

The questions below can help you learn about potential child care programs. Start with the first set of questions and make sure you can check yes for each of the 15 must-haves. If you can check yes for each of these first 15 questions, move to the rest of the questions to make sure the program is right for you and your child. Print this document and take it with you when you visit potential programs.

Name of Program:

Address:

Phone Number:

Director/Owner Name:

Can you check yes for each of these 15 must-haves?

Questions	Yes	No
Is the program licensed? Ask to see the license. If not, ask why and then check your state's licensing regulations to make sure the program is not required to be licensed. Look at the program's past inspection reports and complaint history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are visits from parents allowed and encouraged anytime the child care program is open? If you are not allowed to visit at any time (without calling ahead), this is not the best program for your child and you should consider a different program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the program have an appropriate number of adults looking after each group of children? This is known as the child-to-adult ratio. Recommended ratios are usually lower for younger children. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that child care centers have no more than 3 infants under 12 months old per adult.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are children, including infants, supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the director (of a child care center) have a college degree in child development or a related field? Do teachers (or the owner and operator of a family child care home) have a credential or college degree in early childhood education or a related field?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do all adults in the program receive ongoing training in working with children and child development?		
Is there a planned schedule for each day or week that encourages learning and includes active and quiet play, group and individual learning activities, rest time and meal times?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the environment safe, clean, and well maintained? For example, are safe cribs provided for each infant, and does the program follow safe sleep guidelines? Are electrical outlets covered? Are medicines and dangerous items, including cleaning supplies, kept out of the reach of children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written discipline policy that explains how behavioral concerns are handled? Do discipline techniques included in the policy teach and guide children rather than punish them? For example, does the policy make it clear that there will be no spanking, humiliating, or excluding children? How does the program make sure that techniques are used in ways that are clear, consistent, and fair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the program feel warm and welcoming? Are the children happily engaged in activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the adults seem to enjoy working with and caring for the children? Are they actively involved with the children and do they pay attention to the needs of each child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have all adults working in the program had state and national background checks, including fingerprinting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the adults in the program been trained on how to prevent child abuse and how to recognize and report the signs of abuse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questions	Yes	No
Is there someone present at all times who has been trained in pediatric first aid and CPR? Do staff know how to respond to an allergic reaction? Is there a first aid kit available? Are the adults in the program trained in how to prevent injuries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the program have a clear, written plan to follow if a child is injured, sick, or lost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written plan for responding to emergencies and disasters such as fire or flooding? Does the program conduct regular fire drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



If you can't answer yes to the above questions, consider looking for a different program. If the program meets these 15 critical health and safety standards and the 5 key work and family life questions, continue on to the additional quality standards below.

Health and Safety

Questions	Notes
Are children cared for in small groups with an appropriate number of adults present at all times?	
Does the program maintain a list of who is allowed to pick up your child and check that list when your child is picked up?	
Is the outside play area safe for children? Is the area enclosed and safe from traffic? Is the area clean, well maintained, and free of standing water?	
Are nutritious snacks and meals provided to children at appropriate times? For example, children under 6 should be offered food every 2 to 3 hours. Food should be safe and developmentally appropriate—for example, no foods that are choking or allergy hazards.	
Have all enrolled children received their recommended immunizations—including your own child? Does the child care program keep records to show that all children are up to date on all their required immunizations?	
If the program will transport your child, is there a signed permission slip in place? Are the vehicles used for transportation safe, registered, and insured? Are there appropriate car seats and seat belts available for each child? Is the driver a licensed and insured adult who has undergone a national and state background check that includes fingerprints?	
Are the adults responsible for giving medication to children trained on how to do this safely? Are medications labeled to make sure the right child gets the right amount of the right medication at the right time? Are records kept to show when children received medication and how the medication was given?	
Do the children and adults wash their hands frequently, especially after diaper changing or using the toilet, before and after eating or handling food, and when handling bodily fluids (such as wiping noses)?	
Are toys, tables, toilets, and diapering surfaces cleaned and sanitized after use?	

Questions	Notes
Has the building been checked for dangerous substances like radon and lead?	
Does the program have a policy for when your child is ill?	

Program Management

Questions	Notes
Does the program participate in a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), if available? If yes, what is the program's rating level?	
Is the program accredited by a national or state-recognized accrediting body? National accreditation is another good indicator of a high-quality program.	
Have you seen and do you agree with the child care program's contract and policies? Every high-quality child care program will have a written contract and policies.	
Are there written personnel policies, job descriptions, and annual training plans for all adults working in the program?	
Do staff receive annual performance evaluations, and will you be asked to complete an annual evaluation of the program and staff? Does the program use the feedback from these evaluations to make decisions?	
How often do the adults working in the program choose to stop working there? If staff frequently choose to stop working there, it can be a sign that the program is not well managed and that your child may not have consistent care. Having the care of a consistent, caring adult who knows your child's individual needs is important. If the program is in a family child care home, ask about how long the provider has been in business. You can also ask for contact information for other families who can provide a reference.	

