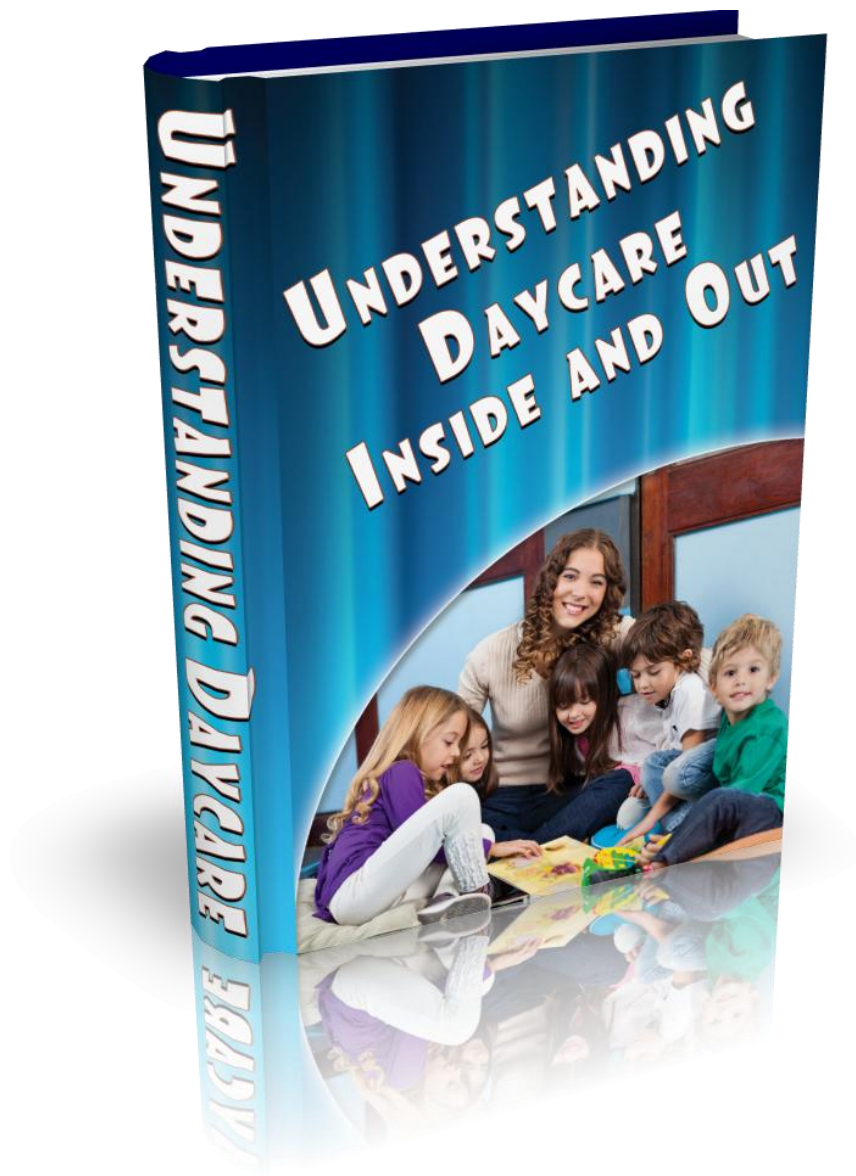


# UNDERSTANDING DAYCARE INSIDE AND OUT

## Special Report



Ashley Wells

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## What to Look For When Choosing a Daycare



A daycare facility is established essentially to provide a caring environment for children while their parents or guardians are away at work or for some reason cannot take care of them full-time, but are open to leaving them with qualified staff and helpers for a certain period every day where they are confident the child will be safe and happy.

However, this is only the very basic outline of what a daycare should provide children: with state licensing now mandatory for daycares to operate and regular staff training credits being an important part of maintaining the daycare's credibility on an annual basis, there is a lot more than basis meals, play equipment and sleeping space that children must be given at a daycare center. We take a look at some of these essential daycare factors that parents must look out for when choosing a daycare for the first time:

1. Check for a known and licensed daycare facility that can prove the service quality it will offer your child to ensure happiness, healthy environment and all-round development of your precious child. Meet with the director of the daycare center and learn about his or her credentials; check for background of staff and other volunteer/helper workers who will be

working closely with your child and the number of children they have enrolled in the group to determine their capability and dedication to proper early childhood development and education of children.

2. Find out about the kind of play equipment being used, the amount of space available to the children for games and other activities, the hygiene and sanitation levels of the daycare as well as the kind of meals being given to the children and whether there is facility for any dietary supplements/changes for your child. Inform about allergies your child may have and confirm the ability of the staff to deal with these or other medical issues; daycare staff needs to be properly trained in administering First-aid and CPR.
3. Learn about the daycare center's emergency plan and fire safety program for children's safety and health should any such situation arise; this is very important to establish before admitting your child in a daycare that they have adequate knowledge and training for dealing with all types of emergencies.
4. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the daycare facility program's child-care attendants who will be ensuring the child adapts and learns to follow the center's routine according to a set schedule and what disciplinary action is taken for children that do not follow this; from learning structured activities to new rules and good habits, these features must be provided by the service to your satisfaction.
5. Check for safety of the daycare rooms – latches, window-bars, covered electrical outlets, no broken furniture or jagged ends protruding from play equipment should be in sight in a quality daycare. Proper play, sleep, learning and outdoor activity zone should exist in the daycare, so don't miss out on these!

