



WHAT IS QUALITY CHILD CARE?

Quality Indicators in Early Care and Education

Quality care added to a quality home environment, leads to the best possible physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development in a child. Parents who know that their child is receiving quality child care can be assured that their child is safe, nurtured, and challenged to learn.

At one time or another, all parents need to find someone to help with child care. Quality child care can be difficult to find. It can be defined as child care services that provide a responsive, developmentally appropriate environment for young children.

Quality indicators are measurable aspects of child care based on research and evidence. Some components of quality in child care may include, but are not limited to caregiver-child interaction, group size, adult-child ratios, teacher training, communication between caregivers and families, and environment safety.

- **Caregiver-child interaction is the most important indicator of quality in child care.** Providers should help children to develop an understanding of self, personal respect, warmth, and a growing self-esteem through their interactions with children. Children should be encouraged to share ideas and feelings. They should never be humiliated or left out of activities.
- Children should have a constant caregiver. They build trust from knowing that the same person will be available to them on a consistent basis. Frequent staff turnover hinders a child's sense of trust and security. The more adults that regularly spend time with a group of children, the better the chance that attention will be given to each child's individual needs.
- Group size and adult-child ratios affect the relationship between the caregiver and the child. Individual responsive attention is best for meeting children's needs from a constant, nurturing caregiver. The fewer children a caregiver is responsible for, the better the opportunity for her to spend individual time with each child.
- Adults trained in child development or early childhood education are best able to provide a quality program. Adults who understand that children differ in interest, abilities, frustration levels, and family and cultural influences are better able to meet the needs of children. Through training, providers learn how to plan for children who are at different stages of development and who have different needs.
- Parents and caregivers that agree on how to care for children can build a supportive environment. Knowing that their ideas are welcomed, sets parents at ease and allows ongoing communication between parents and caregivers. This benefits the child and involves parents in the program.
- A safe place for children is essential. Attention should be given to obvious items such as play equipment, bedding, fire safety, cleaning solutions and poisons. Precautions should be taken to isolate a sick child from well children. Check for clean toileting and diapering areas. Good hand washing techniques should be a priority for staff and children.

- Careful attention should be paid to the child's physical environment. Look for child-centered areas with accessible, child-sized equipment. Space should be available for children to rest, be active, be alone, and play with other children. Both indoor and outdoor areas should foster optimal growth and development. The environment should be comfortable, not too stimulating, and in good repair.
- Nutrition and food services should promote physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. USDA nutritional requirements should be met. Menus should be posted with alternatives offered for children with special mealtime allergies and requirements. Cultural food should be served periodically, and mealtime should be a pleasant social and learning experience.

Good child care arrangements can improve the quality of daily life for children and parents. Contacts with caring adults can broaden the child's experience and give parents peace of mind and important information about the child's development.

When we speak of quality child care, we're talking about settings that offer a steady diet of nurturing care and stimulation. In searching for child care, well-trained caregivers, supportive and varied activities, high levels of parent involvement, and good health and safety are the main quality indicators.

Remember:

Just because a program is licensed or registered, does not ensure that the care provided is quality. Being regulated means that children's basic care needs are provided, i.e. a safe and healthy place. Only you can make the choice for your family. We encourage you to not only visit different types of caregiving facilities, but also visit each room in those facilities to get an accurate picture of the quality of care. You may call the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Care Licensing Division at 1-800-252-5400 or visit them on the web at www.dfps.state.tx.us for information about your early care and education program.

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