

PARENT TIP SHEET



Quality matters. A safe and nurturing early learning environment allows children to get ready for school and parents to focus on their job or education. However, quality also costs.

Start with licensed care. While not necessarily a marker of quality, licensing standards set the baseline for health, safety and program standards for the legal operation of all child care programs. Ask to see a copy of your providers' state license. Some states make reports on licensing, inspections, and complaints available online.

Consider the following **five steps** to choosing quality care:

- ▶ **Start early.** The earlier you begin, the better off you'll be.
- ▶ **Reach out for help.** Use your local [Child Care Resource and Referral Agency](#). They are experts at helping families find quality care that meets their needs.
- ▶ **Visit and ask questions about quality.** Once you've narrowed down your options, don't be afraid to ask about adult-child ratio, group size, caregiver qualifications, staff turnover, and accreditation. For a comprehensive checklist, [go here](#).
- ▶ **Make a choice** based on your assessment.
- ▶ **Stay involved.** Ask questions, communicate with the program, volunteer, and visit the site regularly and unannounced.

Need help paying for quality child care?

Visit the Child Care Aware® [State by State Resource Map](#), ask your local [Child Care Resource and Referral Agency](#) or call Child Care Aware® at **1-800-424-2246**. They can help you answer these questions:

- ▶ **Do you qualify for Child Care Subsidies or Vouchers?** States receive federal funds to help low-income families pay for child care; eligibility criteria differ from state to state.
- ▶ **Do you qualify for Head Start or Early Head Start?** Head Start serves 3-5-year-olds; Early Head Start serves children from birth to 2 years old. Children who receive high-quality child care have shown better outcomes in socio-economic and health conditions as an adult.
- ▶ **Does your state offer Pre-K?** Many states offer state funded Pre-K programs, though eligibility and fees vary from state-to-state. Long-term analyses suggest that enrollment in early childhood education can increase earnings in adulthood by 1.3 to 3.5 percent.
- ▶ **Are you in the military?** Check out the [Military Fee Assistance Program](#). Each branch is different - check the Child Care Aware® of America website for more information.
- ▶ **Are you taking advantage of tax credits you're eligible for?** Check with a tax preparer to see if you are eligible for the [Child and Dependent Care Credit](#) or the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#). Also check for individual state tax credits that can help reimburse or pay for child care.
- ▶ **Are you working or a student?** Ask your employer or school if they have any programs to help pay for child care.
- ▶ **Are you eligible for Tribal-based child care?** Check out the [Head Start Locator](#).

Make your voice heard!
Become an advocate for change by joining the child care movement at childcareworks.org

