

Choosing quality childcare is one of many important decisions you will make for your child. As parents, we want the best for our children! We want them to thrive, be safe, and feel cared for! We want them to play, learn, and grow. There are many ways to decide what is the best childcare for your children, but there are some basic qualities that good childcare will have. Good childcare requires:

- A well-trained, consistent caregiver.
- A setting that keeps your child safe and healthy.
- An environment that enhances your child's physical, mental, emotional, and social growth.

## Family and Friends

Family members can be great babysitters. You already know them. You know whether their home is safe, whether they treat others with respect and dignity, and what their habits are. Additionally, your child can develop close bonds to their grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. And it's usually more affordable. Likewise, close friends can also provide great childcare. You've seen them around their own children. You will be able to know whether their homes are safe and child-proofed, and whether they're nurturing and loving, and will treat your child like one of their own.

The advantages to using family members or friends include:

- Children forge close bonds with their family members.
- Family members and friends may be more flexible when it comes to watching sick children.
- Family members and friends may be more affordable.

However, the disadvantages can include:

- There may be an interruption in childcare if your babysitter gets sick.
- Personal conflicts with family members or friends have the potential to interrupt childcare services.
- Family members may take greater liberties than you would like when correcting your child's behavior or training.

## Licensed Family Child Care Homes

Licensed family childcare providers use their own homes to care for children. Their homes have been inspected by the state, and they are limited to how many children they may watch. The state regulates these in-home care providers to help ensure a safe environment for your child. Some parents feel that these providers create a warmer and nurturing, but potentially less structured environment for their children while still under the watchful eye of the state.

The advantages to using a licensed family childcare home include:

- They provide a more home-like environment.
- They generally have fewer children than licensed daycare facilities.

The disadvantages can include:

- They provide a less structured environment and may have fewer educational programs.
- If the child care provider becomes ill, you may be forced to seek an alternative plan for a few days.

## Licensed Daycare Facilities

Licensed Daycare facilities are places that provide child care services and educational and early learning programs in a nonresidential setting. These facilities are inspected by the state regularly and are held accountable for their policies and procedures.

The advantages to licensed daycare facilities include:

- They do not close if a staff member is sick or goes away for vacation.
- They can provide more early learning and school readiness programs.
- Their tuition can be subsidized by the state for those who meet certain financial requirements.
- Their lunch programs can also be subsidized by the state.

The disadvantages can include:

- They may be too structured for younger children.
- They may be more expensive than family members, friends, or licensed family child care homes.
- They may require your child to already be potty-trained or they may not take infants.

## Checking Out Facilities

Once you have a few centers on your list, it is time to check them out before you decide which one is right for your child. Contact the centers you have found and make appointments to tour the facilities or homes and talk to the providers or directors. Additionally, the center you choose should be safe, clean, spacious, and organized. There should never be any yelling, grabbing, shaking, or jerking of a child, and the workers should never strike a child. Ask questions early on to ensure there are fewer misunderstandings and problems in the future. Always trust your instincts. If you do not get a good feeling about a center, then don't put your child there, no matter how convenient it might be. The choice of childcare is an important decision that should not be made lightly. Deciding what is best starts with deciding what type of childcare works for you and your child.