

Choosing Care for Your Children

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Parents Checklist for Day Care

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What is Good Day Care?

Good day care requires three important things:
A caregiver who provides your child with care and guidance and who works with you and your family to make sure that your child grows and learns in the best way possible;

A setting that keeps your child safe and healthy;

Activities that are suited to your child's stage of growth and that help the child develop mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally.

Consider these questions as you choose day care:

What type of caregiver would be best? A good caregiver should be well-trained, and warm and loving toward children. Whether your child is an infant, toddler, preschooler, or school-ager, the caregiver should encourage the child's interests and stimulate the child to explore and discover new things.

When you interview caregivers you'll want to find out about their training and experience, and their attitude toward child rearing, guidance, and discipline.

Is the setting suitable? Whether you use in-home care, family day care, or center care, the facilities should be safe and healthy. The equipment—games, toys, and furniture—should be in good repair and appropriate for your child. The number of children in your child's group should be small enough to allow your child to receive individual attention.

What will the cost of care be? Day care costs can vary widely, depending on the type of care you use, the days and hours you need care, the part of the country you live in, and other factors. You should investigate the costs of different kinds of day care available, including the costs of transportation for your child to and from the day care setting. You'll also want to find out if your family qualifies for local, state, or federal financial assistance that will help pay for care of your child.

The checklist for parents, beginning on page 5 of this booklet, will help you decide what kind of day care arrangement will provide your child with good quality care in a suitable setting—at a cost that you can afford.

Any kind of day care can be good for your child if the care provides the warmth, supervision, and individual attention your child needs. In fact, you may want to use more than one kind of care for your children—for example, in-home care for your infant and center-based care for your preschooler.

In-home Care

An in-home caregiver is someone who comes to, or lives in, your home. The caregiver can be a relative or a friend or can also be someone you pay to come to your home. If you have three or more children needing care, in-home care may be less expensive than other kinds of care. It can also save you from the worry of getting several children, all with different schedules, to and from a day care arrangement outside your home.

You may also want to use in-home care if your child needs special care because of a physical,

mental, or emotional problem; if you need care for an infant or toddler, or care for a child at night; if you need only after-school care.

You should know, however, that in-home care can be costly, especially if you have only one or two children and are paying someone for full-time care.

Family Day Care

This kind of day care is provided in the home of the caregiver, who is often a mother with children of her own. You may find a relative, friend, or neighbor who is willing to care for your child in this way. Or you may find a family day care home run by someone you do not already know.

Usually, just a few children are cared for at any one time. In Iowa, family day care homes care for six children or fewer and may choose to be registered with Department of Human Services. Group day care homes must be registered and have an assistant. They can provide care for five additional school-age children.

Family day care can be a good arrangement if you are a single parent raising a child alone; if you live in a rural area where family day care is likely to be the easiest to find; if you have only one or two children needing care; if you have a school-age child or an infant.

Keep in mind that a family day care provider may go out of business or stop caring for children at any time. And because many of these homes are not inspected or licensed by local or state agencies, it will be up to you to make sure that adequate health and safety standards are met.

Center-based Care

Day care centers are established settings where children are cared for in a group away from their homes for all or part of the day. There are many different kinds of center-based care, including nursery schools, preschools, and parent cooperatives. Some of these centers are set up primarily to keep children safe and secure. Others are designed to prepare children for their school years. Center-based care is most frequently available in a town or city.

Many day care centers have an organized program of activities to help children learn. Some centers follow more formal plans. Others use a more informal program based on their day-to-day experience working with children.

You may be interested in center-based care if you want to keep your child in the same day care setting for an extended period; if your child needs special care because of a physical or mental handicap or an emotional problem; if you want certain educational or religious activities for your child; if, in addition to care, your child will need medical or dental checkups, or psychological or social services.

Keep in mind that center-based care may not provide the “home” atmosphere some children like. Your child may not be comfortable in a large group for a major part of each day.

In considering a particular day care center, check out the facilities available, the qualifications of the staff, and the number of children cared for by each caregiver (the “staff/child ratio”). In Iowa

there should be at least 1 staff person for every 4 children ages 2 weeks to 2 years. For 2 year olds the ratio should be 1 to 6; for 3 year olds, 1 to 8; for 4 year olds, 1 to 12; for 5 to 10 year olds, 1 to 15; for children over 10, 1 to 20.

Talk to the director to make sure the center's program has the approach you like and includes the kinds of activities you want for your child.