## What Extra Training Is Necessary To Become A Licensed Day Care Provider?

Apart from a good basic education and a love for teaching, handling children requires a lot of endurance and patience on the part of a daycare provider; besides, with new-age theories being brought in daily about child-rearing and teaching methods, there is bound to be controversy over what is a good measure of deciding facilities beneficial for childcare. This is why it is important for any aspiring daycare provider to know about the fundamentals of caring for different age groups of children and also about special needs any particular child may have, be it a baby or toddler or a pre-schooler.



Every state has a licensing board that outlines the basic training that a daycare provider (director and teaching staff) needs to complete in order to get the required license to practice as a childcare facility support. They also must get and maintain a national certification in First-Aid and pediatric CPR to ensure safety and emergency medical aid for children in their care at all times; this cannot be emphasized enough in the case of the daycare provider practicing away from a healthcare facility where ambulance may take time to reach, therefore swift, capable action is necessary on their part to keep children safe and healthy.

The Red Cross holds training sessions in emergency medical aid besides local hospitals and healthcare centers apart from the fire dept. so check with these if you are keen to become a daycare provider and get the necessary minimum training for better chances at getting employed as one.

Colleges and universities also offer daycare teacher and support staff programs besides specialization opportunities in various subjects that come in handy when

applying to a daycare center for a job; however, it is important for any licensed daycare unit to show a certain degree of continuing education credits every year in order to hold on to their licensure. These are proof of their interest in keeping abreast with latest developments in childcare and advanced techniques in handling all types of children; this can be a combination of attending subject-specific classes, conferences, seminars and activities – and since there is no dearth of challenges in this line, there is also immense scope for job satisfaction, travel and growth, for this is one need that just won't go away, you agree?

## How to Prepare Your Child for Daycare



Parents considering daycare facilities for their child need to familiarize themselves with the scope of activities, safety and standard of the childcare facilities offered to them besides learning about the ability of their child to be in an outside environment.

A good daycare option need not be the most expensive one; it can just as well be the neighborhood family daycare facility, which can give focused, individualized attention to your child as much as the larger, more organized center that offers a host of activities and new learning scope.

1. You can initiate the child into staying away from you in preparation of the daycare program to come by placing the kid with a family member or known babysitter (such as a local high-school kid or neighbor) and have them understand you and your spouse need to be away from them for some time, to work. Do keep the sensitivities of a child's needs for a loving, gentle yet firm presence in mind when choosing the child-

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minder as the first impression will influence how the child adapts to a more structured environment as daycare later. Ask other new parents placing children with babysitters for recommendations – stay away from those with too many bad reports.

2. Consult with your child specialist or the yellow pages or even the Dept. of Social Services to get a list of licensed daycare providers in your area if other parents are unable to guide you about this; having decided the childcare services provider, do make it a point to go visit the place with your child to check out the facilities.
3. Take your child around for a tour of the facilities at the daycare and as most service providers are only too happy to allow new enrollments (or even potential ones) to play around freely in order to take to the novel atmosphere, encourage your child to play there and interact with other children and staff at the daycare.
4. Meet all the people who will be interacting with your child on a regular basis and even though your kid may feel homesick initially, allow for more time and a bit of loving talk on your behalf on how much smarter they can be when they learn all by themselves! Focus on the positives and try to rule out as many negatives (safety, hygiene, compliance issues and background checks of the daycare employees) to know your child is at the right daycare!
5. For the first few days, you may ask for permission with the authorities at the daycare if your child may carry along a favorite toy or blanket for seeking comfort in a new environment; most places will agree – and this will make the change from home to daycare a much easier, fun-filled and smooth one for both kiddy and Mommy (or Daddy)!

## How Children Benefit From Childcare



These are not the only benefits of putting your child in daycare, though being able to get back at work so you can keep the home-fires burning and take care of the family better is a distinct advantage; the child at a quality daycare facility benefits from being in a safe, healthy and hygienic

environment with needs for food, play and washing up all taking care of.

With other children also present at the daycare, from babies to toddlers to pre-primary or even primary school children (that come in after attending school), your child at daycare learns to live in a social environment and learns new skills such as communication, interactivity play and team games besides values such as sharing, table manners, importance of obeying rules and being in a structured environment. So, when your child is ready to go to school, he or she has some sort of foundational base already about performing in a structured environment thanks to daycare training!

## Day Care Safety

While accidents can happen anytime and anywhere, it is prevention and general awareness apart from alertness and ready, qualified disaster management or medical aid programs that personnel at daycare should be trained for that can reduce or eliminate danger to child safety.

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Knowing that the childcare you are sending your child to is mindful of state regulations on how a licensed daycare should run and that the administration takes due notice of safety guidelines to keep equipment of a certain standard as well as train employees to meet with

potentially child-threatening situations in a capable manner is what helps parents work with an easy mind, confident in the knowledge their child is in good hands.

Never be afraid to ask questions about the safety regulations and the facility's compliance with them of your daycare center manager; ever since the McMartin preschool trial occurred in the late '80's, parents have woken up to the need of being careful about the kind of environment they leave their children in. From factors such as daycare employee background checks conduction to knowing if there are surveillance cameras on the campus and any other monitoring devices for ensuring all children are safe at all times, there are other daycare safety measures that must be looked into for ensuring parents as well as daycare providers have their needs met.

Do check for licensed daycare operators, whether the employees there have any past offenses such as sex offenders or violent crimes revealed in their background checks, whether the center takes responsibility and adequate precaution in making parents sign a sheet for who will drop and collect the child besides a list of people who are allowed to visit or pick up the child from daycare etc. Only these designated persons should be allowed to come in contact with your child and always alert your kid to remember your code word for emergencies, so you know he or she is safe at all times should anyone else try to collect the child instead.

