



Choosing High Quality Child Care: A Guide for Parents



Choosing Quality Child Care

Choosing child care is an important decision. The quality of a child care program matters because research has shown that, when young children have high quality early learning experiences, they are more likely to succeed in school and life. The **Family Enrichment Collaborative** is working to make sure young children have these high quality early learning experiences in all of the settings where they find themselves each day. **Child care programs are a key piece of that equation.** This guide is based on standards put forth by Steuben Child Care Project and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC.) *Please follow these steps when choosing a program that's right for your family.*

Step 1: Contact Your Local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCRR)

CCRRs maintain a listing of the regulated child care providers within a given county. These confidential referral services inform parents about the different **types of care and identify child care providers that match the parents' needs.** Along with referrals, your CCRR provides educational materials and consultation to assist parents in choosing the best care for their children. CCRRs do not make recommendations or guarantee the quality of any program listed in their referral databases. Parents should always do their homework, use the information in this guide, and follow their instincts about the quality of the programs they visit and evaluate.

Step 2: Call Child Care Providers

Although CCRRs regularly update vacancy information on the providers in their databases, vacancy information does change very often. **So parents should always call child care providers to find out if they have openings.** You should also ask what days and hours they are open, what ages they serve, if they provide transportation, and the cost of care. Some offer financial assistance, so be sure to ask. Also, ask what the parent should bring, for example, a pack-n-play, highchair, etc. Be sure to ask if they have a waiting list for the ages of the child(ren) you need care for, and if there is an application fee. Schedule a visit.

Step 3: Visit and Evaluate

Visit more than one child care program before you decide on one. Visit while children are there, so you can see how the child care provider interacts with them. Spend at least one hour in the spaces where your child would be, and talk with the owner or director. **Evaluate each program using the checklist on the next page.** Please note that if a program does not meet all of the items on the checklist, it does not mean that it is of low quality. This is just a guide, and you should go with **your own instincts and choose a day care that best meets your family's needs.**

Visit and Evaluate: Checklist

Health and Safety

- Children are supervised by a child care provider at all times.
- Toys and equipment are clean, sanitized and in good condition.
- They have fire extinguishers, first aid kits, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- They monitor visitors to reduce risks to children's safety. Children are released** to another person only if you have given written permission in advance.
- Clean environments reduce illness and prevent spread of germs.
- Well-balanced, nutritious meals are served.

Learning Environment/Program

- Good balance between planned, age-appropriate activities and free play time.
- Activities are interesting, fun and challenging where children can learn by doing and can succeed.
- Rooms children are in are clean, attractive, safe, roomy and comfortable.
- Enough toys, games and materials that children don't have to wait to use them.**
- Sturdy, child-size furniture.
- Games, arts and crafts, sports and dramatic play for children of all ages.

Staff

- Warm, nurturing, friendly, accepting and patient.
- Child care providers with training and experience
 - ◇ Regulated providers required 30 hours of training every 2 years
 - ◇ Accredited programs have higher standards than State licensing regulations and usually a higher quality program
- Caregiver(s) comfort sad or angry child in a loving way.
- Caregiver(s) encourage children to learn new skills.
- Caregiver(s) are energetic and in control, while being flexible and fun.
- Look at the group size and number of caregivers. More caregivers per child allows more individual attention, which could lead to a higher quality program.
- What is their staff turnover? Low staff turnover may indicate a higher quality program with stable and consistent staff over time.

Policies

- Parents should be welcomed and involved in the child care program.
- Parents are actively involved, have opportunities to participate, and feel free to visit any time.
- Written discipline policy prohibiting spanking, shaking, or hurting a child in any way.
- Emergency procedures are posted.
- Up-to-date state license or registration is always posted.

Warning Signs

Not all child care programs operate at the highest standards of quality. Most are trying their best, but problems can be present. When they are, there are some red flags that would help you notice them.

- The program does not encourage parents to visit or observe.
- The children move about without any guidance or involvement for 30 minutes or more.
- The providers spend most of their time scolding or yelling at the children.

*Be sure to check with other parents for references about a provider(s) or call the Regional Office for a history of violations, 1-585-238-8531. The website listed below can also be accessed for history on the provider as to whether the provider has had any compliance issues.

Please note that you can obtain a copy of the NYS Child Care Regulations by contacting the Steuben Child Care Project office or visit the Office of Children and Family Services website at www.ocfs.state.ny.us.

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Child Care information and referral is available through area Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies as follows:

Allegany County, NY

ACCORD Corp.
585-268-7605
www.accordcorp.org

Chemung County, NY

Chemung County Child Care Council, Inc.
607-734-3941
www.chemchildcare.com

Ontario, Seneca & Yates Counties, NY

Child & Family Resources, Inc.
315-781-1491
www.cfresources.org

Schuyler County, NY

Schuyler County Child Care Coordinating Council
607-535-7964
www.sccccc.org

Steuben County, NY

Steuben Child Care Project
607-776-2126
www.proactioninc.org/SCCP

For information on other topics related to family well-being, please dial 211.