

STARTING POINT FOR CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION



The Good Child Care Book

What Every Parent Needs to Know
About Quality Child Care



Dear Parents

You want the best for your child—and so do we.

That's why we've put together this Good Child Care Book—to help you choose a child care arrangement that meets your needs as working parents while it nurtures all aspects of your child's development.

Good child care is much more than babysitting. It is gently guiding children as they learn about themselves and the world around them. It is helping them master the skills and lessons of everyday life. It is nurturing their fast-growing minds and carefully handling the challenges of behavior, sickness and relationships—so they will grow into healthy, responsible and productive adults.

As parents, you will select your child care arrangement. But we can help. Here you'll find information on different kinds of child care and hints on what to look for to find a quality child care center or family child care home—plus child care checklists, tax credits and other important information. And you can call us direct for personal assistance with your child care search.

Remember, **quality child care lasts a lifetime!** Look for the good quality ribbons throughout this book for special hints on locating quality care.

Good luck,

The folks at Starting Point

Different kinds of child care

The first step in making the right child care choice is to figure out what kind of child care is best for you. There are three main forms of child care:

Child Care Center

A child care center is a place where many children are cared for and, where, like a small school, they are grouped by age. It is normally open all year round and has regular daytime hours. Many parents choose centers because of their larger staff, facilities, space, toys, equipment and planned activities.

To assure minimum standards, either the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services or the Ohio Department of Education regulates, licenses and inspects child care centers, preschool and schoolage programs. If a center is  accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, it means the center has measured up to national standards of quality care and has made a commitment to offering the high level of care, attention and stimulation every child deserves.

Family Child Care Home

A family child care home offers care in another person's home. The number of children is limited by law. Many parents prefer this type of care because they want their children in a more home-like environment. Family child care homes are especially popular for the care of infants and small children.

Family child care homes receiving public funds are licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services which requires child care training, health and safety inspections and criminal background checks. If a family child care home is  accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care Homes, it means the home has measured up to national standards of quality care and has made a commitment to offering the high level of care, attention, and stimulation every child deserves.

In Home Child Care

Here, a caregiver either lives in or comes to the family's home to care for the child, keeping the child in his or her normal surroundings, with familiar toys and routines. This is convenient for the family and offers flexibility. However, it is considerably more expensive, unless there are several children to be cared for.

Take the time to think about what kind of child care works best for you. *You need to be comfortable with the care your child is receiving, you need to feel secure about your child care arrangement, and so does your child.*

Special Needs Child Care

Children with medical, physical, developmental or emotional disabilities can be enrolled in some child care centers or family day care homes alongside other children. Here, they're cared for by specially trained teachers and have access to the community services and resources they need to learn and grow.



Child Care Center and Family Child Care Home Accreditation

 An accredited child care center or family child care home measures up to national standards of quality established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC). That means they are committed to the highest standards of quality child care and have voluntarily submitted to a rigorous examination of their practices, staff and activities.

Care for Kids Family Child Care Homes

 A CARE FOR KIDS Family Child Care Home (Cuyahoga County only) is a home licensed by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services whose caregivers are trained in child development, age-appropriate activities, and health and safety practices.

Step Up to Quality (SUTQ)

Step Up to Quality is a State of Ohio rating system that awards one to five stars to early childhood centers and family child care homes that meet high quality standards. The more stars, the higher the standards the program has achieved. Ratings are based on national research that identifies program benchmarks that lead to good outcomes for children—including child-to-staff ratios, staff qualifications, curriculum, environment and child and family interaction.

To find these centers and family child care homes, look for yard signs and banners that identify them as Step Up to Quality 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5-Star Award Winners.

The right kind of child care is important.

New information shows that the early care children receive has long lasting effects on their later life—and on how they develop, learn, deal with stress and handle their emotions.

[Babies and toddlers thrive when caregivers are warm, responsive and make them feel safe and secure.](#)

Science has recently found that the *brains of young children grow*—are actually wired—*when the children are given good nutrition, surroundings, care, stimulation and teaching*. The reverse is also true. Without adequate stimulation, a child's learning potential is seriously diminished. PET (positron emission tomography) scans actually show a smaller brain size among children who have been neglected or abused in their early years.

Children have also been found to withstand stress better when they have had a strong secure relationship with a nurturing adult in their early years.

A Child's Intellectual Development

Fifty percent of intellectual development takes place between birth and age four; and 33 percent of whatever academic skills children have attained at age 18 develops between birth and four.

Study by Dr. Benjamin Bloom, 1964

Discovery and Exploration

“Like miniature scientists, babies are sponges for information, learning through mini-experiments with pots and pans, and by playing peek-a-boo and other everyday games.”

