

Choosing Quality Childcare

Explore your options. Ask informed questions. Find a suitable arrangement for your family.

What does quality childcare mean?

Families may consider childcare for supervision, learning, social experiences, predictable routines, or other household needs. Quality includes health and safety practices, responsive interactions, appropriate activities, and arrangements that meet a child's individual needs. Different settings may serve families in different ways.

Understanding common childcare arrangements

Childcare centers:

Programs serving groups of children, often organized by age, with staff and a director. They may offer full- or part-time care.

Family childcare homes:

Care provided in a caregiver's home, sometimes to children of different ages. Hours, group size, and state rules vary.

Preschool, prekindergarten, and Head Start:

Early learning programs with varying ages, schedules, eligibility rules, services, and funding arrangements.

Relative, nanny, or informal in-home care:

Care from relatives or individuals in a family home or the caregiver's home. Legal and licensing requirements depend on the arrangement and state.

School-age care:

Before-school, afterschool, vacation, or summer programs for children who attend school.

What should families look into?

Safety and supervision:	Staff-to-child ratios and group sizes, staff training, background checks, safe sleep when applicable, pickup procedures, and emergency plans.
Licensing and inspection history:	Whether the program is licensed, registered, certified, or legally exempt, plus inspection reports and how any findings were addressed.
Daily experiences:	How caregivers interact with children, how activities and rest are organized, and whether the setting is welcoming.
Individual needs and accessibility:	Language, disability-related accommodations, feeding, medication, communication, and other relevant supports.
Practical fit and cost:	Hours, transportation, availability, full fees, deposits, supplies, late pickups, closures, financial assistance, and cancellation terms.

Where can families begin?

Use your state or territory's childcare search and licensing resources; review available inspection records; contact programs; and, where possible, visit before deciding. A license establishes compliance with applicable minimum requirements, not a guarantee of a particular family experience. Some programs are legally license-exempt, so verify what oversight applies.

Remember: A program's fit depends on your child's needs, your priorities, and practical household circumstances. This guide does not recommend one setting over another.



My Childcare Comparison Worksheet

Use this worksheet during conversations or visits. Keep it for your own records.

1 Our family's considerations

Check what matters to your household:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ☐ Hours and location | ☐ Cost and assistance | ☐ Staff experience |
| ☐ Daily activities | ☐ Licensing/inspection information | ☐ Safety procedures |
| ☐ Accessibility and supports | ☐ Language or cultural fit | ☐ Other: _____ |

Our three main questions or priorities:

2 Compare two childcare providers

What to compare	● Provider A	◆ Provider B
Name/contact		
Schedule/availability		
Weekly/monthly total cost		
License/status and inspection review		
Staffing, safety, and supports		
Visit observations		

3 Questions to ask during a visit or call

- ☐ What is the current licensing or legal-exemption status? Where may I review inspections?
- ☐ What training do caregivers receive, and how are children supervised?
- ☐ How do you handle illnesses, medication, emergencies, and pickup authorization?
- ☐ How do you support different developmental, language, disability, or accessibility needs?
- ☐ What are all fees, closures, payment rules, and financial-assistance options?

Other questions:

4 My next step

Provider to contact:

Contact/date:

Next action:

Follow-up:

Trusted resources

ChildCare.gov — Simple Steps for Finding and Choosing Child Care

<https://www.childcare.gov/consumer-education/find-and-choose-quality-child-care/simple-steps-for-finding-and-choosing-child-care>

ChildCare.gov — Look, Listen, and Ask Tip Sheets

<https://childcare.gov/consumer-education/find-and-choose-quality-child-care/choosing-quality-child-care-tip-sheets>

ChildCare.gov — State and Territory Resources

<https://www.childcare.gov/state-resources>

ChildCare.gov — Financial Assistance Options

<https://www.childcare.gov/consumer-education/get-help-paying-for-child-care/child-care-financial-assistance-options>

Explore further with OH FAMILY

<https://www.ohfamilyinc.org> — find additional family resources and guidance.

About this guide

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Disclosure: This guide provides general educational information and does not endorse a childcare provider or replace professional advice. Licensing, inspection systems, eligibility, fees, legal exemptions, and available supports vary by state and program. Verify details directly with programs and responsible agencies before making decisions.