

{ daycare checklist

Structured group childcare in a for-profit or nonprofit facility. **Cost:** \$600 to \$2,000 a month.

what to look for

- A schedule flexible enough to meet your needs.
- Is there an appropriate number of children at the center? What's the child-to-staff ratio? To see if the center meets state guidelines, check with the state office that handles childcare licensing and regulation. (In some states, it's the Department of Children & Family Services; in others, it's the Department of Social Services. Check state government listings in the phone book.)
- Do all staff members have training in first aid and infant CPR, and early childhood education? Have they all had a recent physical exam and immunizations?
- Are staff members assigned to the same children to ensure consistency of care?
- Are there plenty of toys and learning materials within a child's reach? Do the children sound happy?

red flags to avoid

- Centers that are too quiet may mean not enough activity or too noisy may indicate a lack of control.
- Infants who are awake and in a playpen or an infant swing for more than a few minutes.
- Caregivers who don't talk to a child at her eye level.
- Centers that appear dirty, unorganized or have toys with small parts lying around.

legal requirements

Daycare centers must be licensed, but requirements do vary from state to state. Check with your state childcare regulation office to ensure the center meets standards for health, safety and caregiver training. Ask if there have been any violations or complaints against the center and how they were handled. Some centers have been accredited by organizations like National Association for the Education of Young Children (naeyc.org), meaning the program has had an independent evaluation and caregivers take part in ongoing child development training.

advantages

- * Provides a structured program in a licensed environment.
- * A staff ensures smooth operation if caregiver gets sick.
- * No loss of privacy.
- * Children's social skills may be enhanced by interaction with other kids.

disadvantages

- * Your child is more likely to get sick from other children at the center.
- * Fixed schedules and pricy charges for late pickup.
- * Might provide less individual attention.
- * Expensive if you have more than one child.

where to learn more

- * Childcare Aware: childcareaware.org, 800-424-2246
- * National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care: nrc.uchsc.edu, 800-598-KIDS
- * National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies: naccrra.net, 202-393-5501