Check the nature of equipment provided by the daycare center, such as guarded windows, no sharp toys or rusty nails or broken furniture apparent or any hazardous electrical outlets that have not been covered etc. At times, simple

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precautions like checking for debris and unsafe toys or even ordinary stuff like hanging window cords can prevent accidents and save children's health and life at the daycare, so parents, be aware and alert about your rights and choose a facility that provides well for your child.

Chew on this: About ten years ago, close to 31,000 children below the age of 4 were admitted to U.S. healthcare emergency rooms for injuries that were caused in daycare and school environments; so, perhaps being cautious about child safety is one way to ensure your child doesn't end up as a statistic.

## Day Care Costs Don't Have To Send You to the Poorhouse



Many mommies will want to get back to work and they can really go around the bend worrying about mounting costs of bringing up baby without having to add the anxiety of picking the most expensive daycare option nearest the home/office. However, new parents considering a daycare option for their baby need not focus on simply the most costly

center as premium fees do not necessarily mean quality childcare; this should be looked upon as a balance between facilities given and security of the childcare services.

Thus, the first thing that new parents looking at whether to admit their child into a daycare facility is right for them need to understand is that if there is no other child-minder available, daycare provides the most sensible way of managing the child's needs in a baby-friendly environment while they can concentrate on other matters. Besides, once the baby reaches pre-primary school going age, the cost of



daycare will automatically reduce as the child's needs are easier to meet once they are past the toddler stage!



A school-going child will be naturally spending more time at school, learning new activities and only attending daycare when school gets over, so the cost of daycare fees get tax-deductible for parents, which is a welcome change from expensive daycare at the beginner years.

One solution to controlling the amount of daycare fees you pay is to try and rearrange your work routine so either parent can take over the child's care or find a work at home option that allows for both income to come in and the baby to be looked after in a home environment. You can ask around friends and family if there are any baby-sitter options available to you or the local high-school kids group in the neighborhood can help out for some pocket-money!

Some new parents with babies who have difficulty finding an affordable daycare option have even found success by advertising in the local papers and trading board and lodging for caregivers for their child-minding services – of course, this does depend on the age and needs of your baby, too and where you are situated.

For example, if you cannot change your residence to one where there are better or cost-effective daycare facilities, perhaps, a live-in baby sitter is a good bet, not that this is any cheaper but you do get to keep baby at home and an eye on the child-minder too.

Sometimes, hiring a nanny may be more expensive than enrolling a child in daycare depending on the qualifications and experience of the center and the child-minder; so choose with care if you are actually getting quality childcare

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(such as provided by small, family day-care providers who can give individualized attention) for the price you are willing to pay.

A viable option for active army people is to file for financial aid to cover their day care costs while the 850+ locations countrywide of the Child Care Resource and Referral unit also gives latest info to help parents decide kinds of child care and costs involved.

## Why Child Care Is Necessary



With the rule of society changing to make way for smaller families that live away from their own families and friend's groups or known communities like those existing in small-towns or rural settings that often have family elders or older siblings looking after the younger lot, there is a need for good

childcare facilities that daycare centers springing up everywhere hope to provide.

Not only do working moms and dads benefit from sending their kids to quality daycare, but even those recuperating from an illness or those attending to medical emergencies in the family also find a way to meet child-rearing challenges in a child-safe environment that the daycares of today provide.

1. Thus, with baby boomers showing the way for independent thinking and living even post-retirement and having been the kids that go out there and 'just do it' – there is loads of encouragement for kids to become independent of parental support at an early age; there are fewer stay at

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home moms and many single parents that make it necessary for more children now than ever before to be placed in daycare so they are not latch-key kids, like the '80's had. With so many instances of sex-offenders on the prowl for innocent kids, staying home alone is not a viable option and daycares provide qualified, trained staff focused on keeping children safe, happy and out of danger while learning new skills and activities besides seeing to their timely meals and rest, so are a good bet for many parents.

2. For those parents that cannot afford or find a suitable in-house babysitter or caregiver, daycare provides the best alternative for placing their child in safe, capable hands and a kids-friendly community where they learn to get along with other kids. Daycare



options are a-plenty with variable fee-costs that make it an affordable and convenient option, not to mention safe and comfortable kids-friendly environment to learn and socialize in, for many parents; from full-daycare to part-time services to even week-end options, there are all kinds of daycares abounding! For pre-schoolers, there's the option of after-school only daycare (3-5 hours) and for babies or toddlers, many a time one parent or the other may juggle work-load and shifts to be around so it may only be part-time daycare required, which makes it possible for parents to always follow every important milestone in the child's life.

3. Instead of just watching TV or eating junk-food or perhaps putting themselves in danger when left alone without adult supervision at home, children are better off at daycares that provide a host of all-round child development facilities apart from full-time trained staff attending to children's needs, right from healthcare to playtime and medical emergencies. You can choose to volunteer a few hours a week to make

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the transition from a home environment to a community one easier on your child or pay surprise visits to spend extra quality time with your precious one; this will allow you to know the real functioning of the daycare center and allow you to bond with your child.

## Childcare Tips for the Mother-To-Be



The search for childcare ideally should begin when you discover your due date. This gives you plenty of time to research your childcare options. Depending on the type of childcare you choose, there are several items of importance to consider before selecting a provider. Are you going to need in-home care in which a single caregiver comes to your home? If this is the type of care you need, be aware that many of these providers are not licensed nor are they required to be licensed.

In this case it is especially important to get references from previous employers for at least 5 years. Ask for names and phone numbers; don't hesitate to call the parents who have used their services.

If the provider refuses or is unable to provide this information for you, move on. In-home caregivers may be left alone with your child, they may be unlicensed and are often costlier than other types of childcare; caution should be exercised when choosing this type of childcare.

