

CHOOSING A PROGRAM



Selecting a child care program is one of the most important decisions parents must face. With this in mind, we have created this handout as a guideline for developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education. Whether choosing a child care center or a family child care home, this information will help you distinguish quality child care.

Philosophy

Pay close attention to how children are taught, disciplined, nurtured, and treated in everyday interactions. Discuss with the provider his/her philosophy about child care and compare it with yours. Ask yourself whether you think alike on the matter. This will help ensure good communication and understanding. It will also help establish acceptable routines for meals, naptime, potty training, and other activities. Find out whether the provider encourages parental involvement, which increases the quality of any child care program. Finally, assess whether the program promotes cultural diversity, and whether materials and teaching styles respect the children's different cultural and ethnic heritages.

Curriculum

Young children are sensory motor learners. They learn by running, twirling, pouring, digging, tasting, jumping, clapping, singing, talking, smelling, rolling, and screaming. Children learn through play. Quality child care should be structured, yet flexible enough to incorporate these learning-oriented behaviors. It should also be based on the children's needs and interests, providing age-appropriate, sensory learning activities that support their progressive developmental stages. Because children's learning is closely related to play, the curriculum should reflect a sense of fun and adventure.

A high-quality, developmentally appropriate program has a **child-centered** approach. This simply means allowing children to choose from a variety of activities. However, providers should encourage children to finish one project before moving on to another. A curriculum that is **theme-based**—for example, one that coordinates activities focusing on the seasons of the year or a special holiday—also helps children learn. Projects can be fun and playful while stimulating the children's minds.

A **teacher-directed** approach is less developmentally appropriate. An example of a teacher-directed activity is one in which the children create valentines, and the teacher has already drawn and cut out the hearts. The teacher directs the children to glue the hearts onto paper so that everyone's art looks the same, reducing opportunities for creativity. To make this project child-centered, the teacher would encourage the children to cut, draw, and glue by themselves, assisting only when necessary and giving praise for all efforts, whether or not they conform to the teacher's standards.

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Staff

When children are young, the most important thing they need to feel is love and trust. If children trust their families, teachers, and providers, they can grow and learn. Among the most important things to look for in a child care provider are warmth, trustworthiness, a feeling of safety, and a demonstrated commitment to being with children.

People who care for children should be willing to learn new techniques and strategies. Make sure the provider you choose is patient, tolerant, respectful, and professional. Your child will copy the behavior of the other children as well as the provider. You have very little control over the other children in care, but you do have control over the provider you choose.

Make sure that your caregiver is invested in his/her career. Child care is a business, and teachers and providers are serious professionals who deserve to be paid fairly for their work. There is a strong correlation between the quality of a program and the salaries of the teachers. Ask the teachers about their salary ranges, benefits, and turnover rates. These factors are important indicators of quality.

If the person caring for your child is only doing you a favor, has no training, earns low wages, receives no benefits, and is only doing the job until something better comes along, you will probably receive low-quality child care—with possible negative consequences for your child. Low-quality child care can lead to developmental, disciplinary, and behavioral problems, along with health and safety concerns. Every child has the right to an excellent care environment. As a parent, you have a voice in guaranteeing that right!

If you would like more information about child care licensing regulations and choosing appropriate child care, please call Children's Council's **Referral Line** at **(415) 343-3300**.

Excerpts of this handout are adapted from City College of San Francisco's Childcare Guide.

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