

The Signs of a Quality Family Home Daycare

More and more, research tells us that our children's healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences during the first few years of life. If you are a parent who works during these early years, choosing a quality child care program is one of the most important decisions you will ever make for your child. There are many child care providers eager to provide loving care for your child, and knowing the differences between them, as well as being sensitive to your child's individual needs, are important elements to consider before entrusting your child to another.

The first years of a child's life are by far the most important. Children of this age develop at such a rapid pace, emotionally, socially, and educationally. During these early years, is when a child begins to form their own unique personality and identity. Because of this, children need a child care setting where they can thrive, with a provider who understands how to promote their healthy growth and development. A quality family home daycare will cater to each of these needs, by providing a safe and nurturing environment that allows each child's personal strengths and attributes to flourish; helping to enable your child to reach his or her full potential. Ideally, a quality family home daycare should have the following.

A good reputation:

A quality home daycare should have a welcoming, friendly atmosphere, and be well known for its nurturing environment. A good early childhood program can have benefits for children, families, and communities.

A current license:

A license isn't a guarantee of quality care (that's why you have to evaluate the childcare provider yourself), but you really shouldn't consider any home daycare that doesn't have a current and up-to-date license. Additionally, any provider that you are considering should also be CPR and Pediatric first aid certified.

Established ground rules:

It's important for a home daycare to be flexible; for instance, letting you pick up and drop off your child at different times. But, it should also have clearly established regulations for everything from operating hours, to how to handle emergencies. That way you know the provider takes his or her responsibility, and your child, seriously.

Along the same lines, look for a provider with a strict sick-child policy. Find out which illnesses mean your child has to stay home and for how long. A tough policy may inconvenience you if your child is ill, but keep in mind that it goes both ways; other children who are sick will also be kept away from your child. A good home daycare helps cut down on illness by requiring all children to have current immunizations and regular checkups.

A stimulating environment:

Environments send powerful messages by the way they make people feel. The feeling of a safe and trusting environment is an important component of a quality home daycare. The best home daycares will have plenty of ample space for the children to freely stretch about. Look for a home that is clean and safe, so children can actively explore their surroundings. Look for an environment that is filled with interesting and stimulating things to look at, talk about, and play with. The right environment for your child will be set up to promote learning through free play, have the ability to accommodate the needs of growing infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and

have eating and diapering areas well organized so as to be comfortable and practical for the childcare provider, while allowing them to better focus on the child.

A stimulating curriculum and activities:

The best home daycares have structured schedules that include plenty of time for physical activity, quiet time (including daily story time for groups and individuals), group programs, individual activities, and free time. Television and videos should play little or no part in what your child does all day. A well, thought-out curriculum stimulates your child's development and makes each day more fun. Look for a provider with a wide range of age-appropriate toys that will encourage your child's development, and as he or she gets older, stimulate creative, imaginative play. Children should also have the chance to play outside every day (weather-permitting, of course): Running, jumping, and skipping are good for them physically, mentally, and socially.

Well balanced meals and snacks:

The best home daycares will participate in some type of nutrition program. In doing so, you as a parent can rest assured that your child will be provided with nutritious, well balanced meals and snacks.

Clean, safe facilities:

A good home daycare is clean and sanitary. Floors, bathrooms, and the kitchen should be kept clean and disinfected, trash shouldn't be left sitting un-emptied, the provider should wash his or her hands after every diaper change, and the house should have adequate heat, light, and ventilation. A plan for emergencies should also be in place. Just because it's a private home doesn't mean it shouldn't meet these standards.

As far as safety is concerned, toys and play equipment should be in good repair, all medicines and other hazardous substances should be out of reach, bedding should be fresh and firm (to reduce the risk of SIDS for babies), and the outdoor play area should be level and safe. Smoke detectors should be in place and working, a first-aid kit and fire extinguisher should be close at hand, and all standard childproofing techniques should be in place (covered outlets, safety gates, door latches, etc).

A qualified, committed childcare provider:

Anyone who makes a career out of caring for, and teaching children should have the necessary qualifications and be well experienced. Home daycare providers should genuinely enjoy being with children and love to help them learn and explore. Providers should be responsible, enthusiastic, and well prepared. Note how the provider interacts with the children. If you see him or her getting down at eye level to talk with children as individuals, consider that a promising sign. The children currently in the provider's care can be a great guide to his or her abilities as a childcare provider. If the children are generally happy when you make your visits, are affectionate towards the provider, and appear to be actively involved in play or activities, you can be fairly certain that the provider will provide your child with the environment that you are looking for.

