

WHAT IS QUALITY CHILD CARE?

The following are three important indicators that families can use to help them to understand what high quality early childhood programs look like:

Ratios refer to the number of staff compared to children; for example 1:6 means one staff person for six children. NAEYC* recommends the following ratios:

Infants	1:3 or 1:4
One year olds	1:4 or 1:5
Two year olds	1:6 or 1:7
Three – 5 year olds	1:8 - 1:10
Kindergarten	1:10 – 1:12
School-aged	1:12 - 1:15

*National Association for the Education of Young Children

Group size: Research has demonstrated that limited group size is related to positive outcomes for children. It is recommended all groups have at least two teachers. A good rule of thumb is, a group size should include roughly twice the number of children per adult. For instance with one year olds, a group size of ten children with two adults is reasonable.

Staff training: Quality of the staff is the most important determinant of the quality of an early childhood program. Research has found that the teachers' level of formal education and training in early childhood is related to positive outcomes for children such as increased social interaction with adults, development of prosocial behaviors and improved language and cognitive development. (1)

1. NAEYC Accreditation Criteria and Procedures, 1998.

WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

All child care centers need to be licensed by the Arizona Department of Health Services, except where children may come and go on their own, where parents are on the premises, those on military bases or those on tribal lands. Centers with a commitment to excellence go beyond state licensing standards and seek accreditation. Accredited early childhood programs voluntarily measure up to national standards of quality, established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For information on NAEYC accredited centers, parents may search their website: www.naeyc.org

GATHERING INFORMATION

Depending on whether you are looking for care inside or outside your home, the kind of information you want may differ. Telephoning first can save you time and energy.

Listed are basic questions to ask if you choose a facility outside your home. Remember to write down the information that you receive from each phone call.

QUESTIONS TO ASK OVER THE PHONE

Ask to speak to the person in charge. In certain facilities this will be a director, program coordinator or supervisor.

If this person is not available, ask if there is another person that can give you some information and answer your questions. If you would prefer to talk to the person in charge, let them know and ask when is a good time to call back, or leave a message asking them to return your call.

1. What ages do you serve?
2. Are there openings (or a waiting list)?
3. Location and hours of operation: Make sure to ask if they offer year-round care (if you have this need)
4. Do you offer: Full-time; Part-time; Hourly-care; Emergency/Temporary Care? Drop-in care is different from part time care. Drop-in care means you are not seeking care on a regularly scheduled basis. Many centers do not offer this option due to issues related to staffing, ratio and group size issues.
5. Cost for care for my child(ren) for: (list your needs before you call, example full-time, 7:30 - 5:30. Monday through Friday, then you can just fill in what their answer is:
\$ _____/hr, week, month).
6. What are ratios for: **

	AGE	Teacher:Child
Child	_____	_____:
Child	_____	_____:
Child	_____	_____:
Child	_____	_____:

** Though you may be looking for toddler care, if you plan on keeping your child

at this facility for a long time period, ask for the ratios of the older age groups your child will eventually move to.

7. Are meals/snacks provided: (It may be helpful to ask if families are ever asked to provide snacks for their child's group.)
8. What is the program philosophy?
9. Describe a typical day for my child at your facility.
10. Are you licensed and accredited?

At this point, if you feel comfortable with the answers you have received, let the person know that you are interested in visiting their facility. Try to arrange for both scheduled and unscheduled visits. Families should be welcome to stop by at any time.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Listed below are questions to ask a teacher/caregiver when you visit a home or center. Plan to spend at least one hour at each location. Take some time to review these questions before you visit and add additional questions you may want to ask. When you visit, make sure that you have ample opportunity to ask questions and spend time observing the facility and the interactions between teacher/caregiver and the children. Keen observations will add information that will be very valuable when you make your decision. When you are visiting a facility try to see it as your child may see it. Items are listed under the areas of environment/equipment, safety, health and nutrition, staffing and policies/programming. Use the space after each statement to make notes to refer to later.

Environment/Equipment

Look for:

- o Indoor and outdoor spaces that are accessible to children, clean and free from hazards;
- o equipment that is clean and in good repair;
- o space with a variety of textures such as softness, and areas for different types of activities, including quiet activities;
- o large indoor area available to the children;
- o equipment and activities arranged so a child can initiate and complete without adult intervention;
- o plenty of equipment and a variety of activities for the children; and
- o room(s) at a comfortable temperature, with adequate ventilation and lighting.

ASK:

1. What is the maximum number of children who will be in the classroom or home at any one time during the day?
2. Can the children be in small groups and is there a balance of activities (examples are quiet play versus active play)?
3. Where do the children nap and what are the policies for napping or resting?
4. Are sleeping children within sight and hearing of a teacher/caregiver at all times?

Safety, Health and Nutrition

LOOK FOR:

- o Appropriate safety features, such as fences around the yard and/or pool, toxic materials out of reach and electric outlets with covers;
- o indoor and outdoor surfaces, such as carpet and sand, to lessen injuries;
- o emergency numbers posted near all telephones;
- o smoke detectors and fire extinguisher(s);
- o recommended health policies practiced such as hand washing;
- o clean and sanitary areas for food preparation;
- o a menu of meals posted, if applicable to the location;
- o traffic problems when picking up or dropping off your child; and
- o a safe neighborhood.