A Checklist for Parents

This checklist is designed to help you decide what things about a day care arrangement are most important to you and your family. It can also help you make sure your child's arrangement offers the things you believe are important.

Arrange to visit the center or home when the children are present. You may also want to visit when you are not expected.

Read through the checklist and circle those items you want the arrangement to provide. Then, when you talk to a possible caregiver or visit a home or center, decide whether the arrangement offers those things. Just check "yes" or "no." Use the checked-off list to help you make a decision.

Remember, this checklist tries to be as complete as possible. Not everything will apply to your family's situation.

Does Your Child's Caregiver:

For All Children	Yes	No
Appear to be warm and friendly?	—	—
Seem calm and gentle?	—	—
Seem to have a sense of humor?	—	—
Seem to be someone with whom you can develop a relaxed, sharing relationship?	—	—
Seem to be someone your child will enjoy being with?	—	—
Seem to feel good about himself or herself and the job?	—	—
Have child-rearing attitudes and methods that are similar to your own?	—	—
Treat each child as a special person?	—	—
Understand what children can and want to do at different stages of growth?	—	—
Have the right materials and equipment on hand to help them learn and grow mentally and physically?	—	—
Patiently help children solve their problems?	—	—
Provide activities that encourage children to think things through?	—	—
Encourage good health habits, such as washing hands before eating?	—	—

	Yes	No
Talk to the children and encourage them to express themselves through words and language?	—	—
Encourage children to express themselves in creative ways?	—	—
Have art and music supplies suited to the ages of all children in care?	—	—
Seem to have enough time to look after all the children?	—	—
Help your child to know, accept, and feel good about himself or herself?	—	—
Help your child become independent in ways you approve?	—	—
Help your child learn to get along with and to respect other people, no matter what their backgrounds are?	—	—
Provide a routine and rules the children can understand and follow?	—	—
Accept and respect your family's cultural values?	—	—
Take time to discuss your child with you regularly?	—	—
Have previous experience or training in working with children?	—	—

For Infants or Toddlers (birth to age 3)	Yes	No
Seem to enjoy cuddling your baby?	—	—
Care for your baby's physical needs such as feeding and diapering? Wash own hands frequently?	—	—
Spend time holding, playing with, talking to your baby?	—	—
Provide stimulation by pointing out things to look at, touch, and listen to?	—	—
Provide dependable and consistent care so your baby can form an attachment and feel important?	—	—
Cooperate with your efforts to toilet train your toddler?	—	—
"Child-proof" the setting so your toddler can crawl or walk safely and freely?	—	—
Realize that toddlers want to do things for themselves and help your child to learn to feed and dress him- or herself, go to the bathroom, and pick up his or her own toys?	—	—
Help your child learn the language by talking with him or her, naming things, reading aloud, describing what she or he is doing, and responding to your child's words?	—	—

For Preschoolers (aged 3 to 5 or 6)

Yes

No

Plan many different activities for your child?

—

—

Join in activities himself or herself?

—

—

Set consistent limits that help your child gradually learn to make his or her own choices?

—

—

Recognize the value of play and encourage your child to be creative and use his or her imagination?

—

—

Help your child feel good about himself or herself by being attentive, patient, positive, warm, and accepting?

—

—

Allow your child to do things for himself or herself because she or he understands children can learn from their mistakes?

—

—

Help your child increase his or her vocabulary by talking with him or her, reading aloud, and answering questions?

—

—

For School-Age Children (aged 6 to 14)

Give your child supervision and security but also understand his or her growing need for independence?

—

—

Set reasonable and consistent limits?

—

—

At the same time, allow your child to make choices and gradually take responsibility?

—

—

	Yes	No
Understand the conflict and confusion that growing children sometimes feel?	—	—
Help your child follow through on projects, help with homework, and suggest interesting things to do?	—	—
Listen to your child's problems and experiences?	—	—
Respect your child when he or she expresses new ideas, values, or opinions?	—	—
Cooperate with you to set clear limits and expectations about behavior?	—	—
Understand the conflicts and confusion older school-age children feel about sex, identity, and pressure to conform?	—	—
Provide your child with a good adult image to admire and copy?	—	—

Does the Day Care Home or Center Have:

For All Children	Yes	No
An up-to-date license or registration certificate, if one is required?	—	—
A clean and comfortable look?	—	—
Enough space indoors and out so all the children can move freely and safely?	—	—
Enough caregivers to give attention to all of the children in care?	—	—
Places to store personal belongings?	—	—
Places where children can be alone?	—	—
Enough furniture, play things, and other equipment for all the children in care?	—	—
Equipment that is safe and in good repair?	—	—
Equipment and materials that are suitable for the ages of the children in care?	—	—
Enough room and cots or cribs so the children can take naps?	—	—
Enough clean bathrooms for all the children in care?	—	—

