



Choosing Child Care for Your Baby (Birth to Three)

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You know that babies need a lot of care and protection. They also need an environment that will help them thrive. Babies are growing so fast and learning so much! Their experiences in the first three years shape their development in important ways. And most important of all is the way they're treated by the adults who take care of them.

As you look for child care for your infant or toddler, here are some key points to keep in mind and some specific things you can look for when you visit child care programs.



BABIES NEED A SAFE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN MOVE AND EXPLORE

Babies' bodies and minds need to be active in order to develop well. They need to be able to move around and to see and handle a variety of objects.

Look for:

- Spaces where infants can move around safely.
- Large areas for toddlers' active play
- A variety of toys and books appropriate for babies, kept on low shelves where they can reach them.
- Toys for toddlers including art materials, musical instruments, and things to climb on, build with, push, and pull.
- A safe, enclosed outdoor play area with play equipment for toddlers.

For more ideas, See 4CS Tips on:

- Choosing Child Care.
- Checklists for Telephone Screening and Visiting Child Care Programs.

BABIES NEED CAREGIVERS WHO UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY BABIES

Look for:

- A director and head teacher or family child care provider with college-level training in early childhood education.
- Caregivers with training and experience working with infants and toddlers.
- Caregivers who obviously enjoy the babies they're working with.

BABIES NEED SMALL GROUPS WITH ENOUGH CAREGIVERS

Look for:

- At least one adult caregiver for every four infants (birth to 18 months) and every six toddlers (18 months to three years).
- Groups of 6 to 12 children – smaller groups for younger children.

BABIES NEED STABLE, CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CAREGIVERS

To feel safe and supported, babies need to bond with particular caregivers.

Look for:

- A program where each child gets a primary caregiver, with others participating in their care.
- A program that keeps the same primary caregiver with the child throughout the infant/toddler years.

BABIES NEED CAREGIVERS WHO RESPOND TO THEIR NEEDS

The way babies are treated in the first few years affects their brain development and shapes the way they will respond to people and experiences in the future.

Look for:

- Warm, nurturing, accepting adults.
- Caregivers who play with, sing to, hold, and cuddle each child often.
- Caregivers who talk to the babies frequently during play and routine care.
- Caregivers who respond to infants' babbling and listen carefully to encourage toddlers' efforts to speak.
- Adults who comfort upset or frightened children and respond sympathetically to crying or calls for assistance.
- Adults who respect individual differences - how much sound and activity an infant can handle, which toys, foods, and activities a toddler prefers.
- Caregivers who spend most of the time engaging with the children.
- Adults who are patient with babies' attempts to learn new skills.
- Sensitive, positive methods for teaching babies appropriate behavior.
- A program that welcomes all children and makes special arrangements so children with disabilities can participate fully.

BABIES NEED THE ADULTS WHO CARE FOR THEM TO COOPERATE

Your relationship with other caregivers is important to your baby!

Look for:

- Adults who care for babies in ways you feel comfortable with - the ways they handle feeding, sleeping, toileting, and discipline are compatible with yours.
- Caregivers who frequently share information about the child's activities, eating, sleeping, behavior, etc., and ask you for information and suggestions.
- Caregivers who welcome you to participate.
- Caregivers who learn about and include the cultures of the children's families.

BABIES NEED TO BE KEPT SAFE, CLEAN, AND HEALTHY

Look for:

- Bottles and formula kept refrigerated, bottles labeled with the child's name
- Well-balanced, nutritious meals at pleasant, sociable mealtimes.
- Safe equipment in good condition: cribs, high chairs or other feeding areas, strollers, changing tables, etc.
- A separate crib or cot for each child, with sheets and blankets washed often.
- Diapers changed promptly and babies thoroughly cleaned when changed.
- Caregivers' hands washed thoroughly and changing table disinfected after each baby is changed.
- Diapering/toileting areas clean and separated from feeding area, with dirty diapers kept in a closed container.
- First aid supplies and adults with first aid training.
- Written policy that sick children are kept home.

BABIES NEED A FLEXIBLE DAILY ROUTINE WITH A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES

Babies need familiar, predictable environments that respect their individual needs, schedules, and interests.

Look for:

- A daily routine that includes indoor and outdoor play and a mix of active and quiet activities.
- Children choosing their own activities and toys most of the time.

For infants:

- Each baby sleeping and eating on their own schedule.
- Except when sleeping, infants out of the crib, free to move and explore.

For toddlers:

- Times to explore art materials, water, and sand, to climb, build, and move.
- Times when caregivers look at and talk about picture books with individual children or small groups
- Times for songs and games.