

1 Are the children happy? See if the children seem to enjoy coming to the program. When there, they should feel like they are at home - easily playing and talking with others. Look for smiles, happy faces and the sounds of a positive atmosphere.

2 Are the children safe? For the child's well-being and yours, it is important to know that your child is in the care of a responsible person and organization. It is important to know that the early learning and care environment is set up to avoid fire, accidents and other dangers. Look for smoke detectors, first aid supplies, safe play areas with covered outlets and toys in good repair. Make sure that children are not released to anyone parents do not agree to and are never left alone or unsupervised.

3 Are teachers caring and responsive? First and most important, early learning professionals should love children. When they do, you'll find they talk and play with the children. They respond quickly when they have problems, set limits gently, comfort them and meet their daily needs. Even child guidance should be handled with care and understanding - by setting limits and offering consistent supervision.

4 Are the teachers well qualified? At the very minimum, caregivers should have some training in child care with an emphasis on child development, First Aid, CPR and child guidance. Better yet, an Early Childhood Educator is a professional with an extensive knowledge of child development, curriculum planning to meet the needs of children and the ability to assess learning. Early Childhood Educators have credentials and certificates that support early learning and life readiness. They are registered members of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

5 Do the activities lead to learning and development? Just watching children isn't enough. High quality child care environments are places where the educators assess each child's development set appropriate goals and plan strategies to help the children meet these goals. Teachers plan for all areas of development and include activities and experiences that are of interest to the children in the program. Look for a number of special interest areas like dress-up, science/nature, book corner, block area, creative/art, and water/sand table to name a few.

6 Is the room clean, pleasant and well-organized? When you look around the room, do you see places to store the toys.

Are the shelves at a height that make it easy for children to clean up when they are done? Is the room bright and comfortable? High quality programs have children's artwork and pictures of the children displayed at the child's eye level and is not cluttered. Is the space large enough for the number of the children attending? Can they spread out and become engrossed in an activity?

7 Are good health and nutrition practices followed? You will want to be sure that the place is clean, especially the bathrooms, diaper changing areas along with the food preparation area. Does the program have cleaning practices posted? Does everyone wash their hands before serving, eating, bathroom visits and diapering? Does every child have their own cot or mat for rest time? Is the room warm enough in cold weather and cool enough when it is hot? Are the meals based on Canada's Food Guide and offer healthy choices for children?

8 Do teachers and parents work together for the well-being of the child? Working together as partners is the best way to help your child get ready for school and life. Working together on behaviours and skill building both at

home and in care help a child feel confident and loved.

9 Are parents and families encouraged to be involved? Children do better when they feel like the grown-ups in their lives are interested in what they are doing. They are happier and can focus on their job of learning when everyone is working together. What opportunities does the program or provider have for you to get involved. There may be opportunities such as board member, a circle time visitor, or even baking your famous chocolate chip cookies for a bake sale fundraiser.

10 Do the child care costs, hours and policies match your needs? As a parent who is working or going to school, you do not want surprises. Make sure your centre, home provider or in-home caregiver is what you can afford. Do the hours fit within your work/school schedule? What happens when your child is sick, on school vacation or has an emergency? There should be written contracts and policies that provide information on what to expect from the care arrangement.