Another option is family childcare, which is a more casual environment with a limited amount of children enrolled, and is usually less expensive than day care



centers. This type of childcare requires you to drop off and pick up your child at the person's home.

Often there are charges made if you are late in picking up your child; the caregiver is more like a nine-to-five business and may strictly enforce this rule. These types of childcare providers should be licensed, and the type of care provided is left up to the individual so again, references from other parents are crucial.

Still another option is a day care center, which must be licensed. Your child will be among more children, receiving less individualized care than the previous two types of childcare mentioned.



However, there are many benefits to this type longer hours of operation, less stringent rules on pick up and drop off times, and more activities with more children to interact with. The down side may be the more children your child is exposed to the more chance of illness and other problems resulting from interacting with many young

children at once.

Before you have your baby is the best time for you to visit your prospective childcare providers. Take along a notepad with you; make notes of any positive or negative items you will want to check into later.

Checklists provided by several websites can be printed out, using your notes for comparison. If you are going to be returning to work after maternity leave, having several providers lined up will make your intro back to work less stressful. If you are working out of your home, or work part time, it is still beneficial to have a childcare provider on call for emergencies.

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This would be a drop-in provider who can be called at the last minute and basically is an on-call provider. Having a drop-in childcare option will also afford you some time to get back into the routine post-baby. Even a few hours a week can give you time to do the grocery shopping, keep doctor's appointments, have lunch with a friend or just get out of the house for an hour.

## Day Care 101 What Is Day Care



Day care has come a long way since the temporary babysitting jobs of the 60's and 70's that paid fifty cents an hour for one child, maybe a quarter more an hour for two children. Neighboring teens made good babysitter candidates, as did children of friends or older family members. All that was required of the babysitter was to fix a dinner plate for the child, clean up

afterwards and play with the child before tucking them into bed. Most of the sitting was done on Friday or Saturday nights allowing the parents to enjoy a night out. Today, day care means a whole lot more.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over the last 10 years almost 65 percent of women with children six years old or younger were working outside the home. Especially in a single parent household, it is essential to have access to day care, if other alternatives such as relatives or grandparents, are not available. In a family where both the husband and wife work full time jobs, ongoing day care is sometimes the only choice.

There are several options available today. More corporate employers are adding on-site day care facilities, in-home providers are available, and full or part time

day care centers are located in nearly every city large or small. Some centers only accept children ages birth to toddler, while others welcome children of any age. There is a growing trend toward “drop-in” child care, with facilities offering affordable short-term, high-quality care. Schools, gyms, rec centers and even churches are jumping on the child care bandwagon by offering such events as Parent Nights Out. Some communities are organizing child care co-ops. Nannies, also known as a child's nurse are also an alternative, however, a more costly one as it involves full-time in-home care by a person who may or may not reside on the property.

Nannies can be male or female; however mannys are becoming popular. Families can choose the care that fits their changing needs a nanny for the newborn, drop-in care for the toddler, and an environment rich day care for preschoolers. Summer needs may differ from those during the school year and parents may switch programs to accommodate those needs.



Day care centers that are evolving into highly structured learning centers now offer a wider range of activities. Still available are simple arts and crafts projects, but the addition of early learning programs has been attributed to research showing a response to academics at an earlier age. Parents want their

children to start developing skills that previously were not taught until much later. Add-on extracurricular activities such as gymnastics, ballet and martial arts are offered for an additional fee. The instructor comes to the center on a weekly basis providing on-site instruction, and this is especially beneficial to those parents who are short on time and cannot accommodate weekly lessons. Keeping parents up-to-date on the schedules and events was done by a simple newsletter; today many providers have websites which even include the weekly menus. You can also request an update on your child's conduct, which is in turn emailed to you.

## Day Care Issues Separation Anxiety



Day care issues of facility policy, additional charges and late fees, and visitation rules are important issues but none seem as pertinent as the problem of separation anxiety. Few parents enjoy leaving their child with a stranger for hours at a time, and though there are benefits to child care it is hardly on your mind when faced with a child having a temper

tantrum as you are trying to leave the daycare facility to head to work. So how can you ease this often temporary situation?

The solution lies within yourself to come up with creative and personalized ways to ease your child through one of the most difficult day care issues separation anxiety.

Not all children have day care issues such as separation anxiety. Some babies and children enjoy being around other children in a new environment, and take to daycare right away. Those parents are the lucky ones. But if you are experiencing any of the following situations at drop off time, there are changes you can make to get through this time of transition (because it will pass). Don't mistake separation anxiety for misbehaving. Understanding your child's fears is the first step.

Your child knows you as the source of comfort in his life and even the smallest of children will experience fear when seeing their mommy leave their surroundings and go away. What you say and how you say it can be understood by your child. If you have a baby you are nursing, try to schedule time to nurse your baby right before you leave. Holding and comforting your baby this way is a great way to make a connection, and talking to your baby helps to relax him. If you are feeling anxious about leaving your baby, he will most definitely sense this. If you have done your homework, and are confident in the environment in

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which you are leaving him, let this come through in your voice. Your tone of voice will reassure him you'll be back soon and that you love him.



Your toddler invariably starts his tantrum early, before you even leave the house for the daycare center. Day care issues can impact the home environment as well but there are ways to get around this too. Start by being consistent. You have made up your mind to put your child in daycare, stick to the routine. Don't look for ways to skip days; it won't get your child through this transition period any smoother. Before bedtime, read storybooks that talk about daycare. Go to the library; the librarian can help you choose books geared to your child's age. At the very least, talk to your child during story time; explain to him where you will be going and that you will be back for him when you are done

working.