ASK:

1. What procedures are followed to insure the prevention and spread of illness and diseases?
2. Are parents notified of contagious diseases in the facility?
3. Are meals planned for variety, sufficient amounts and nutritive requirements? Are fresh fruits, vegetables and foods low in sugar served regularly?
4. What are the safety guidelines for staff and children for accident prevention, poisoning, fires, emergency, etc.?
5. What are the policies for exclusion of ill children?
6. What are the policies on distribution and storage of medication?
7. If any kind of transportation is provided, what about insurance, screening of drivers, reliability of the vehicle and use of safety restraints?

8. (For a home provider) are there smokers, firearms or pets in the facility?
9. If there is access to a pool, what safety precautions are implemented?

Staffing

LOOK FOR:

- o Adults maintain a safe, healthy environment and carefully supervise children;
- o adults who interact with children and model behavior they want developed;
- o Adults provide meaningful activities that challenge children. They also help the children get the most of out of every learning situation;
- o language is encouraged for all ages of children and caregivers listen and talk to the children;
- o Adults help children express their feelings and are consistent in their guidance of children; and
- o Adults are warm, affectionate, energetic and respectful.

ASK:

1. What is the training/background of the teachers/providers who will care for your child (including length of employment)? What kind of on-going training is provided?
2. Is training in first aid and CPR provided? And training updated on a regular basis?
3. When my child's provider is ill or absent, what happens?
4. Will I have an opportunity to meet regularly with my child's teacher?
5. If I have a problem or concern about the care of my child who will I need to discuss this with first?
6. If I have a problem or concern about the program, who will I need to discuss this with first?
7. Can you give me any references? Example: other families who use a program/provider.

Policies/Programming

LOOK FOR:

- o Policies on treatment of children that you agree with;
- o Programming that is appropriate to the age of your child and his/her developmental level;
- o Written policies that are well defined regarding fees, hours, scheduling, holidays and how they are observed, illness, toilet training, bringing possessions from home, celebration of birthdays, parental release authorization, etc.;
- o Evidence of parental involvement and communication, such as newsletters or opportunities to volunteer;
- o If applicable, the facility's license posted; and
- o If applicable, is the program accredited by an accrediting organization, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children?

ASK:

1. Is there a set routine for the children each day? Is there flexibility in the routine?
2. Are there established methods of communication with parents?
3. Are there written guidelines for the treatment of children (including discipline procedures) and the handling of behavior problems, such as aggression?
4. Is there a waiting list and what are the procedures for this list?
5. What are all the fees I need to pay to enroll my child? Will there ever be special fees, such as for field trips?
6. How often does the cost for care (tuition) change?
7. Will I be able to change my child's schedule when my class or work schedule changes?
8. When my child is old enough to join an older group of children, how will this be handled?
9. Are records kept on the children?

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN-HOME CAREGIVERS

Listed below are questions to ask a prospective caregiver who may come to your home. Included in this, are temporary caregivers. If you have received their name

through a referral service, the person has probably been screened and matched up with your particular needs. However, since you are the person doing the hiring it is important that you also have the opportunity to talk with them at length, to ask your own questions, and check referrals.

Explain where you got their name, what your child care needs are and that you would like to ask some questions. Also, allow them to ask questions of you.

1. What is your background/training with children? (Ask what ages they have worked with.)
2. Why are you looking for this kind of job?
3. What do you like most about children?
4. What is your past work experience? Why did you leave your last job?
5. Tell me about yourself.
6. Meals will be prepared by you while you are here. What are some meals/snacks you would prepare?
7. Describe what you would plan on a typical day, including indoor and outdoor activities, for my child.
8. Tell me about a situation, such as a behavior difficulty, with a child that you felt you handled well.
9. What are your long-range plans?
10. Do you have references?

At this point, if you feel comfortable with the answers you have received, let the person know that you are interested in having them meet your children and interviewing them further. Make sure the caregiver is aware of any expectations regarding household duties such as transportation, dishes, laundry, cleaning, etc.

MAKING YOUR DECISION

Whether you are just starting child care or changing child care, it is important that you feel comfortable with making this decision and that you convey these feelings to your child to ease their transition to their new child care arrangements. Ask yourself if it was easy to talk to the teacher/provider, and how they reacted to your child. Did one or two facilities meet your needs? If so, visit a second time. Allow your child ample time to

visit and prepare yourself and your child for this important event. If you have decided on in-home care or a certain facility, you will need to make the appropriate arrangements, such as filling out the necessary forms and paying any registration fees. It is possible that your first choice may not be available and you may need to select your second choice or possibly a third choice. If this does occur, you and your child still need to be prepared for the change.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT BACK UP CARE CHILD CARE

In all child care arrangements, back-up care is very important for those times when your primary provider cannot provide care. Such times include the care of your child when he or she is too ill or injured to attend their regular care or when your provider is not available to provide care. Suggestions for back up care include:

- Family child care providers who will care for an ill child
- Licensed child care centers offering emergency or back up child care
- Sick child care offered through hospitals or agencies
- Network of family and friends

Contact ASU Family Resources for a listing of agencies that provide back up care in the community.