

# IS THIS THE RIGHT PLACE FOR MY CHILD?

**Choosing child care**





## CHOOSING CHILD CARE

Parents across Minnesota are looking for child care options which fit their needs and help their children learn and grow. Several Minnesota parents share their experiences searching for child care:

*"Finding good care for my kids was not just a matter of finding someone to watch them while I was at work. It was also finding a caring place where they could learn and feel safe. I wanted them to feel important and some daycares wanted this too. At each visit, I asked myself, 'Do the kids here seem happy?' and 'Do the teachers seem happy and do they want to meet my children?'"*

— Dina Mendez, mother of Adriana, Tomas and Kaitlin

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*"I know my child best and know what will work best for her in terms of child care. It helped to have the parent checklist on hand as well to learn more about what all children need and what will help her get the most out of her time with these teachers."*

— Molly Jensen, mother of Johanna

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*"This was a scary process at first but learning about what we could expect was helpful. When I learned how important the first few years of life are for my child's lifelong learning, I felt it was important to find the best place we could. I read over the parent checklist and asked some of the questions at each visit. I feel good about where my son spends his days and I feel proud that I am able to provide these good experiences for him."*

— Jon Maxwell, father of Tanner

**For a list of useful terms on child care types, please look ahead to page 7.**

## IS THIS THE RIGHT PLACE FOR MY CHILD?

Choosing care for your child while you are at work or school is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent. Early experiences last a lifetime. **Because 90 percent of a child's brain develops by age five, the quality of care a child receives from babyhood through preschool can make a big difference.** School-age children continue to need quality care. This checklist has been designed to help you make informed child care choices and understand the care options that best fit your needs.

The parent checklist items listed in this guide are based on research about what is important in order for children to be protected and well cared for in a group child care setting. The checklist, created by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, will help you know what to look for and ask to find out if the program you are considering will be a safe, healthy and happy place for your child. For more information, visit [www.mnchildcare.org](http://www.mnchildcare.org).

Place a check in the box if the program meets your expectations. Fill in the name of each program below and use the corresponding column of check boxes to help you remember each visit.

Option 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Option 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Option 3: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHILD CARE PROGRAM OPTIONS

*UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, THE CHECKLIST ITEMS APPLY TO ANY CHILD CARE SETTING.*

### SUPERVISION

#### Will my child be supervised?

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are children watched at all times, including when they are sleeping? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are adults warm and welcoming?                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do they pay individual attention to each child?                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are clear and simple safety rules established with the children?     |

- |                          |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do adults focus on the positive and redirect behavior rather than yelling, spanking, or using other negative punishments?      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are there enough staff-members to supervise all children (see the recommended guidelines for adult-to-child ratios on page 7)? |

### TRAINING

#### Have the adults been trained to care for children?

For a child care center (a program offering care in a community center, place of worship or other facilities):

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the director have a degree and some experience in caring for children?                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the teachers have a credential or an early childhood-related degree and experience in caring for children? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are all adults continuing to receive early childhood-related training or education?                           |

#### For family child care (care offered in the caregiver's home):

- |                          |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the provider had specific training on children's development and experience caring for children? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the provider continuing to receive early childhood-related training or education?                 |

#### For child care center AND family child care home:

- |                          |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there always someone present who has current CPR and first aid training?             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there always someone present who has current SIDS and Shaken Baby Syndrome training? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have the adults received training specific to my child's age and needs?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the adults willing to seek out such training?                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have the adults been trained on child abuse prevention?                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the adults willing to seek out such training?                                       |

## LEARNING

### Will my child be able to grow and learn?

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are there specific areas for different kinds of play (blocks, puzzles, art, dress-up etc.)?                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the play space organized and are toys and materials easy to reach and use?                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are toys age-appropriate?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are some toys and materials available at all times and are some rotated?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are there daily or weekly activity plans available?<br>Have the adults planned experiences for my child to enjoy? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will my child be engaged in conversations with adults throughout the day which are appropriate to his/her age?    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will my child be asked questions, when appropriate, and encouraged to speak and communicate?                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will my child be read to at least twice a day and encouraged to read or explore books on his or her own?          |