Day care issues such as separation anxiety can last for up to two weeks or longer depending on your child. If you feel he is exhibiting more serious reactions at drop off time than previously or if he seems to be more upset or generally not your happy child, maybe an unannounced visit to the facility is called for. If you drop in and look around, you can help yourself get a better picture of how your child's day is going. Maybe he is unhappy because the environment is unhealthy for him, and this is the only way he can tell you. Then it would be time to change day care facilities.

## Finding a Five Star Daycare Provider

Years ago, simply asking a friend who "sat" for them was as easy as picking up the phone. Or you might find an advertisement in the local newspaper. But with daycare centers springing up like daisies, the choices are far and wide. But finding the right day care provider to suit you need not be an insurmountable task. References from friends are still a great way to locate one that has been proven

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to be reputable. The internet is also a great resource, there are web sites posted by entrepreneurial daycare providers which will have information on their qualifications and licensing, etc. Local newspaper classifieds will have ads run by smaller family type childcare providers, and your local chapter of CCR&R (Child Care



Resource and Referral) is a free service that provides counselors you can speak with who will assist you in locating a childcare provider, based on your zip code.

After you determine what type of daycare you need, be it in-home, drop-in or full time daycare center supervision, there are several guidelines to follow. A checklist should include the following information, as well as obtaining references and visiting the facility.

Does the provider or center have enough supervision; are the children supervised even when they are sleeping How many caregivers are there at all times (For babies, there should ideally be a two to one ratio.) Are the providers trained in first aid and rescue breathing Are the children within a caregiver's sight when they are with another caregiver Have the caregivers had background checks

Is the director and teachers qualified to run a daycare facility with bachelor's degrees in a child related field Has the staff worked in child care for at least one year (for teachers) or longer (two years for directors) Is the licensing up to date Does the staff show a genuine love for children or is this just a job

Is there a common bathroom available for older children to use to wash their hands, before and after toileting and before meals Are the diapering areas clean and the diapers disposed of in a proper manner Are the other children kept up to date on their immunizations and are these records available as proof Are toxic materials locked away and poison information posted Are medications kept safely out of reach of children

There should be an emergency plan in place if a child gets hurt or lost; is there a first aid kit on the premises Do they practice fire drills and is there a program in place for disasters such as earthquake and tornado.



Picking the right daycare doesn't have to be overwhelming if you know what your options are. Whether you are moving into a new city, or having a new baby in the house, you probably knew early on that picking the right daycare was at the top of your list. This is an important chore that should not be put off until last minute. Finding a daycare

provider that suits your needs is as important to your well-being as well as your child's. If you are just opting to change daycare providers for any reason, being overly careful in making your choice is not overdoing it but simply being smart. There are many ways to find a daycare provider using the newspaper or internet, but once you find one, how will you know you are picking the right daycare.

When you have narrowed down your choices and gone over the checklist that details all of the important criteria that a good facility has, making sure your choice is a good one, you may then have to get on a waiting list. Picking the right daycare is only a small part of the process, getting on the waiting list and being accepted is a larger part.

If your search for a provider is due to a new baby in the home, and you are planning to return to work full or part time, you will definitely need to make arrangements in advance that coincide with your back to work date. In picking the right daycare, inquire if they offer part time as well as full time or if only full time is available. Your needs may change over time and whatever the situation calls for, you have to be able to depend on your care provider to be there when you need them. Once you have made your choice, you will want to make a visit

to the facility and see how they operate in person. If possible try to make a surprise visit. Observe how they treat the children, how discipline and cleanliness issues are handled. If you stay around for even half an hour some of these observations are likely to be made by you.

If you are going through a move to a new city, that move is going to be upsetting to a child's routine. Once you get settled you will want continuity in your child's routine; checking to see if the daycare has a frequent turnover would be prudent. Children make attachments to their teachers, having a new teacher frequently could be very damaging to a child already trying to settle into his new environment. Keeping a mental list of your specific wants can guide you in your decision making process. Does your child like to play with others, is he active Is your child more of a self-starter, does he like to sit alone and look at picture books With so many different types of daycare programs available, and the different types of personalities offering that care, you will surely find one that suits your needs. If you bear this in mind during the process, you will undoubtedly have success in picking the right daycare.

## What Toys Are Necessary For Day Care?



Any day care is going to need to have on hand all the necessary equipment. This encompasses cribs, high chairs, booster seats, strollers, car seats and toys. The first five are fairly self-explanatory, but what sorts of toys should you buy? The very nature of day care almost guarantees that you will have a children in all age groups, from

infants on up, and while some toys easily cross age gaps, a majority will not.

Infants through about six months have very little mobility, and therefore will need toys that will stimulate them without frustrating them because of their inability to

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interact. Soft toys in bright colors that they can put in their mouth are an excellent choice, and if they should happen to make noise all the better. As infants will taste everything in their attempts to identify it, items with sharp corners, loose attachments (such as beads or eyes), or excessive amounts of hair (think stuffed dog) are better suited for older children. Providing colorful pictures for the child to look at while lying down or being changed will delight them, as will a colorful, patterned blanket for tummy time. Many bouncy seats provide a toy bar for the infant to stare at while seated, and allow for interaction as the child grows and learns to use their hands to reach for things.



From six months to a year children learn to use their hands to explore objects. Soft toys, books, and teething rings are a good choice. This is also a good age to bring out plastic keys, telephones, bathtub squirting toys (be sure they are dry, clean and free of mildew on the inside), rattles, and any other item the child can hold in their hand easily, so long as they do not possess small parts

which may present a choking hazard. Soft balls the child can throw will please them, as they are still learning how to use their hands and are delighted by the cause and effect of seeing a ball fly after they throw it.

