



How to Choose a Day Care Center

As you think about child care, make visits, ask questions, then decide. Taking the time and energy to choose the right center for your family's needs is a necessary part of selecting a loving environment for your child.

Our referral gives you somewhere to start, but the responsibility for your child's safety and well being is yours. Group size, child/adult ratio, teacher experience, training and education, facility safety, program accreditation, and family involvement are some of the quality indicators you might consider in choosing a day care center. Ask plenty of questions and make sure you are comfortable with the center before making your final decision.

Phone Interview Questions

Before you schedule a site visit, you may want to ask:

- How much do you charge? (hour, day or week)
- Do I pay for days my child is sick? On vacation?
- Is there an extra fee if I am late picking up my child?
- Who supplies the food? What kinds of food are served? Will you prepare special diets when needed?
- Is there a special rate for 2 or more children from the same family?
- How do the children in care spend their time?
- Do you take the children on any field trips? Are parents notified in advance?
- Are parent participation hours required? If so, how much time? Are parents welcome to stop in to visit their children at any time?
- How often do you communicate with parents?
- How many children are enrolled in the center? What is your limit? What is the age range of the children?
- How many children and adults will be in my child's classroom?
- Are your teachers certified in any way? What special qualifications are available here? How long has each of your teachers been with the center?
- Has your program been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or another organization?

Child Development Council
609 W. Clinton St.
Ithaca NY 14850
(607) 273-0259

www.childdevelopmentcouncil.org

Site Visits

When you decide to visit a center, bring your child to the interview. Allow at least an hour, planning to go when your child is not hungry or sleepy. Observe how the teachers and your child interact. Ask for a tour of the indoor and outdoor areas used for care. Observe other classrooms and teachers with all the children.

If you are unable to keep your appointment, call the center to cancel!

Health and Safety Indicators

Licensed Child Care Centers are required to meet minimal Health and Safety requirements to be in compliance with regulations. Background checks on all staff who will be alone with children are required to obtain a license. Regulations pertaining to Child Day Care Centers can be viewed on the internet at:

http://ocfs.state.ny.us/main/childcare/daycare_regs.asp

Minimum requirements are outlined in regulation, however the responsibility for your child's safety and well being is yours.

When visiting a center, note the environment and safety precautions such as smoke detectors, outlet covers, safe exits, gates, etc. Requirements are clear, but minimal, your feeling of health and safety is subjective. You need to take the time to ask yourself:

- Are there classroom telephones? If so, are emergency numbers posted by the phone?
- Is there a fire extinguisher in each classroom?
- Is this an environment in which I want to leave my child?
- What skills, warmth and knowledge does the teacher possess so I feel comfortable leaving my child?
- Does my child seem to like the teacher?
- Does the teacher try to involve my child with the other children?
- Does the teacher continue to attend to the children's needs even though I am there?
- Do the children mix well together?

How many children and adults might I see in a child care center?

NYS Regulation 418-1.8 Supervision of Children

- (a) The child day care center must employ or have available staff who will promote the physical, intellectual, social, cultural and emotional well-being of the children.
- (b) The child day care center must provide supervision of the staff responsible for the care of children. Workloads and assignments must be arranged to provide consistency of care to children and to allow staff to fulfill their respective responsibilities.
- (c) Whenever the child day care center is in operation and the director is away from the premises, there must be a person designated to act on behalf of the director.
- (d) Children cannot be left without competent direct supervision at any time.
- (1) No person other than a director, head of group or assistant to the head of group may supervise a group independently even for brief periods of time, except in an emergency. No person under 18 years of age may be left alone to supervise a group of children at any time including in an emergency.
- (2) The minimum age of a staff person is 16 years.
- (3) A person who is qualified to perform the duties of an absent staff member must be provided when needed to comply with the applicable staff/child ratios.
- (e) When a child day care center is in operation, an adequate number of qualified staff must be on duty to insure the health and safety of the children in care. The minimum ratios of staff to children are illustrated in the ratio chart at the right.

For a copy of NYS child care regulations and/or more information on selecting child care call the Child Development Council, or visit the NYS Office of Children and Family Services website at www.ocfs.state.ny.us

Call the Child Care Complaint Line at 1-800-732-5207 with concerns about a Day Care Center. Call the Child Development Council at (607) 273-0259 for a history of any child care program's compliance with regulations.

To report child abuse and neglect call 1-800-342-3720.

Minimum Staff/Child Ratios

| AGE OF CHILDREN | STAFF/CHILD MAXIMUM RATIO (*) | GROUP SIZE(**) |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| under 6 weeks | 1:3 | 6 |
| 6 weeks to 18 | 1:4 | 8 |
| 18 months to 36 | 1:5 | 12 |
| 3 years | 1:7 | 18 |
| 4 years | 1:8 | 21 |
| 5 years | 1:9 | 24 |

(*) Staff/child ratio refers to the maximum number of children per staff person.

(**) Group size refers to the number of children cared for together as a unit. Group size is used to determine the minimum staff/child ratio based upon the age of the children in the group.

(***) Waiver required

How much education and training do child care teachers need?

Regulations specify higher education requirements for each role in a licensed center. In addition to these prerequisites, the center director and each employee must complete a minimum of thirty hours of training every two years. Fifteen hours of training must be received during the first six months of the program's first year of licensure or during the person's first six months of employment by the program. This initial fifteen hours applies towards the thirty hour minimum requirement for each license period. Such training requirements also apply to any volunteer in the day care program who has the potential for regular and substantial contact with children. Training must address the following topic areas:

- Principles of Child Development
- Nutrition & Health
- Program Development
- Safety & Security
- Business Record Maintenance & Management
- Child Abuse & Maltreatment Identification & Prevention
- Statutes & Regulations Pertaining to Child Day Care
- Statutes & Regulations Pertaining to Child Abuse & Maltreatment
- Shaken Baby Syndrome

