

How Do I Find Quality Child Care?

Many parents say that they wonder what to look for when choosing child care. Parents need to know who to talk to and what questions to ask when finding a program for their infant, toddler, pre-school or school-age child.

Below are answers to common questions that parents often have when seeking quality child care. This information can help you make the best choice for your family.

What is quality child care?

- ★ Quality child care is nurturing, safe and stimulating.
- ★ Quality child care provides children with an environment that encourages healthy social, emotional, mental and physical development.
- ★ Quality child care is more than babysitting.

By choosing a quality child care program you provide your child with positive early experiences that will help him or her prepare for school and increase their chances to succeed in life.

What do I look for in a quality child care program?

Not all child care providers offer a quality program. A quality child care program provides a healthy and safe environment, children in small groups with a consistent staff person, positive interaction and relationship-building with the staff and other children, staff with experience and education in early childhood, appropriate discipline practices, educational activities, daily routines and nutritious meals and snacks.

What type of child care providers are available?

There are child care programs in homes, child care centers and in churches. Not all child care programs are regulated or monitored by an outside agency. Only regulated programs have regulations and laws that help ensure the health and safety of children.



How do I find a child care program?

ChildSavers is the Richmond organization that can help parents take the guesswork out of choosing quality child care. ChildSavers has information on how to find a local child care program, what the state laws and licensing requirements are and where to find an accredited program. This information will help you identify several child care programs that may meet your needs. ChildSavers provides guidance by phone, in person and via the Internet. You can contact ChildSavers at (804) 644-9590, ext. 3018.

Now that I have a list of several child care programs that I am considering, what do I do next?

Review the information and violations cited during licensing inspections over the past two years by going on-line to www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/licensed.cgi. Pay close attention to violations that would be unsafe or harmful for your child, both physically and emotionally. If you have questions about the information or do not have access to a computer, contact the Richmond Regional Licensing Office at (804) 662-9743. If you access the information on-line, you must know the name and the type of program. This information will be available for a regulated program.

After considering the information received from ChildSavers and Licensing, now decide which programs you want to contact to ask if they have space for your child. Visit the child care program **before** you enroll your child. During your visit, use the checklist on the back of this page to decide if the program provides a quality child care environment.

Are there funds available to help me pay for child care?

The City of Richmond can provide financial assistance to families who are eligible. A family may be eligible for child care subsidy if the parent is employed full-time or while they are enrolled in a training program or school leading to employment. For more information, contact the **Richmond Department of Social Services, Child Care Section at (804) 646-7407.**

Take this checklist with you when you visit child care programs. Look for the following to help you choose a quality program.

Caregivers/Teachers

- Children and family members are greeted when they arrive.
- Parents are allowed to go into the program and surprise visits by parents are encouraged.
- Caregivers/teachers get down on the child's level to speak with the children.
- Caregivers/teachers and children enjoy being together. You observe pleasant and meaningful interactions among adults and children.
- Children's needs are quickly met even when things get busy.
- Caregivers/teachers tell you what your child is doing every day and are always available to answer your questions.
- Caregivers/teachers are trained in CPR, first aid and early childhood education.
- Caregivers/teachers practice and know how to respond to emergencies such as medical emergencies and natural disasters.
- Caregivers/teachers are involved in continuing education and professional development activities.
- There is enough staff to serve the children. Each type of program has a different required staff-to-child ratio. Ask local experts about the best staff-to-child ratio for the age of your child.

Setting

- The atmosphere is clean, bright, pleasant and free of obvious health and safety concerns.
- There are different areas for resting, quiet play and active play; there is enough space for the children in all of these areas.
- Caregivers/teachers can see and are actively supervising all children in the building and on the playground.
- Areas used to prepare and store food are clean.
- Bathrooms and diapering areas are cleaned and sanitized to help prevent the spread of germs and disease.

Activities

- There is a daily balance of play time, story time, activity time and naptime.
- Many activities are available for children to choose from during play time and activity time.
- There are enough toys and appropriate learning materials for the number of children enrolled.
- Toys are clean and safe and are within reach of the children.
- Infants and young toddlers are able to safely move around and explore their environment.
- Infants are always placed on their backs to sleep.
- Children and caregivers/teachers wash hands often, especially before and after eating, using the bathroom or changing diapers.



In General

- The program is licensed or regulated.
- You hear the sounds of happy children during your visit.
- You have been informed of how discipline issues are handled and you agree with those practices.
- You understand and have reviewed the program's operating policies and procedures.
- You think that your child will be happy there.

*This checklist was adapted from, **How to find quality child care in your community.** You can request a copy of this booklet from ChildSavers at (804) 644-9590, ext. 3018.*



City of Richmond
**Early Childhood
Development Initiative**

For more information visit www.richmondgov.com/ecd or call 804-646-7320.