From one to two years, children are beginning to understand the concept of play. Toys with small parts or sharp edges should still be avoided, but this is the age where the toddler will truly begin to interact with a toy. Anything that makes noise will be enjoyed, whether it is a plastic piano, xylophone, or a bowl and spoon. Blocks they can stack and knock down are popular, although at this age many children have trouble with the concept of blocks that lock together. Plenty of picture books should be available, with sturdy pages (preferably board books) and large, colorful illustrations.

From two to four children begin to engage in imaginary play, learning how to play with other children. Toys that allow them to explore their creativity should be available-dolls and doll sized infant gear, large action figures, toy vehicles, play kitchens and food, and blocks that allow them to build buildings and vehicles are now appropriate. Balls, playground equipment (both inside and outside), ride-on toys and other such physical outlets will be necessary as well, as children this age often have a tremendous amount of energy. This is a good time to stock your art supplies as well, keeping crayons, watercolors, finger-paints, washable markers and coloring books/paint paper on hand at all times. It will astonish you what those budding geniuses will produce given the proper supplies, and this is an excellent way to occupy them on a rainy day.

## Day Care Germs an Unavoidable Pest



Germs are everywhere. And day care germs abound. They are too small to see but we know they are there. Children can spread germs without ever getting sick themselves. They can catch colds, ear infections, diarrhea and worse. More severe illnesses like chicken pox, impetigo and hepatitis are also spread

by germs. Toys are a vehicle for day care germs, so are unwashed hands of a caregiver after diaper change or blowing a child's runny nose. Runny noses don't always mean a child is sick, but the child can also be carrying something right under your nose so to speak, and you won't know it for several days until your symptoms start showing. So how can you cut back on day care germs and minimize your child's sick days. Every child gets sick eventually with the average cold, but chances of spreading it to the other day care children and the sick child's family can be greatly reduced by following a few simple rules.

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Always keep up to date with your child's immunizations. Schools will not enroll children in kindergarten without the immunization records filled out by the family physician. The same requirements must be met for daycare enrollment as well. Keep copies of your child's immunization records and have them ready to give to the daycare provider. You can request information on the other children enrolled in the daycare facility as well. All children enrolled in any daycare facility your child is going to should

be immunized.

You should always have a backup plan for days when your child is sick and cannot attend daycare. Even if you suspect your child is catching something, he should be kept at home. The other daycare mothers will appreciate your compliance with this and they should follow suit. But there are times when some parents ignore the customary considerations surrounding children attending public environments and send their children off to daycare sick anyway.

At home, frequent hand washing can greatly reduce the chances of passing the illness on the rest of the family. As a general rule, washing your hands after coming in contact with your child is a good idea. One never knows if they are contagious with something and keeping your hands free of daycare germs, as well as any surfaces that the child may come in contact with, is good prevention. Door handles, eating utensils, toys, and plastic items such as beginner baby books should all be kept sanitized.

Toddlers should be taught right from the start to cover their mouth when they cough and proper toileting and cleanliness is a must. Stepstools in front of bathroom sinks enable children to wash their hands like big kids and colorful child-oriented soap dispensers add to the fun.

Children build immunities by being sick and then getting well. Daycare germs can speed up the process that would otherwise take place in the first years of school, even babies start building immunities by contact with other children. So a child who has never been in daycare and hasn't been sick very much will be thrown in a preschool that abounds with germs and his immunities begin to build but at the expense of lost school days. So whether parents like it or not, daycare germs do have their place in a growing child's life.

## Effects of Daycare on Children



Ever since women entered the workforce, the great daycare debate has raged on. Parents, scholars and politicians have argued the pros and cons of external childcare facilities until families are absolutely certain placing their child in day care results in either an infant prodigy or a teenage delinquent.

As with any issue, the truth has been found to be somewhere in between. Day care can be a tremendous opportunity for a young child to learn social skills, expand their vocabulary and learn to function as an individual away from their parents; constant interaction with their peers allows them to develop a respect for the opinions and emotions of others, learn the value of teamwork, and to form friendships that will often carry into their school years. They are also given an opportunity to learn basic academic skills at an earlier age, and adapt to the more rigid structure of a classroom environment prior to entering Kindergarten, easing what is often a difficult transition for children who are kept at home in their preschool years.

On the flip side of the coin, not all day care providers are able to give the high quality of attention and education necessary for growth and adjustment. This is



often due to an inadequate amount of staff for the number of children a facility cares for. Many times by the time a child reaches preschool age there is only one teacher responsible for up to fifteen students, if not more (licensing guidelines state that there should be no more than fifteen students per teacher at the four and five year old level; however, a fluctuating population of drop-in students may cause this number to be nothing more than a myth).

The results of a long term study done by the National Institute of Health showed that those children who spent a great amount of time in a lower quality daycare displayed more instances of aggressive behavior and demands for constant, individual attention, a trend that continued through the sixth grade. This behavior may stem from the need to compete for attention from a very young age, and is displayed in children of large families as well.



Those children who are quiet and well behaved are set to the side while the teachers struggle to deal with the children who are not so self-sufficient; is it any wonder, then, that this often results in these children learning to emulate the less than savory behavior of their peers, whom they see receiving the individual attention they crave?

The key to a positive day care experience is to carefully screen any day care before a child is enrolled. The school should have a low staff to child ratio, with one adult to every two or three children at the infant level, gradually rising as the child increases in age but still sufficient for individual attention.

The teachers should display a genuine love for the children, with experience and training in child development and psychology, allowing them to quickly detect a problem with a student before it becomes uncontrollable.

Parents should remain in contact with the child's teacher, receiving progress reports and observing classroom behavior on a regular basis. Any instance in which a parent is deliberately left "out of the loop" in their child's education, even at this early stage, is cause for concern, and should be considered an immediate warning sign that all is not as it should be. In this case knowledge is power, and allows a child to quickly be removed from an unsuitable situation before damage is done that is irreversible.

