

Choosing Care for Your Children

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Day Care – Child Care Center



Distributed by
Iowa Council
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Cooperative Extension Service
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Pm-796b
October 1977

Ames, Iowa 50011



What is a child care center?

Day care or child care centers are resources available in some communities for the group care of children on a regular daily basis during working hours. They are concerned with helping and supporting parents with their child rearing when the parents are at work, at school, or for other reasons require this type of care.

All centers must be licensed by the Iowa Department of Social Services, and you will want to be certain the center you are considering is licensed.

The number of children in a center is determined by the license which states the maximum number of children permitted based on available space and the number of adults. Centers generally take children from ages 2-6. Some are licensed to provide care for infants. Some centers have before-and-after school programs for children ages 6-12.

All centers have a director and/or head teacher as well as teachers, teacher-aides, cooks and often volunteers. They work together to provide a safe, healthy, stimulating environment for the children.

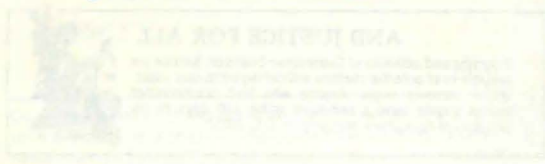
How do I find a center?

If there are child care centers in your community, they must be licensed. Your local office of the Department of Social Services will have a listing. Plan to visit the center for as much time as you can—a morning will be a good start. Observe the children, the program and spend some time talking to the staff.

What should I look for?

If you have never visited a center before, it will be a different experience, perhaps a bit overwhelming at first. You may find it helpful to look around for a while and then select a child who seems to be your child's age and follow that child for a period of time. This may give you an idea of what an hour or morning for your child might be like. Some things to look for are:

- **The physical environment** — safety precautions, fire protection, exits; clean and adequate bathroom and kitchen facilities. Is there enough space for play, furniture, equipment? Are there provisions for naps and outdoor play?
- **Staff and children together** — Are the children happy and relaxed? Are the adults enjoying their work? Is there a good relationship between the staff and children? What is the philosophy of discipline? Do the children play well together? How are squabbles dealt with? Do the children receive enough attention?
- **The program** — Does the staff understand how children grow and develop? Is there opportunity for large group, small group and individual activities? Who chooses the activities? Are there active and quiet, indoor and outdoor activities available? Are meals and snacks nutritious?
- **Relationships with parents** — Is there a parent involvement policy? Do staff members view themselves as working with parents in the child rearing process for the good of the child and the family? Are parent meetings planned? Were your questions answered?
- **Did you feel comfortable there** — Would your child feel comfortable?



Child care center – family day care home: How do I choose?

If your community offers these choices, try to decide which program best meets the needs of your child and your family. Child care centers can be large and different from the home setting. Generally, they offer better trained staff, more opportunities for interaction among children the same age, and a wider range of activities and equipment.

Family day care more closely resembles the home environment, usually offers a more relaxed, natural style of care, a more flexible schedule, and a less formal relationship with you as a parent.

Preparing the child

If your child will be going to a center for the first time, the transition to this new environment will probably be difficult, so any advance preparation you can provide will help. Talk about the center, the nice toys and equipment, the fun things to do and friends who will be there. Visit the center with the child and try to spend some time there at the beginning. Special attention during the first few weeks will be especially important.

Preparing yourself

If this is the first separation from your child on a regular daily basis, this will probably be difficult for you. Talking to other parents in the same situation can be helpful. If you are comfortable with the center, this will be helpful to you and the family. Visit with staff briefly when you bring and pick up your child. Discuss problems if they arise and try to see if they can be resolved. If, after several weeks, you are not satisfied that things are going well, you may want to place your child in another child care situation. Try not to make a hasty decision because consistency is important to your child. Frequent changing of locations and providers may be disruptive for the child's development and for your family life.

You and your child

You may feel guilty about not spending as much time as you'd like with your child or together as a family. It is important to plan for special time and activities with your children. The hours spent together may be fewer but the time you do spend together will be valuable and enjoyable for all of you when it is well-planned and free of outside distractions.

Your involvement at the center

Being involved in your child's center will be helpful for you, the center and your child. If you have some free time, you may want to visit or to spend some time helping as a volunteer. Plan to attend parent conferences and meetings. You may want to become more active and have a say in determining policy and program by serving on a committee or board. All of these experiences will enhance the joint relationship between the center and the family.

Other publications available in this series include:

Family Day Care Homes, Pm-796a
Preschool or Nursery School, Pm-796c
A Babysitter in Your Home, Pm-796d
Setting Up Play Groups, Pm-796e
Babysitting Cooperatives, Pm-796f

For more information about young children, contact your local county extension office.

File: 2

The physical environment - outdoor play areas, the protection area, clean and safe water, latrines, and other facilities. Do you have enough space for play, for the children, and are there provisions for the children's health? Do the children receive medical attention?

Staff and children together - Are the children happy and relaxed? Are the children working hard? Is there a good relationship between the staff and children? What is the philosophy of discipline? Do the children play well together? How are the children dealt with? Do the children receive medical attention?

The program - Does the staff understand the children's growth and development? Is there opportunity for large group, small group and individual activities? Who chooses the activities? Are there active and quiet activities and outdoor activities available? Are meals and snacks nutritious?

Relationships with parents - Is there a parent involvement policy? Do staff members view themselves as working with parents in the child rearing process for the good of the child and the family? Are parent meetings held? Were your questions answered?

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