

CHOOSING QUALITY CARE

# A Guide for Families



Child Care  
Resource and  
Referral Network

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# Choosing Quality Care – A Guide for Families

Choosing an early care and education program for your child is one of your most important decisions. As your child's first and best teacher, you want what's best for them while you're away – a healthy, safe and nurturing environment that will ensure they're prepared for kindergarten and the rest of their educational journey. This guide helps walk you through the many factors you'll want to consider.



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## Health and Safety

Your child's health and safety are top priority. When selecting a child care program, there are a few health and safety considerations to keep in mind, including cleaning and sanitation practices, ratios and group size and caregiver qualifications.

### Cleaning and Sanitation

Child care programs are more likely to protect children from harm and illness if they consistently practice standards such as frequently washing hands, disinfecting diaper changing stations, cleaning toys and properly storing cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials.

### Ratios and Group Size

Ratios and group size can affect the quality of care for children in relation to safety, attention given and daily adult interactions. Depending on the age and personality of your child, take a moment to understand which group size and adult-to-child ratio works best for you. Look for opportunities for your child to be independent, work together with caregivers and other children and change activities throughout the day.

### Caregiver Qualifications

The amount of experience, education and continuing professional development a child care provider has is an important indicator of quality. The longevity of the teaching staff also contributes to higher-quality care. It shows a welcoming, supportive and positive environment, which may translate into better care for your child.

[Learn more about health and safety.](#)

[Check out this helpful child care health and safety checklist.](#)



## Types of Child Care

Providers can serve children in a number of environments, from large centers in a commercial setting to small groups in a provider's home. In Indiana, you can find safe, high-quality programs in homes, centers, schools and faith-based early learning settings. Programs can vary greatly, and not all have the same licensing requirements or health and safety standards. Your child's personality and your personal preference may lead you to one type over another.

[Explore the different types of child care.](#)

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## Paths to QUALITY™ Rating System

Indiana's voluntary quality rating and improvement system is known as Paths to QUALITY™. Programs participating in Paths to QUALITY™ meet specific quality standards within four different levels. Accredited programs meet the highest standards of care.

[Learn more about Paths to QUALITY.](#)

## Developmental Milestones

Developmental milestones are the typical skills that children develop in playing, learning, speaking, behaving and moving at specific ages. These milestones have windows of development that most children follow.

[Learn more about developmental milestones at every age.](#)

## Developmental Support

Every child — including yours — grows, learns and develops in a unique way. When a child's development doesn't follow the typical path, families have many resources available to get support — and get it early — which is the best time. Talk with your program about the supports they offer. In Indiana, families of children from birth to age 3 can find developmental supports through First Steps.

[Learn more about developmental supports.](#)

## Financial Assistance for Child Care

It shouldn't be the only factor in your decision, but cost of care can be important in choosing your program. Many providers offer sliding scale fees, and there are several financial assistance options available to Indiana families, such as Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers, On My Way Pre-K and Head Start/Early Head Start.

[Learn more about financial assistance for child care.](#)



## Family Engagement Practices

Quality programs work closely with families to ensure they are informed about their child's development and are a welcomed partner in their care. They often have an open-door policy, which means family members are free to come and go at any time. A program that provides written policies to include and engage families may be a sign of true family partnership.

[Use this document to engage with your provider about your child and their needs.](#)

## Child Care Program Tours

When choosing an early learning program for your child, consider visiting your top three locations in person. It will give you a feel for the program leadership and teaching team, help you visualize where your child will spend their day and allow you to ask any remaining important questions in person.

[Learn more about what questions to ask a prospective program.](#)

## Complaint Reporting

Families can review inspection reports and any validated complaints or enforcement actions for licensed and registered Indiana child care programs. To learn about past complaints for a specific program, visit [Child Care Finder](#) and search for a program. The program page will include information about any past complaints.