## How to Find Child Day Care in Phoenix, Arizona



Phoenix offers a wide variety of day care options to its residents, allowing them to choose between both an institutional facility and an in-home one; parents of preschoolers can choose to place their child in either a "traditional" preschool or enroll them in a Montessori school. Those who desire one-on-one care for their child

may choose to hire either a nanny or an au pair, either privately or through an agency.

Selecting which of these choices is the right one for an individual is a difficult task at best, and choosing an individual caregiver harder still. There are many resources that can help parents with this. Word of mouth is a wonderful endorsement.

Parents know best what parents like, and the opinions of other families can help offer direction if taken with a grain of salt. Bear in mind that if one parent likes a caregiver and another does not, it is possible they each seek different qualities from a day care environment; however, if several sources have expressed dissatisfaction with a specific facility there may be a problem.

Any Phoenix Department of Social Services can provide a list of licensed day care providers, as well as preschools and before and after school care in the area. A licensed day care is one that has met state requirements for operation, and is required to provide at least a minimum level of care to maintain its license. For parents of preschoolers, Social Services and the area Health Department can also provide information and applications for the local Head Start programs, if available.

Local pediatricians can also be a fount of information when it comes to finding day care in Phoenix due to the volume of patients they see-Moms love to talk! It's fairly likely that any physician who has been in the area for any length of time will be able to recommend a reputable day care.



A pediatrician who is familiar with a child's history and temperament may also be able to assist you in deciding whether the child would be better placed in a group setting or with one-on-one care, as with a nanny or au pair.

If no results are yielded after following these methods, a phone book or newspaper classified ad will provide a list of providers and numbers; however, as little else is provided with these ads, it is always advisable to plan on visiting a day care before deciding if it is the right one.

You should also prepare a list of questions pertaining to policies such as payment, drop off/pick up times, emergency procedures, staff experience and training, and any other issues you are concerned about prior to contacting the provider. This way all vital pieces of information are exchanged prior to the child ever setting

foot in the facility, and both parent and educator know in advance responsibilities and expectations, reducing the chance of misunderstanding farther down the road.

Do not be afraid to request to set up an interview or sit in on a class; this is an excellent chance to view their day-to-day routine before signing on the bottom line.

## How to Turn Your Home into a Daycare



Caring for children in your home can be a wonderful experience, allowing those with a genuine love of children to make a living doing something they enjoy. Turning your home into a daycare, however, can be a tricky process. Several steps need to be taken before you can successfully open your doors to the world.

First and foremost, decide how many children you wish to care for and find out whether you need to become licensed or not. Most states do not require licensure for in-home care of small groups of children, but if you wish to have more than three or four it will probably be necessary. This can be done by contacting your area Office of Child Care Licensing. Whether you decide to become licensed or not, it is a good idea to complete a course in pediatric first aid and CPR-this way you will be prepared for emergencies that come along.

Then examine your home. Is it childproofed? If you are planning on accommodating small children, and if you're planning on making daycare a full time profession you probably are, you will need to take appropriate measures to



ensure that your home is safe. Childproofing supplies are available at many local stores. Outlet covers in the wall, child proof latches on doors and cupboards and appropriate safety gates on stairways are a good place to start (when buying a gate for a stairwell ensure it is the kind that can be anchored to the wall-children may push over a pressure gate). You may also want to consider a safety latch for the toilet-very small children can fall into a toilet and not be able to get themselves out.



Next, you want to purchase your supplies. Necessary daycare supplies range from outdoor playground equipment and an assortment of toys to high chairs, booster seats, cribs, extra sippy cups and plastic flatware. If you have completed the licensing process you will have already obtained a list of these items. Ensure that all equipment

meets current safety standards, and no toys have been recalled. It also is a good idea to stock up on basic art supplies, such as crayons, watercolors, child safety scissors and coloring books.

Don't forget your first aid supplies! You are going to want to have on hand a full first aid kit, with plenty of disinfectant, band-aids, antibiotic ointment, burn spray, calamine lotion, sunblock and lotion (for the eventuality the sunblock does not work). It is often beneficial to have Children's Ibuprofen and Tylenol on hand, but bear in mind this should not be administered without a parent's approval.

You can choose to advertise your new business by word of mouth, classified ads, fliers-the possibilities are endless. Be sure to have an interview sheet made up when meeting a new child. This should contain questions on emergency contacts, allergies (food, drug and other), past daycare history, any favorite objects/hobbies and any dislikes, as well as any other information you would like to have on hand.

## What Child Care Options Are Available In Phoenix?

Phoenix, AZ boasts a large, diverse population, and it strives to meet the needs of that population. A need in any area is care for the children, particularly during working times when both parents are unavailable. Because of this, Phoenix child care options are as diverse as its people.



Child care is available for all ages, from six weeks of age on up. Parents have a variety of choices. One is to place their child in a traditional child care institutional setting. Here qualified teachers will care for their children in an age appropriate setting, with a reasonable staff to child ratio. Such facilities maintain a classroom setting and structured daily schedule very close to what

the child will encounter when entering Kindergarten.

An institutional style pre-school is also available, solely for children of preschool age (three and four year olds). There are two types, traditional and Montessori. In a traditional setting, the focus is on preparing the child to enter school, and the situation is very much like Kindergarten will be. The children follow a schedule, and begin basic work on pre-reading and math skills. Much of this is done in a manner similar to that of a classroom, with much of the learning done on paper, and generally one or two adults to fourteen or fifteen children.