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

### Is this a safe and healthy place for my child?

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do adults and children wash their hands (after using the bathroom, changing diapers, eating etc.)?                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are diaper changing surfaces cleaned and disinfected after each use?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do all of the children enrolled have the required immunizations?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are medicines labeled and out of children's reach?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a system in place to ensure children are given the correct medication?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials locked up, out of children's reach?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a plan to follow if a child is injured, sick or lost?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are first aid kits readily available?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a plan for responding to disasters (fire, flood etc.)?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the outdoor play area a safe place for children to play?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the equipment the right size and type for the age of the children who use it?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | In center-based programs, is the playground area surrounded by a fence at least four feet tall?                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the equipment placed on mulch, sand or rubber matting?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the equipment in good condition?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the number of children in each group limited?<br><i>Smaller group size has been shown to be an important indicator of quality.</i> |



## MANAGEMENT

### Is the program well-managed?

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the program's license in good standing with the state or local agencies who oversee licenses?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are parents and/or staff asked to evaluate the program?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | How many training hours do the program staff take each year? <i>Receiving ongoing training has been found to be an important step in providing excellent care.</i>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the program accredited by a national organization? <i>Accreditation means that this child care/early education program has been recognized by a leading national organization as a provider of excellent care.</i> |

## COMMUNICATION

### Does the program work closely with parents?

- | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will I be welcome any time my child is in care?                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is parents' feedback sought and used in making program improvements? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will I be given a copy of the program's policies?                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will I be given a contract signed by the caregiver?                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are annual conferences held with parents?                            |

For more information on the checklist items, or the research that they represent, please log on to [www.mnchildcare.org](http://www.mnchildcare.org) (please click on information for families).

## USEFUL TERMS FOR YOUR CHILD CARE SEARCH

### Ratios

Research shows that the quality of child care improves when children are in smaller groups and get more attention and care from adults. So, there are licensing rules that set a maximum number of children for every available adult. Different rules apply to different types of care providers, and those details are available at [www.mnchildcare.org](http://www.mnchildcare.org) (please click on information for families).

### Types of Child Care

You have a number of options in selecting child care. There is no one "best" type of care. It depends on the needs of your child and your family.

#### Licensed family child care homes

A licensed family child care home is one in which the caregiver has met the requirements for a license to care for children in her/his home.

#### Child care centers

Child care centers are licensed by the state to care for larger groups of children in their own building, community centers, places of worship or in other facilities. Centers may provide care for infants through school-age.

#### School-age child care

School-age child care programs offer care for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. They usually operate in schools, community centers, YMCA/YWCAs or park and recreation programs. Care is typically available before and after school, on school holidays and during the summer.

#### Preschool programs

Preschool programs usually offer two- or three-hour sessions per day, a few days per week. These programs are not used primarily for child care but instead offer children an opportunity on a part-time basis to interact with other children and prepare for school. Enrollment is usually limited to children 3 to 5 years old.

### Family/Friend/Neighbor care

“Family, Friend and Neighbor” care is unlicensed care provided by a relative, friend or someone in the community. It can take place in the child’s home or in the caregiver’s home. Caregivers may include grandparents, other relatives or non-relatives. It may be full or part-time, paid or unpaid care.

### Head Start/Early Head Start

Head Start/Early Head Start promotes the growth and development of children from low-income families. Parent involvement, a health program and family support are included. Children ages 3 to 5 years old attend Head Start. Early Head Start serves families with children from birth to 3 years old.

### In-home care

“In-home care” means a caregiver comes to your home. Most in-home caregivers are friends, family members or “nannies.” Nannies often have professional training and experience. In-home caregivers are not licensed. As their employer, you may be responsible for contributing to Social Security, taxes, workers’ compensation costs, insurance and vacation time.



1-888-291-9811  
[www.mnchildcare.org](http://www.mnchildcare.org)

### ABOUT CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL

Child care is one of the most important choices parents make. Helping families better understand their choices is a mission of every Child Care Resource & Referral district. CCR&Rs serve nearly 7 million parents across the country.