

Choosing Quality Childcare

Rona Renner, RN and Marisol Muñoz-Kiehne, PhD

All parents have concerns when it comes to leaving their little one with someone outside of the family. Families where both parents work outside the home have become the majority among couples with children, and single parents often face financial challenges requiring them to seek childcare in order to work. It takes time and effort to choose a setting for your child where you feel comfortable.

As you begin searching, talk to other parents, visit different places, and start looking early so you don't have to take the first opening you find. All children are different, so keep your child's temperament in mind as you look for the right "fit."

Three Key Questions:

1. Who will care for my child?

- If there's a director of the program who sets policies and hires staff, it's important you're comfortable with this person.
- The teachers should be friendly and calm. Find out if they've had classes in early childhood development. Notice if they yell or use harsh language, and ask how they discipline children.

2. What will my child be doing all day?

- Spend time observing so you have a good idea of the kinds of toys available and projects the children do. Ask questions, including why the provider thinks the activities are good for kids.
- Find out what the basic philosophy is about how children learn and the importance of play.
- Evaluate the program. Will your child be happy with the activities? Is there time scheduled for outdoor play? If your child is high energy, make sure there are opportunities for gross motor activities.
- Ask about television and video watching. Many parents don't want their children watching TV without their approval of the content. Since you're paying for a learning environment, better to have it be without passive TV watching.

3. How safe will my child be?

- There is no guarantee that an accident will never happen, but some precautions can make a difference.
 - Ask if there are emergency and evacuation plans, and check for fire extinguishers.
 - Make sure there are safety locks on cabinets with cleaning supplies or medicine.
 - Are there enough staff so all children always have an adult in the room with them?
 - Check the bathrooms for easy hand washing and cleanliness.
 - Explore the nap room and cribs that your child might use.
 - Check to see that the providers have current CPR certifications.

There are other factors that you'll need to consider when looking for childcare, like cost, location, and hours of operation. Your needs are important, so keep them in mind as you search for a place where your child will play, learn, and be cared for by someone who is kind and respectful.

For more information, visit www.preschoolcalifornia.org.