Your Child's Learning and Development

Questions	Notes
Are all areas well organized and are materials easy to use and easy for children to get to?	
Do you see plenty of age-appropriate toys and items to encourage different kinds of play? For infants and toddlers, are there toys that promote learning? For example, toys that teach cause and effect and help promote coordination? For older children, are there different areas for different activities such as reading, art, and playing with toys?	

Questions	Notes
Does the program have a planned schedule for each day and week that includes age-appropriate indoor and outdoor activities that encourage learning? Are there activities that prepare children to learn early reading, math, and science? Do adults read to children or encourage children to explore books at least twice a day?	
Will you get daily updates on how your child is doing and what he or she has been learning?	
Does the program track children's developmental milestones and will the program schedule regular time with you to discuss your child's development, including annual conferences?	
Which learning plan or curriculum does the program use? Is it based on research? Does it cover all areas of your child's learning? How will this program make sure that the curriculum meets the individual needs of your child?	

Interactions with Children and Families

Questions	Notes
Do the adults in the program seem to really know each child and respond to their individual needs? How will the program get to know you and your child, your goals for your child, and your routines at home?	
How will the program support you and your child if being apart is difficult?	
Do the adults talk with children throughout the day in a positive tone of voice, and sit or kneel down to be at the child's level? Do they listen and respond to what each child says and how the child acts (verbal and nonverbal cues)?	
Does the program support all cultures and languages spoken by children and families?	
Does the program seem to respect and want to understand your family's cultural values and traditions? Are there staff in the program that speak the same language you speak at home?	
Do the adults in the program seem willing to develop a relationship with you and work with you to support your child's development? Are they also willing to engage with your child's other parent and family members involved in your child's life?	
Do the adults in the program celebrate children's accomplishments?	
Do you like the person who will be teaching and caring for your child?	
Do you like how the program communicates and interacts with families?	
Do you think you will feel comfortable having conversations with the teacher or program director about your child's needs, how your child is doing, and if you have any concerns?	
Does the program provide learning activities to take home and events that will include you and other family members? Are events scheduled at times when your family can attend?	

Questions	Notes
Do you agree with how the program handles discipline and challenging behaviors?	
Does the program have a no-exclusion or no-expulsion policy? How will they work with you and your child to prevent expulsion or exclusion if your child displays challenging behaviors?	

Care of Infants

Questions	Notes
Is the schedule flexible to meet your baby's unique needs for sleeping, eating, and playing?	
Does the program practice safe sleep at all times? Will your infant sleep in a safe crib with a firm mattress, well-fitting sheet, and nothing else in the crib? Are staff trained on safe sleep?	
Are caregivers talking and interacting with infants during times babies are awake, including during diapering, feeding, and play?	
Do you feel that the caregivers will understand your child's unique personality and preferences?	
Do infants have supervised time playing on their tummies each day	
Are infants' bottles clearly labeled with the child's name and the date, and properly stored?	
If you are breastfeeding, how will the program support this?	
How will the caretakers communicate with you each day about your child's day including mood, eating, sleeping, and how they responded to your child's needs	
Are diaper-changing surfaces cleaned and disinfected after each use? Do staff wash their hands before and after each diapering?	

Children with Disabilities

Questions	Notes
Does the program change or adjust activities to make sure that children with disabilities can participate in all activities?	
Have the adults in the program been trained on how to work with your child's unique needs, or are they willing to get trained?	
Do the program and the staff seem willing to work with your family to meet your child's needs?	

Questions	Notes
Is the program willing to partner with your child's early intervention program or special education provider? Will they allow other providers to enter the classroom and make suggestions? How will you, the program, and your child's other providers work together?	

Work and Family Life

Questions	Notes
Is the program open when you need it to be?	
Is the program conveniently located for your family?	
Does the program provide transportation that could help you get your child to and from the program or to and from school?	
Can your family afford this program?	
Does the program offer any discounts or scholarships, or participate in a child care assistance program?	

Portions of this checklist have been adapted from content originally created by Child Care Aware of America ([Is This the Right Place for My Child? 38 Research-Based Indicators of Quality Child Care](#)). The checklist also draws on the Parent Toolkit, from the U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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