



Choosing Child Care

Introduction

Finding the right child care for your baby may be one of the most important decisions you will make. Your baby's development will be shaped by their caregivers, so look for a setting that you're comfortable with and where the caregivers understand and nurture babies and children.

Choosing child care that's right for your child will likely require some research as well as an assessment of your own needs and your child's.



1. Types of Child Care

Your first consideration will be what type of child care best fits your needs. This will probably change over time as your child grows. Options include:

In-home care, such as a sitter or a nanny

Most states do not regulate in-home caregivers. Some regulate agencies that provide nannies.

Pros: convenience, personalized attention

Cons: less structured than a child care center and fewer opportunities to socialize with other children

Shared care

You hire a caregiver with one or more other families who cares for the children in one of your homes.

Pros: convenience, may help keep costs down

Cons: less structure than a child care center and limited opportunities to socialize with a variety of children

Family child care home

The caregiver typically will have up to six children in their own home. Most states regulate family child care providers.

Pros: home-like environment, fewer children than a day care center

Cons: may offer fewer activities and limited opportunities to socialize with a variety of children

Child care center

These offer care and educational activities to groups of children. They usually are open all day and all year long to cover the hours needed by working parents. The staff usually is trained in child development.

Pros: may offer a variety of structured activities and socialization opportunities

Cons: may have less flexible hours

Some parents have relatives care for their children or put together a patchwork of options. They may arrange work schedules so one parent is home with the child and fill in the gaps with sitters, relatives or part-time day care.

2. Choosing Child Care

When you decide which type of child care will best fit your needs, you're ready to start your search. Here are some places to begin:

- Ask friends, neighbors and co-workers for recommendations.
- Contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency to request names. Find your local agency by using this [online tool](#).

Make an appointment to visit each child care business you are considering. Spend time in the setting, observing the way the caregivers interact with the children. Ask questions and take note of the caregivers' answers. Use the following checklist when looking at your different options.

Child Care Checklist

Credentials

- ☐ The program is licensed by the state or local government.
- ☐ The program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or the National Association of Family Child Care.

The facility or home

- ☐ The setting is appealing.
- ☐ Electrical outlets are covered with outlet plugs.
- ☐ Toys are clean, nontoxic and large enough that they cannot be swallowed; they have no small or breakable parts.
- ☐ Toys and materials are well organized so that children can choose what interests them.
- ☐ High chairs, changing tables and strollers are equipped with safety straps; teachers always use the straps.
- ☐ Cribs have no more than 2-3/8 inches of space between slats.
- ☐ A fully stocked first-aid kit is kept on hand.
- ☐ The diaper-changing area is well organized with supplies and extra clothes within easy reach. Also in this area is a sink stocked with disinfectant, paper towels and a trash can that opens with a foot pedal.

The caregivers

- ☐ Are trained in infant-toddler development
- ☐ Are CPR certified and trained in other emergency procedures
- ☐ Make eye contact with and speak in a nurturing way to the babies and older children
- ☐ Hold infants while feeding. Infants are never left with bottles propped up into their mouths.
- ☐ Share your philosophy on discipline, toilet training, etc.

- ☐ Show respect for your home language and culture

The program

- ☐ Babies eat and sleep according to their own rhythms, not on a preset schedule.
- ☐ A daily schedule is posted using pictures and visuals, so that toddlers can anticipate what will happen next.
- ☐ Any special needs of children are easily accommodated by the caregivers and the environment.
- ☐ You are welcome to drop in at any time.
- ☐ If a facility, group size is limited to eight children with at least one caregiver for every three infants.

Use the following charts to track your notes and impressions of each child care provider you visit.

Questions for Day Care Centers

Name of day care center	Notes
How many children would be in my child's group?	
What are your teachers' qualifications?	
Do any staff members have special training?	
What is a typical day like at the center?	
How do you handle toilet training?	
How do you handle discipline?	
What are your fees?	
What are your hours and days of operation?	
What would happen if my child became sick?	
Are there a few parents I could call for references?	

Questions for Nannies and Other In-home Providers

Name of in-home provider	Notes
Can you tell me about other children you have cared for, including their ages and stages of development?	
What are your qualifications and experience?	
What would a typical day be like for my child?	
What are your favorite activities to do with children?	
What are your fees?	
What hours and days are you available?	
How would you communicate with me about my child each day?	
What would you do in an emergency?	
Are there parents I could call for references?	