	Yes	No
Safety caps on electrical outlets?	—	—
A safe place to store medicines, household cleansers, poisons, matches, sharp instruments, and other dangerous items?	—	—
An alternate exit in case of fire?	—	—
A safety plan posted to follow in emergencies?	—	—
An outdoor play area that is safe, fenced, and free of litter?	—	—
Enough heat, light, and ventilation?	—	—
Nutritious meals and snacks made with the kinds of food you want your child to eat?	—	—
A separate place to care for sick children where they can be watched?	—	—
A first aid kit?	—	—
Fire extinguishers?	—	—
Smoke detectors?	—	—
Covered radiators and protected heaters?	—	—
Strong screens or bars on windows above the first floor?	—	—

For Infants or Toddlers (birth to age 3) **Yes** **No**

Safe gates at tops and bottoms of stairs? — —

A potty chair or special toilet seat in the bathroom? — —

A clean and safe place to change diapers, sanitized after each use? — —

Cribs with firm mattresses covered in heavy plastic? — —

Separate crib sheets for each baby in care? — —

For Preschoolers (aged 3 to 5 or 6)

A stepstool in the bathroom so your preschooler can reach the sink and toilet? — —

For School-Age Children (aged 6 to 14)

A quiet place to do homework? — —

Appropriate games and activities? — —

Are There Opportunities:

For All Children	Yes	No
To play quietly and actively, indoors and out?	—	—
To play alone at times and with friends at other times?	—	—
To follow a schedule that meets young children's need for routine but that is flexible enough to meet the needs of each child?	—	—
To use materials and equipment that help children learn new physical skills and to control and exercise their muscles?	—	—
To learn to get along, to share, and to respect themselves and others?	—	—
To learn about their own and others' cultures through art, music, books, songs, games, and other activities?	—	—
To speak both English and their family's native language?	—	—
To watch special programs on television that have been approved by you?	—	—
For Infants or Toddlers (birth to age 3)		
To crawl and explore safely?	—	—
To play with objects and toys that help infants to develop their senses of touch, sight, and hearing? (For example, mobiles, mirrors, cradle gyms, crib toys, rattles, things to squeeze and roll, pots and pans, nesting cups, different sized boxes)	—	—

Yes No

To take part in a variety of activities that are suited to toddlers' short attention spans? (For example, puzzles, cars, books, outdoor play equipment for active play; modeling clay, clocks, boxes, containers, for creative play)

— —

For Preschoolers (aged 3 to 5 or 6)

To play with many different toys and equipment that enable preschoolers to use their imaginations? (For example, books, musical instruments, costumes)

— —

To choose their own activities, for at least part of the day?

— —

To visit nearby places of interest, such as the park, the library, the fire house, a museum?

— —

For School-Age Children (aged 6 to 14)

To practice their skills? (For example, sports, musical instruments, drama activities, craft projects)

— —

To be with their own friends after school?

— —

To do homework?

— —

To use a variety of materials and equipment, including art materials, table games, sports equipment, books, films, and records?

— —

To use community facilities such as a baseball field, a swimming pool, a recreation center?

— —

Find Out about the Day Care Regulations in Your Area

In Iowa, all day care centers must be licensed. Family day care homes caring for six children or fewer may register. Group day care homes may care for an additional five school-age children and must be registered.

You will find it helpful to know about the day care regulations in your area. For information on Iowa's day care regulations, contact Child Care Licensing, Department of Human Services, Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

For information on federal day care regulations, write to the Day Care Division, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Post Office Box 1182, Washington, D.C. 20013.

If you wish more detailed information about day care, copies of *A Parent's Guide to Day Care*, Stock No. 017-091-00231-2, are for sale from: Gryphon House, Inc., 3706 Otis St., P.O. Box 217, Mt. Rainier, Maryland 20712.

Other publications in this series include:

Pm-796a *Family Day Care Homes*,

Pm-796b *Day Care Centers*,

Pm-796c *Preschool or Nursery School*,

Pm-796d *A Babysitter in Your Home*,

Pm-796e *Setting Up Play Groups*,

PM-796f *Babysitting Cooperatives*,

Pm-796g *Child Care Credit on Income Tax*.

File: Family Life 2

Adapted from a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services publication by Dorothy Pinsky, extension human development and family life specialist.



and justice for all

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