

Choosing quality child care

Today, more children than ever live in households where both parents work. As a result, child care is a necessity for many families. You can make an informed choice with a little homework and preparation.

First, think about the type of care you'd like.

In general, your choices will include daycare centers, family child care homes and in-home care like a nanny, babysitter or au pair. There is no right or wrong answer, and no one option works for everyone. Consider your and your child's personalities, as well as the cost of each choice.

See it for yourself.

If you're considering a child care center or family home, ask about coming in for a visit. Seeing the environment yourself can often give you a better feel for the caregivers and the atmosphere. Do the children get constant supervision? Do they receive positive discipline?

Look at group size.

Each state has required caregiver/child ratios. See if you're comfortable with the size of the group and ask about their typical ratios. Infants need one caregiver per four children at a minimum. The ratios get higher as the children get older.

If you're looking for a nanny or au pair, prepare for interviews.

You should talk with each candidate to get a feel for their personality, child care philosophy and their training and education. You may wish to write a list of questions in advance, and take notes during each interview so you can refer to them later.

Check health and safety guidelines.

Caregivers should be up-to-date on CPR certifications. Ask about smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and childproofing all areas for safety.

Discuss illness prevention.

Find out whether policies are in place to prevent the spread of illness. This may include requiring children to be fever-free for 24 hours before returning to care, as well as other policies on specific symptoms and illnesses. Caregivers should thoroughly wash their hands after each diaper change or using the bathroom, and before preparing any food.

The ultimate goal for any child care is to find one that keeps your child safe, healthy and happy.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Aware