Look for a provider who hugs, rocks, plays along side with, and interacts with the children. A good childcare provider responds to the children's smiles, emerging skills, and interests, and will find ways to expand upon each experience. A good childcare provider talks with the children about what they do and see, is a playful partner who introduces new ideas, objects, and games, and supports children in their social contacts with other children and adults. Look for a provider who understands and welcomes all stages of a child's development. The right childcare provider recognizes each child's personal rhythms, style, strengths and limitations, and tunes into these

when planning the pace and time for eating, sleeping and playing. Young children need positive, consistent caregivers who learn to recognize their unique cues for hunger, distress, and play. This kind of nurturing interaction contributes significantly to a child's social and emotional growth.

The right childcare provider will develop a positive, loving relationship with your child. This is a key indicator of quality care. The right provider will also relate well to you and have values and attitudes that are similar to yours. Look for a provider who shares your philosophy on sleep, discipline, feeding, and other care key issues. A good provider will ask detailed questions about your child's health and care requirements to help determine if it's good match.

Note: Many people start a home daycare business so they can stay home with their own children. This is good in the sense that the childcare provider has experience as a parent, but it also means the person may have chosen this form of work for reasons of convenience rather than love. Investigate and use your mom or dad radar to help assess whether the provider has enthusiasm that is clearly necessary for working successfully, full time, with children.

The look of a quality home daycare includes....

- a room arrangement where it is possible to see all the children at a glance?
- toys, materials, supplies, and an environment that is well organized?
- sinks and toilets that the children can use independently?
- childcare providers who wash their hands with soap and water in the following situations:
 - before and after handling food?
 - before and after helping the children use the toilet or changing a diaper?
 - after wiping a child's runny nose?
 - after playing with the children outdoors?
 - after doing messy activities with the children?
- children who wash their hands with soap and water in the following situations:
 - before and after handling food?
 - before and after using the toilet or having a diaper changed?
 - after playing outdoors?
 - after doing messy activities?
- child-sized tables and chairs. Do the children's feet rest on the floor?
- an eating table that allows the children's elbows to rest comfortably on top when sitting?
- an abundance of alternating materials, toys, books, etc?
- providers who interact with each child at their eye level and make eye contact with the children?
- providers who are involved in activities with children?
- simple photos, pictures, and children's artwork displayed?
- a variety of toys that advance physical development, as well as, imaginative play?
 - blocks in all sizes
 - interactive toys
 - balls
 - dress-up props
 - a variety of dolls from different ethnic backgrounds
- hands-on materials to stimulate creativity?
 - arts and crafts
 - water
 - paint
 - crayons
- children's books that are always available and accessible?
 - age appropriate

- attractive
- have pictures of children and people from various racial and cultural backgrounds
- sturdy cardboard books for infants

The sound of a quality home daycare includes....

- laughing, giggling, and happy children?
- providers who bend down to greet your child in the morning?
- providers who describe to the children
 - pictures on the wall?
 - objects in the room?
 - children's feelings?
 - children's actions?
- providers who ask questions that require more than one word answers?
- providers who do activities with children both individually and in a small group such as:
 - reading books?
 - talking about the pictures in the books?
 - use puppets?
 - say nursery rhymes?
 - singing songs?
- providers who have daily musical activities?
- providers who freely talk with each other and with the children and parents?
- providers who encourage children to share and to be kind to others?
- providers who help to build the children's confidence, through positive reinforcement?
- providers who listen to the children?
- providers who respond to children's
 - crying?
 - gestures?
 - sounds?
 - words?
 - questions?
- different types of music played for the children throughout the day, such as children's songs or classical music?
- musical instruments, song games?
- providers who talk with parents on a daily basis?

The feel of a quality home daycare includes....

- happy and engaged children?
- a comfortable temperature in the home. Not too hot? Not too cold?
- rooms with windows that open to let in fresh air daily?
- soft carpeted areas?
- a large outdoor space, with lots of grass or soft material under foot, that encourages running, jumping, and climbing?
- providers and children who have relaxed, pleasant voices, and frequent smiles?
- a provider who is professional, dependable, mature, honest, and a kind person?
- a provider who is calm, patient, and loving?
- a provider who is happy, enthusiastic, and eager to answer all of your questions?
- providers who:
 - pat children on the back?
 - rock the child when he or she wants comfort?
 - hold children in their laps?
 - give children hugs?

- both soft and hard surfaced toys such as:
 - stuffed animals?
 - Play-dough?
 - blocks?
 - puzzles?
- a soft, cozy space for a child when he or she wants to be away from the group by themselves?
- soft, cozy mats for the older children to sleep soundly on?
- a reassuring routine and a familiar schedule for the children?
- children's names on the cubbies and pictures of the children on the wall to let them know they belong?
- pictures of various cultures displayed on the wall or in books to let children know that all people are important?
- for both parent and child, a strong feeling of being a welcome part of the early childhood program?
- for your child, a strong feeling of safety and comfort in the provider's home?

