

# Choosing Quality Child Care

Finding the right caregiver can be challenging but it is one of the most important decisions you will make. Recent studies show that brain growth is affected by the young child's earliest experiences with the adults in his world. Knowing how to look for quality care will help you find the best child care program for your family.

Begin your free child care search by contacting the Child Care Referral line of the YMCA Childcare Resource Service at 1.800.481.2151. YMCA CRS is the state funded child care resource and referral service for San Diego County.

## Free services include:

- Child care referrals to licensed family child care homes, centers, and nanny agencies
- Application for child care fee assistance
- Parent resource packet of child care information
- *Choosing Quality Child Care* workshop
- Resource library with parenting books and videos
- Referrals to parenting classes
- Links to community services for families
- Training for parents and caregivers
- Child health and behavioral health services



## Five Simple Steps to Follow when Visiting a Child Care Program:

### Look

Begin by visiting several child care homes or centers. On each visit, think about your first impression. But don't stop there. Does the program look safe for your child? Do the caregivers/teachers who will care for your child enjoy talking and playing with children? Do they talk with each child at the child's eye level? Are there plenty of toys and learning materials within a child's reach? You should always visit a home or center more than once. Stay as long as possible so you can get a good feel for what the care will be like for your child. Even after you start using the child care, continue to come back and check it out.

### Listen

What does the child care setting sound like? Do the children sound happy and involved? What about the teacher's tone of voice? Do they seem cheerful and patient? A place that's too quiet may mean not enough activity is planned. A place that's too noisy may mean there is a lack of guidance.

### Count

Count the number of children in the group. Then count the number of staff members caring for them. Usually the fewer the number of children for each adult, the more attention your child will get. A small number of children per adult is most important for babies and younger children. The license should be posted and list the number of children allowed by age group.

### Ask

The knowledge and experience of the adults caring for your child is very important. Find out about the special training they have. Ask about the background, education, and experience of all staff: caregivers, teachers, and program directors. Ask the same questions about any other adults who will have contact with your child in the home or center. Quality caregivers/teachers will be happy to have you ask these questions.

### Be Informed

Find out more about efforts in your community to improve the quality of child care. Is your caregiver involved in these activities? Does your caregiver belong to any professional organizations? Has your child's caregiver achieved accreditation or completed training that exceeds minimum requirements? Do they have child development units or a college degree?

There are different types of child care settings. Some are licensed, some are not. Licensed care is regulated by the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing division. While licensing does not ensure quality, it does provide guidelines for health and safety. We recommend that you check the history file of a licensed home or center to obtain information on complaints or violations. When you invest time you can find quality care in any of these settings:

**Licensed Family Child Care** is offered in a home setting. The provider can care for up to 14 children, depending on their ages, and the type of license that has been issued. There is a limit on the number of infants (birth to 24 months) in care at one time. As a small business, the provider sets hours, rates, and services. Care is often provided on a more flexible schedule including weekends and evenings.

**Child Care Centers** can be large or small and operated independently or by a church or other organization. Children are often grouped by age. Staff must meet specific educational requirements. There are also required staff-to-child ratios. Program philosophy, tuition rates, and services vary. Hours of operation generally reflect traditional work schedules.

**License-Exempt Home Care** is provided by a nanny, friend, or relative in the child or caregiver's home. Child care for children from only one family does not require a license. It is important to have a criminal background check completed on your caregiver. Call 1.800.481.2151 to ask about fingerprint background clearance through Trustline. You can also request a home health and safety checklist and information on training classes for your license-exempt caregiver.

## Getting Started

Call the YMCA CRS Child Care Referral Line at 1.800.481.2151 to begin your search for care or search online at [www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org). To help us find programs that meet your needs, we will ask a variety of questions such as the ages of your children, and the hours/days and location where care is needed. We can also help you apply for child care subsidy programs or you can apply on-line at [www.childcaresandiego.com](http://www.childcaresandiego.com).

## Next Steps

- Call all the referrals on your list
- Ask questions and schedule interviews
- Visit at least 3-5 programs
- Bring your checklist
- Look, Listen, Count, Ask, Be Informed
- Choose programs that meet your family's needs
- Review program files: contact Community Care Licensing at 619.767.2200 for an appointment
- Continue to monitor the quality of care your child receives

Quality child care is determined by: A **Caregiver** who provides warm, loving care and guidance; A **Setting** that keeps your child safe, secure, enriched, and healthy; **Daily Activities** that allow your child to develop and learn in the best way possible; and **Program Philosophy** and policies that fit the needs of you and your child. The following check list is a good tool to take with you and use when visiting a child care program.

To learn more about child care settings visit our web site at [www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org).

# Check List

## Caregiver/Teacher

- Caregivers are patient, warm, accepting
- Caregivers and children look happy to be together
- Caregivers speak to the children at eye-level
- Children's needs are quickly met even when things are busy
- There are enough staff to ensure basic safety
- Caregivers have completed CPR, first aid and early childhood education courses and training

## Activities

- There is a daily balance of free play, story time, planned activities, and nap time
- A daily schedule and activity plan is posted
- There are enough toys and materials for the number of children
- Toys are clean, safe, and within reach of the children
- Video and TV viewing is limited to short, educational programs

## Setting

- The atmosphere is bright and pleasant
- There is a fenced outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment
- Children are visible to the caregivers at all times
- There is a different area for resting
- There are different areas for quiet and active play
- There is enough space for the children
- All work and pictures are at child's eye level and reflect diversity

## The Program

- Program philosophy and values are similar to yours
- Positive guidance is used to help children learn self-control
- Children are comforted when needed
- Parents are encouraged to visit at any time
- Contract, fees, late charges, and other policies are reviewed
- Nutritional meals and snacks are provided
- The license and emergency plan is posted
- Caregivers communicate daily with parents about their child
- Regular meetings are schedule to discuss the child's development

**YMCA CRS seeks to promote and develop quality child care but provides referrals, not recommendations, to particular providers.**

**Child Care Referral Line:** 1.800.481.2151  
**Open Monday – Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**  
**and Friday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

**On-Line Child Care Search:** [www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org)

**Child Care HealthLine:** 1.800.908.8883  
Free child health and behavioral health services.

**Community Care Licensing:** 619.767.2200  
Call to review a potential child care provider's licensing history to obtain information on complaints, violations, and site visits.

**For a copy of YMCA CRS referral and complaint policies call the Child Care Referral Line.**