are the hours for full- or part-time care?			
Is child care close to home and/or work?			
Is transportation provided for before-school or after-school programs?			
COST			
When are fees due? How much?			
Are there different fees for part-time or full-time ?			
Are there different fees for children of different ages? (Infant care usually costs more)			
Do fees include lunch and/or breakfast?			
Do fees include formula or diapers?			
Is there still a charge when a child is sick or on vacation?			
Are there discounts for siblings?			
Are there extra fees — supply fees, picking-up-late fees?			
Are scholarships or financial aid available?			
QUALITY ISSUES			
How many children are cared for and what are their ages?			
How many adults are there per child?			
What type of education or experience do the caregivers have?			
Is it okay to visit the site and when?			
Are you registered, licensed, or accredited? How long have you provided child care?			
Do you smoke or have pets?			

3. Make a Visit

Visit at least three caregivers or child care programs. Be prepared to spend some time, at least an hour or longer. You should expect:

- a warm greeting
- short introductions to both adults and children
- a brief tour
- an explanation of fees and policies
- an invitation to stay awhile to see the daily routine and children playing

Questions to ask:

- Please describe a typical day
- How much TV are the children allowed to watch?
- How do you discipline children?
- How do you handle nap times?
- How do you handle toilet training?
- What types of play or learning activities do you have?
- Do you have CPR and First Aid Training?
- What child proofing have you done to prevent accidents?
- What types of foods do you serve for meals and snacks?
- Do you participate in the Adult and Child Care Food Program?
- Are children ever transported in a vehicle? Do you use seatbelts or car seats?
- How do you handle emergencies?
- What formal training or education does the caregiver have?

Caregiver	#1	#2	#3
HEALTH AND SAFETY			
Clean and comfortable			
Enough space			
Hand washing practiced by adults and children			
Toys and furniture in good shape			
Medicines and cleansers locked up			
Safety gates			
Up-to-date child care license/registration			
Safe, fenced and litter-free outdoor play			
Nutritious meals and snacks			
First Aid kit			
Smoke detectors			
Covered radiators or heaters			
Good light, heat, and ventilation			
Alternative exit for fire			
DAILY ROUTINES			
Greeted warmly upon arrival			
Opportunities for parents to share information or ask questions			
Lunch and snack times relaxed and pleasant			
Nap times relaxed and NOT stressful			
Consistent, predictable schedule			
Times and places to play alone or with others			
Small group sizes			
FUN AND LEARNING			
Toys that children enjoy			
Singing or finger plays			
Pretend play			
Outdoor play			
Books to read			
Blocks, puzzles, and games			
Drawing painting, crafts			

Caregiver	#1	#2	#3
FUN AND LEARNING (continued)			
Caregivers talk, describe, read aloud			
Caregivers ask and answer questions			
Interesting, age-appropriate activities			
Field trips or interesting visitors			
AFFECTION AND ATTENTION			
Individual attention—use children’s names			
Calm voice			
Relaxed, flexible			
Patience			
Listening			
Gentle touch			
Sense of humor			
Respectful of children and parents			
Good adult supervision			
Accommodates special needs children			

4. Check References

Don't be shy about checking references. Selecting a caregiver for your child is one of the most important things you will ever do. Ask each caregiver for at least two parent references and their phone numbers. Most parents are happy to share information with other parents and can be a wonderful resource. Parents who check references say they often get information they couldn't have gathered any other way.

Parent #1 _____

Parent #2 _____

Parent #3 _____

Parent #4 _____

5. Make a Decision

Remember that it is okay to be choosy. Review the information you have gathered and call back if you have questions that were not answered. Trust your gut instinct. If you are not comfortable with what you have found thus far, keep looking. If a child care arrangement you like is full, put your name on a waiting list. Even if you must use another program temporarily, you will have this as an option.

Prepare your children by talking positively about the new child care situation and by letting them visit the place beforehand. Ask your new caregiver if it would be okay for your child to bring a favorite toy, teddy bear, or blanket to help ease the transition.

If Problems Arise

Sometimes child care programs that are wonderful take a sudden turn for the worse. That's why it is important to keep a watchful eye and to continually monitor your child care situation. If you believe that your child care arrangement is not safe, take immediate action. If the situation is serious, do not hesitate to find alternative care right away. After all, you are responsible for your child's health and safety.

Also remember that you have a responsibility to other children to see that they are well cared for. Express your concerns to the caregiver, and report concerns to the Department of Health and Welfare or your local licensing agency. You may feel uncomfortable at first, but it is the right thing to do. Our children deserve the very best care that we can give them.



For more information, call the **24/7** Idaho CareLine by dialing 2-1-1 or 1-800-926-2588



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE



CENTER ON DISABILITIES AND
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
live learn work play
University of Idaho
College of Education