



Child Care Solutions: Exploring Your Options

We hope this guide helps you understand how you can research various child-care options to make an informed choice.

What kind of care is best for my child?

This depends upon you and your child's needs and the setting you think would be best for your child. Look for qualities that help children thrive. These qualities are listed within the checklist found below.

How do I find child care that meets my standards?

Child-care solutions are within your reach. Your child will benefit from the time you spend researching and choosing a child-care setting that meets the needs of your child and family.

1. Research your options.
 - Check out - www.IdahoStars.org - to find information about child-care providers.
 - You also may call your local Child Care Licensing office for a list of home-based or center-based operations in your area.
 - Talk to friends, family and other parents to get their recommendations.
2. Narrow your list to a few centers or family homes that interest you:
 - Arrange to visit them to compare their programs.
 - Visit when the children are in care so you can see what kind of activities are planned and how the caregiver interacts with the children.
 - Observe the caregivers, the environment and the children at the operation using the checklist below.
 - Keep in mind the individual needs of your child. Imagine what it would be like to spend eight to 10 hours every day in that environment.
3. Meet with the caregiver or director.

Discuss any of your concerns and make sure your questions are answered to your satisfaction.

Sample Questions* to ask:

Please describe a typical day.

- How much TV are the children allowed to watch?
- How do you discipline children?
- How do you handle nap times?
- How do you handle toilet training?
- What types of play or learning activities do you have?
- Do you have CPR and First Aid Training?
- What other training do you and your staff receive?
- What types of foods do you serve for meals and snacks?
- How do you handle emergencies?



Use the following checklist to help decide if the center is right for your child and compare the Centers you visit.

	#1	#2	#3		#1	#2	#3
				Fun and Learning			
Health and Safety							
Clean and comfortable				Toys that children enjoy			
Enough space				Enough toys for all children to stay engaged			
Toys and furniture in good shape				Singing or finger plays			
Medicines and cleansers out of reach of children				Pretend play			
Safety caps on electrical outlets				Outdoor play			
Up-to-date license or registration (ask to see last inspection report)				Books to read			
Safe and litter-free outdoor areas				Blocks, puzzles and games			
Nutritious meals and snacks				Drawing, painting, crafts			
Smoke detectors				Caregivers talk, describe and read aloud to children			
Good light, heat/air conditioning and ventilation				Caregivers thoughtfully answer questions			
Alternate exit for fire evacuation				Interesting age-appropriate activities			
Daily Routines				Field trips and/or interesting visitors			
Greeted warmly upon arrival				Attention and Affection			
Opportunities for parents to share information and ask questions				Individual attention			
Lunch and snack times relaxed and pleasant							
Nap times relaxed and pleasant				Relaxed and flexible			
Consistent, predictable schedule (look for a posted schedule)				Patient			
Times and places for both active and quiet play				Listens to children			
Times to play alone and to play with others				Gentle touch			
Group size manageable for caregiver(s)				Sense of humor			
				Respectful of children and parents			
				Good with supervision and guidance			

* Checklist written by Lesia Oesterreich, Iowa State University, University Extension. Used with permission.



Once my child is in care, how do I ensure care stays at my standards?

1. Keep talking with the caregiver.

Good communication with your child and child's caregiver is vital from the very beginning and will help ensure good care for your child.

Talk to the operation director or provider about their policies and make sure to sign and read a contract. A contract should cover issues like fee payments, late fees, operation holidays, and who provides snacks and meals.

Many centers share weekly activity plans and menus. Ask to see them.

Ask about your child's behavior, interactions and progress.

2. Keep talking with your child.

Ask your child about their day, what they did, whom they saw or anything special that day. If your child doesn't want to return to care, talk with your child and find out why. Talk to the caregiver if anything unusual seems to have happened.