



# Tips for Picking a Child Care Facility



## 1. Start Early

Start looking for child care in advance. If you are considering a child care center or care in someone else's home, finding the right child care takes time. Talk to local experts, call 844-KID-INFO, visit [www.elginpartnership.org](http://www.elginpartnership.org) or at [ExceleRate Illinois](http://ExceleRateIllinois) to get facts about child care, a list of options in your area including ratings, and information on child care financial assistance programs.

## 2. Visit and Ask Questions

Visit the child care options you are considering. Don't be fooled by outside appearances, they may have great teachers inside. Ask questions about safety procedures (doors locked) and visitors. How many children and teachers per room? What do you need to provide? How are teachers supervised? After the initial tour, go for an unannounced visit, or drop by and spy. Sometimes visits will confirm that the place is right for you, but sometimes they'll be a real eye-opener. Choosing a child care center is important. They need to earn your business!

## 3. Policies and Procedures

Find out whether you share parenting philosophies on topics such as discipline (Do the caregivers use time-outs, scolding's?); feeding (What snacks or drinks are provided for older babies? Get a copy of the menu); sleeping (When are naps offered? How are fussy babies put to sleep?) Inquire about sick-child policy (What symptoms prevent a child from attending?) and the medicine policy. Do they have a biting policy? Ask whether there's a backup plan should the family day-care provider or in-home caregiver get sick and unable to work.

## 4. Teaching Staff

Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes and about their experience. It's best if children stay with the same caregiver for at least a year. Change in caregivers is stressful to children.

## 5. Observe the Classrooms

When you are visiting a potential site, pay attention to how the staff interacts with the children. Ideally, a caregiver should be on the floor playing with kids or holding one on her lap. What is the overall tone/sound of the room? Does it feel homey/welcoming? Are there a variety of toys in good condition on the shelves or are they empty? Is it clean?

## 6. Happy Children and Staff

Pay attention to how the staff interacts with children. Caregivers should appear energetic, patient, and genuinely interested in the kids. Do they treat the children with love and affection? You can also watch the children and how they respond to the caregivers. Do they reach for them? Do they smile when they come near and talk to them?

## 7. Observe the Playground

When you observe the playground check to make sure the materials are in good repair as well as cushioned fall zones around the climbing equipment. Are the fences in good repair and locked? What materials are available for children such as bikes, balls, sandbox, etc.?

## 8. Health and Safety

Make sure the child care center, family daycare, or in-home care provides a safe environment that is spelled out in its health and sanitation rules. Look up, down, and at eye level for items such as choking hazards. Are gates closed, window guards on windows, cleaning chemicals locked up, smoke detectors, and emergency exits accessible? Is the center clean, floors swept, caregivers wash hands several times daily, diaper and food prep areas sanitized, mouthed toys are sanitized, children's belongings are labeled and not shared, etc.

## 9. Parent Communication

How are you going to be communicated with about your child and any happenings at the center and how often: daily, weekly, daily written notes of your child's day including toileting and how they ate, phone calls? How will you be notified in the case of an emergency? Make sure you can communicate comfortably with each other. When you first hand off your child in the morning, you should tell the caregiver how your little one slept the night before, if he is teething, and whether he ate breakfast. At the end of the day, you'll want to know similar information, such as the number of diapers he went through when he napped, and if he seemed happy overall. It's always preferable to speak to the caregiver in person.

## 10. Problem Solving

It is inevitable that you'll experience conflicts with your caregiver. Address problems right away rather than ignoring them until they grow out of proportion. Some issues can be resolved quickly; others may require more discussion. Whatever the conflict, don't be afraid to speak up. Express your concern, listen to what the caregiver has to say and find a solution that you are comfortable with.