

# Take the Next Steps Toward Choosing Quality Child Care



Choosing the right child care is never simple—but it’s one of the most important decisions a family will make. After all, you want peace of mind knowing your child is getting the best care possible while you’re away. So, it’s important to be informed and have a plan to make the best choice for your family. This means doing a bit of research and knowing the right questions to ask. Luckily, DCF has you covered. We’ll help get you prepared and walk you through the steps to choosing the right care for you and your child.

## Step 1: Start your research with the Child Care Finder

You can learn a lot of great information from the Child Care Finder. It’s more than a tool to find child care options in your desired area. You can get in-depth details about program specifics and quality. When reviewing a provider’s regulatory history, keep in mind that even well-performing programs may have violations. It’s rare to find a regulated center that has never been cited for a violation.

## Step 2: Narrow down your child care options

Now that you have a list of child care programs in your area, it’s time to start narrowing down your options. Start by calling programs or visiting their website. At this stage, you’ll want some top-level information to ensure the program fits your family’s needs. A little bit of initial research helps to make sure the program is within your budget, has the services you need, and operates during the hours when your child needs care.

If you need extra support finding child care, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies can help. Visit [supportingfamilies.together.org/find-my-local-crrr-and-frc](https://supportingfamilies.together.org/find-my-local-crrr-and-frc) to find one near you.

## Step 3: Visit the programs on your short list

Now that you’ve got a short list of potential child care options, schedule a time to visit them. Also, don’t be afraid to just pop in at different times of the day. Start with some simple observations. Does the program appear to be a healthy, safe environment? How are the children interacting together and with staff? Next, sit down with staff and ask questions. Here are some ideas to get you started:

### Ask for a copy of their written policies

- Every child care program should have a set of policies available. This should cover how they’ll handle everything from daily schedules and child illnesses to discipline and food plans. These policies, or program rules, help families and staff work together to provide a consistent quality of care.

### Ask about costs and attendance

- What is my total cost for child care?
- What’s your policy for absences?
- What is your policy for sick children?

### Ask about health and safety

- What safety protocols are in place to detect and prevent illnesses and injuries?
- What cleaning and disinfecting protocols are in place?
- How is food prepared and what if my child has a food allergy?

### Ask about their YoungStar rating

- What were your programs strengths and areas for improvement?
- What are some ways you're looking to improve your rating?
- What should I know about your program that I wouldn't find in your YoungStar rating?

### Get the full picture

- How long have most of the child care providers worked at your program?
- What is your staff's education and training?
- Are there opportunities for me and my family to get involved in your program?

Remember, these are just some questions to help get you started. No questions should be off limits, so take some time to add any questions that are especially important to you and your family.

### Step 4: Keep evaluating

After you've made your child care decision, you should continue to reassess your program choice. It's important to be actively engaged with the program and your child to make sure it's the right fit. After all, every family's and child's needs are different and may change over time. Here are a few ways you can continue to evaluate your child care program on a regular basis:

#### Ask yourself

- What did my child do today?
- How did my child interact with the caregiver(s)?
- Is the outside play area safe and free of hazards?

#### Do

- Spend a few minutes each day talking with the provider about your child.
- Drop in frequently and participate in activities.
- Observe behavior during drop-off and pick-up.
- Review monitoring results by the regulatory agency.
- Listen carefully to what your child has to say about their day.



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