If you have a complaint and/or concern about a licensed or registered child care program, you can report it to the [Brighter Futures Indiana Solution Center](#) at 1-800-299-1527 or the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration at (877) 511-1144.

[Learn more about reporting complaints here.](#)



# What's Best for My Child

A strong relationship between you, your child and your child care provider is key. Use this document to outline your child's strengths, challenges and existing routines. Then plan a time to discuss it with your provider.

Child's Name:	Age:	Date:
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Name(s):		

	My Child's Strengths	My Child's Challenges	What it Takes to Help My Child Be Successful
Communicating Talking/Listening			
Thinking and Understanding			
Eating and Drinking			
Toileting			
Resting/Sleeping			
Traveling and Moving Around			

## What's Best for My Child – cont.

	My Child's Strengths	My Child's Challenges	What it Takes to Help My Child Be Successful
<b>Inside Play Time</b>			
<b>Transition</b> (i.e. moving from one activity to the next)			
<b>Playing with Others</b>			
<b>Outside Play Time</b> (i.e. getting to the playground, utilizing equipment, etc.)			
<b>Fine Motor Activities</b> (cutting, coloring, etc.)			
<b>Gross Motor Activities</b> (running, jumping, riding a bike, etc.)			

Notes:



# Child Care Program Health & Safety Checklist

In Indiana, there are many kinds of [child care programs](#). Some programs may operate in large centers with many classrooms, while others may take place in someone's home or within a church or faith-based location. Regardless of which you choose for your family, your child should be healthy and safe throughout the day.

As you visit a new program or send your child to their current program, here are the essential questions you should ask and items to keep in mind focused on child health and safety. **The answers to all questions should be YES:**

Now, take a moment to review your checklist to determine if this child care program meets the basic health and safety requirements. If you need help finding other child care programs or for more information visit [brighterfuturesindiana.org/blog/how-to-find-high-quality-child-care-in-indiana](http://brighterfuturesindiana.org/blog/how-to-find-high-quality-child-care-in-indiana).

## CLASS & GROUP SIZES

- Are there enough adults in the room to carefully watch each child?
- Are caregivers paying individual attention to each child?

## SAFE SLEEP

- Are all children watched and monitored during nap times?
- Is there a separate crib for each infant?
- At nap time, are infants placed alone on their backs in a crib cleared of all other items?
- Do older children have a quiet place to rest or nap?

## SECURITY

- Are main entrances locked and are internal stairways and doorways safeguarded to prevent wandering children?
- Are children accompanied by an adult and actively supervised while playing outside?
- Do child-accessible electrical outlets have covers, safety plugs or are tamper-resistant and labeled as such?
- Do caregivers have medicines labeled and out of children's reach?
- Are cleaning supplies, other poisonous materials and dangerous items locked up, out of children's reach?

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Are there clear procedures for taking care of children during an emergency?
- Is contact information for police, fire, poison control and local hospitals posted and accessible to all caregivers?
- Are caregivers trained in first aid, CPR and safe sleep?
- Is there a fully stocked first-aid kit available and accessible to adults, but out of children's reach?

## CLEANING, SANITIZING & HAND WASHING

- Are caregivers cleaning infants and toddlers promptly when diapers or clothing are wet or soiled?
- Are soiled diapers discarded sanitarly?
- Are caregivers cleaning diaper-changing surfaces and disinfecting them after each use?
- Are adults and children washing their hands before handling food and when changing diapers or helping children use the restroom?
- Is the environment clean and are toys and shared materials sanitized often?

## DEVELOPMENT & WELL-BEING

- Are caregivers warm, welcoming, nurturing, affectionate, patient and good-natured?
- Are caregivers talking with children at eye level, engaging them in conversations and asking questions when appropriate?
- Are caregivers handling discipline in a calm, consistent way to encourage positive behavior?
- If the program provides food service, do meals and snacks contain a variety of food groups?
- Are books, pictures, toys and other materials age-appropriate?





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