Montessori schools are a bit different. Classes are generally smaller in size, and the focus shifts a bit from the norm to a more hands-on approach; children learn school skills in much the same way they learned in their toddler years. Classrooms are divided into activity areas, and the children move in small groups from center to center completing small tasks. For example, children learn to count and add not by looking at numbers on paper, but by being given a bowl of beans

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and spooning them from one cup to another as they count. Felt boards or letter peg games are used to teach spelling, and generally there are plants and/or animals in the rooms to teach the children how other species live and grow.

Should a parent prefer to have their children cared for in their own home, they are given the option of either hiring a nanny (think Mary Poppins) or an au pair. A nanny may be hired either independently or through an agency, and may live in the home or commute from their own home daily. They are, in essence, a contracted baby-sitter, and costs for these are usually higher than an institution. An au pair is a student, generally from another country, who comes to live with a host family while attending school. They are given room and board and a small allowance in exchange for a set number of hours of childcare a week, as well as assistance with housework and other chores. In home care is more expensive than out of home; however, the benefits to the child are innumerable.

## What Is Institutional Day Care?



If a child has to enter a child care program at a young age, choosing the correct one can be as important to their future as the correct college. The consequences of a child having a poor early childhood experience are widely documented, with children displaying behavioural problems, increased insecurity and separation anxiety and excessive

demands for attention into the grade school years. In light of this, many parents often feel overwhelmed in the face of the sheer number of day care options available. Each child thrives in a different environment; however, with a little research and the occasional trial and error, it is possible to for a parent to discover the best choice for their child.

Institutional child care is becoming more and more popular in the United States. Many institutions will begin accepting children as early as six weeks of age, and often continue to offer care up through the school years. Cost wise, this option is usually somewhere in the middle between in-home day care and private care, with prices varying according to age and the number of days a child is expected to be present. Most facilities will charge on a weekly basis, and parents are expected to pay for the full week regardless of the number of days their child is actually present.



Children in day care institutions are grouped into classes according to age, with each age group having its own classroom with one or two teachers. Staff to child ratios vary according to institution; however, as most are required to be licensed they should not exceed the guidelines set forth in the state

licensing agreement.

Care often begins several hours prior to school hours, allowing for children to be dropped off as parents go into work, and continues for several hours after dismissal. They are fed breakfast and lunch, and are given rest time in the afternoons. Age appropriate group activities are scheduled throughout the day, with time allowed for independent play, and holiday activities and field trips are common. All children are taught basic skills, such as self-feeding and potty training, and those that are of preschool age are taught to write their names, identify colors, shapes and letters, and count.

The advantages of choosing an institution are the chance for a child to acclimate to a classroom environment prior to entering school and reliable care; barring an emergency parents should never find themselves without a caregiver during regular hours of operation.



Most teachers and teacher's aides have training in child development and psychology, as well as childhood education, from a secondary school, and are trained to respond to medical emergencies. There are disadvantages as well. Due to the larger class sizes children often do not receive an appropriate amount of individual attention, particularly those children that are less boisterous.

This is the stepping stone to many of the behavioral problems touted as these children learn to emulate the less desirable actions of their peers, whom they see the teachers working with time and again.

Any good child care facility will allow parents to come in and observe prior to placing their child, and will often allow parents to accompany the child for the first few days. This will give the parents a chance to get a feel for how their child will acclimate to the environment, and remove them if a situation seems inappropriate.

## Why Is Day Care Licensure Important?



Day care licensure is a means by which the government, on a city, county, state and national level, may regulate the standards of care provided by a facility by establishing set guidelines which must be adhered to. Licensure requirements vary from state to state, and may be obtained from an Office of

Child Care Licensing. These requirements apply to all facilities caring for more than seven children for a period of time longer than three hours, and guidelines apply to all areas of child care.

While having completed licensure requirements does not guarantee that a facility is the right one for an individual child, it does guarantee that at the very least a child's minimum needs are being met. The guidelines established in the requirements for obtaining a license outline cover all aspects of child care. Directors and teachers are required to have completed a specified amount of secondary education in child development or education, giving them a deeper understanding of the child psyche and a better ability to troubleshoot when problems arise. Teacher's aides are required to be completing coursework in these same fields. All staff are required to have their fingerprints on file, and the director should keep a current, up-to-date file on each employee, complete with a background check.

A reasonable staff to child ratio is outlined, with specifics given for personal attention for infants and toddlers. Directions for feeding, napping, diaper changes and playtime are outlined, as well as for age appropriate equipment and supplies. All educators are required to be familiar with each child's file, and able to meet any special needs a child may possess, whether medical or otherwise. Guidelines are given for children in wheelchairs, or with other disabilities.

Prior to licensure, a facility must be inspected and found to meet specified fire and safety requirements, and fire drills must be done once a month to ensure that all children and staff are familiar with procedures in the event of an emergency. A staff member trained in CPR and first aid should be present on the grounds any time children are present, and must accompany all groups on trips off the grounds.



Proper equipment, such as high chairs and cribs, must be provided for infants and conform to current safety standards. Procedures are given and must be followed for any cases of suspected neglect and abuse.

Licensed facilities are required to renew their license at the end of a set period of time, as well as submit to regular

inspections. Failure to meet any licensure guidelines may result in a facility being fined and/or having its license revoked or suspended.

The consequences of poor care in daycare centers are widely documented. Children suffering from abuse at the hands of poorly trained staff members. An excessive number of students per staff member resulting in a lack of personal attention, which may lead to discipline problems and unreasonable demands for attention later in life, as well as a higher incidence of injury from children being poorly supervised. Licensure guidelines are intended to prevent these problems from arising, thereby ensuring that children in daycare facilities have a healthy, safe environment in which to grow and learn. A list of licensed day care facilities may be obtained from any social services department.