

# Provided by Smart Start Colorado

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**Choosing Quality Child Care** Choosing your child's first out-of-home care and educational experience is an extremely important decision. And as a parent, you are bound to experience a wide range of emotions in your search for quality child care. To help you feel confident and secure in your decision, Smart Start Colorado has put together the important steps in choosing child care.

## **Step #1 - Determine you and your child's needs**

- What type of child care would best suit your child—a child care center or a family child care provider?
- Would your child be more comfortable in a structured, academic program or one that is less structured?
- What are your needs in terms of location, hours of operation and cost?

## **Step #2 - Visit, Observe, and Ask Questions**

- Bring your child
- Plan to stay for at least 30 minutes
- Visit during different times of the day
- Talk to the teacher who will be with your child the majority of the day
- Tour the entire facility/home including the bathroom, sleeping area, kitchen and outdoor play area
- Some questions and observations:
  - Are parents and children made to feel welcome?
    - Listen. Is there yelling or enforced silence?
    - Are children involved and enjoying their activities?
    - Is the space arranged to allow for a variety of activities (group work, quiet time, table-top activities, etc.)?
    - Do children have access to toys and equipment appropriate for their ages?
    - Is the language and culture of each child respected? Do the activities reflect this?

- What are the policies surrounding discipline?
- What are the hours of operation?
- What are the fees and add-on costs?
- Is transportation provided to schools? Is transportation used for field trips? Are seatbelts and car seats used?
- Do children have a place to store their individual belongs? What must you supply?
- Which meals are served? What types of foods are served for the meals?
- What is the staff turnover?

### **Step #3 - Stay Involved...**

Visit regularly to monitor the quality of care and make sure the program is meeting your child's needs.

### **Checklist**

Here are additional questions to ask yourself about prospective child care providers.

#### **General:**

- Is the program licensed? For how many children?
- Is the license posted along with the last inspection?
- How many children are enrolled? What are their ages?
- What is the ratio of children to caregivers?
- Is there a contract or written policies?
- What are the vacation and sick day policies?
- What is the total cost, including all fees?

#### **The Caregivers:**

- What type of trainings do the caregivers have?
- Do they regularly attend ongoing training?
- Are the caregivers trained in First Aid and CPR?
- What are the provisions when the caregiver is ill or absent?
- Do the caregivers appear to genuinely enjoy interacting with the children?
- Do the caregivers talk to children at their eye level and play on the floor with them?

- Do the caregivers listen attentively to the children and talk with them in a positive manner?
- Are the children's needs met quickly, even when things are busy?

**The Setting:**

- Is the environment clean, safe and smoke free?
- Is there enough space indoors and out for a variety of activities?
- Is the atmosphere bright and cheerful?
- What are the safety procedures?
- Are televisions/videos used? How often?

**Activities/Program:**

- Do you see a mix of active and quiet play, a variety of activities for children to choose, and frequent adult/child interactions?
- Is there a schedule or daily routine posted for each group?
- Are there safe, clean toys and learning materials for each age group within the children's reach?

**Parent/Family Role:**

- How is communication maintained between parents and caregivers?
- How are parents encouraged to be involved?
- Are parents' concerns respected?
- Do you and your child like the program and feel comfortable?

For more information: visit [www.smartstartcolorado.org](http://www.smartstartcolorado.org) and click on Parent and Family Resources