

Quality Child Care Checklist ✓

Choosing a child care or preschool program for your young child is a big decision. Location, availability, hours and cost are important to consider, and so is the quality of the program.

This checklist will help you recognize the key elements of quality early learning beyond basic licensing standards and to help you make a more informed decision when choosing a child care or preschool setting for your child.

BEFORE YOU VISIT ✓

CHILD CARE PROGRAM

Check the status of the provider’s license or certification.

Quality begins with health and safety. Providers who serve five or more children for compensation are licensed and monitored by the Arizona Department of Health Services. Providers on tribal lands or military bases may have their own licensing or certification requirements. Ask the provider for more information.

Call the program to ask about:

- Hours of operation (*evenings, weekends, holidays*)
- Costs and available financial assistance and discounts
- Meals
- Transportation for children needing part-time care
- Policies regarding sick children and emergencies

Schedule an in-person visit.

Quality providers will welcome a visit from you and your child during normal hours of operation. You will want to see the children interacting with teachers and caregivers, so ask about particular times of day to avoid morning drop off, nap and afternoon pick-up times.

NOTES

Learn more at FirstThingsFirst.org/child-care

Quality First, funded by First Things First, partners with child care providers across Arizona to improve the quality of early learning for kids from birth to age 5.

AT YOUR VISIT ✓

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Do you have a parent handbook?**
Quality programs should offer you a copy.
- What are the qualifications of the director and teachers? How long have they been working with children?**
Experience working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers as well as training or college coursework in early childhood development and education lead to quality interactions.
- How do you keep families informed about your program and their children's progress? What opportunities does your program offer for family involvement?**
Quality programs will post lesson plans, send information such as a newsletter, host regular parent/teacher conferences and keep you informed about your child's activities.
- How does the program deal with challenging behavior?**
Quality Programs use proactive and positive approaches to guide behavior.
- What is your ratio of teachers to children? Maximum group size?**
These determine the level of care and attention your child may receive. Quality programs may have smaller teacher/child ratios and limit group sizes compared to state licensing requirements.

Age of Children	Preferred Teacher/Child Ratio
Birth-12 months	1:5 or less
12-24 months	1:6 or less
2 year-olds	1:8 or less
3 year-olds	1:12 or less
4-5 year-olds	1:13 or less

In mixed-age group settings, check these guidelines by the age of the youngest child in the group.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR

Positive, Nurturing Teacher/Child Interactions

- Does the teacher respond and attend to the children through warm communication and body language?
- Does the teacher play and engage in conversations with the children during activities?
- Do the children have many opportunities to talk and communicate with one another?
- Does the teacher engage in extended conversations with the children?
- Are the children supervised at all times? Children should never be left alone and should always be within sight and sound of teachers.

Positive Child/Child Interactions

- Are children playing either together or side-by-side?
- Are children encouraged to work together to resolve differences or conflicts?
- Do children move freely from activity to activity?

Caring for Infants

- Are babies placed on their backs to sleep?
- Do babies spend part of their play time on their tummies?
- Do teachers or caregivers respond promptly to crying babies?
- Are babies held while being fed?
- Do caregivers show affection for the children (smiling, singing, holding, rocking, etc.)

Classroom Environment

- Is there ample space and materials to encourage play and learning within the children's reach, *including*:
 - Books, puppets, posters, pictures and writing materials.
 - Blocks, cars, puzzles, games and building materials.
 - Markers, scissors, paint, paper, glue and clay.
 - Dress up, play kitchens and baby dolls.
 - Science materials, sand and water play, plants and other natural items.
 - Musical instruments, music devices and scarves.

Outdoor Environment

- Is there an outdoor play area, with shade, that is used daily?
- Does the outdoor area include active play materials such as climbing equipment, bicycles, balls, or swings?
- In addition to active play, are there opportunities for quiet play such as books, sand, water, or building?
- Are the adults actively engaged?

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AFTER YOUR VISIT ✓

- Trust your instincts and also your child's reactions to the teachers and environment.
- Ask your child:**
 - Do you think you would like to go play there?
 - What did you like best?
 - What did you like best about the teacher?

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