*Dr. Andrew Metzoff,
University of
Washington*



Quality care makes a difference.

More and more, science is reinforcing the view that consistent, quality care is essential for normal growth and development.

In the first three years of life, *a child grows from a completely dependent being into one who walks, talks, plays and explores.* Given good care, a three year old is self-confident, trusting, inquisitive, able to communicate through language, physically and mentally healthy, able to relate well and be empathetic to others—all attributes that add up to a good start in life.

👤 Studies have found that the single most important factor in quality care is the relationship between the child and the caregiver. *Children who receive warm and sensitive care are more likely to trust people, enter school ready and eager to learn and get along well with other children.*

👤 The quality of this relationship, in turn, depends on the caregiver's personal qualities, education and training as well as the ratio of caregivers to children, the number of children in a group and maintaining stability in the child/caregiver relationship.

👤 Other indicators of quality programs are a strong focus on health and safety issues and on working closely with parents.

How to find quality child care

Selecting your child care arrangement is one of the most important decisions you will make—for your own peace of mind and for your child’s healthy development. So you’ll want to take the time to make a thorough search. Here are some suggestions.

Call.

Begin with a call to Starting Point at 1-216-575-0061 or 1-800-880-0971. This nonprofit agency keeps a long list of child care centers and homes throughout Northeastern Ohio. Although they cannot recommend one center or home over another, they can help you find care in your neighborhood or near your job. They can also give you the information you need to make a good choice.

Visit.

You’ll want to visit several child care centers or family child care homes. Initially, be sure to set up a time when you and your child or children can visit in advance. Make sure you keep your appointment, and be on time. Child care providers have a lot to do every day, and time is very important to them. When you are there, stay as long as you want to get a feeling for the place where your child will be spending so much time. Visit more than once so you’re all comfortable with your choice.

Observe.

When you do visit, trust your first impressions—they’re often on target. Is this a place where you’ll be comfortable leaving your child? Then, look and listen. Your eyes and ears will tell you a lot. Is this a safe place? Are the caregivers warm and responsive to the children. Do the caregivers seem to really care about the children, respond patiently to questions and discipline gently and fairly? On the following pages you’ll find some other things to look for.

Bring a Checklist.

You’ll find handy checklists in the pocket at the back of your brochure. Make copies and fill them out on your visits. This way you won’t have to rely only on memory, and you’ll have something concrete to use in comparing child care programs.

Check References.

Talk with other parents whose children are cared for at the centers or homes you are considering. Call and ask how they—and their kids—like the child care arrangement.

ten things to look for on your visit.

1 Are the children happy?

See if the children seem to enjoy going to child care. When there, they should feel like they are at home—easily playing and talking with others. Look for smiles and happy faces.

2 Are the children safe and secure?

For the child's well-being and yours, it's important to know that your child is in the care of a responsible person, that the center or family child care home is set up to avoid fire, accidents and other dangers, and that there is a clear plan to deal with emergencies and sickness. Look for smoke detectors, first aid supplies, safety measures, safe play areas, covered radiators and electrical outlets. Check that all dangerous items and substances are well out-of-reach. Make sure children cannot be released to anyone parents do not specify and are never left alone and unsupervised.

3 Are there enough teachers to give good care?

The fewer children each teacher has in her care, the more time she has to help each child learn and grow. That gives your child the good early start needed to do well in school and in life. The State of Ohio sets minimum standards for the number of children each teacher can handle. For higher quality care, look for lower teacher/child ratios.

4 Are the teachers loving and responsive?

First and most important, child care teachers should love the kids. When they do, you'll find they talk and play with the children. They respond quickly when they have problems, set limits gently, comfort them and meet their daily needs. Even discipline should be handled with love and understanding—by setting limits and offering consistent supervision.

5 Are the teachers well-qualified?

At the least, teachers should have some form of special training in

child care—particularly in child development, first aid, CPR, nutrition, behavior problems, health, safety and working with parents. Even better, look for professionals who have credentials, certificates or degrees in child development or early childhood education.

6 Do the activities lead to learning and development?

Just watching the children isn't enough. Make sure the teachers set goals for each child and plan things to do that are right for the children's ages? They should use creative materials, toys, books and help the children develop language and everyday skills. The teachers should talk, sing and read to the children, have daily routines for mealtimes, nap times and repeat pleasurable activities like special songs, rhymes and comforting words.

7 Is the place clean, pleasant and well-organized?

You want your child to be in bright, pleasant surroundings—as well as a

What about babies?

A good caregiver hugs, rocks, cuddles, responds to the baby's smiles, talks happily with the baby about what they see and do and introduces them to new objects and experiences.

place that's clean and large enough for indoor and outdoor activities, naps, meals and personal belongings. There should be at least 35 square feet of playroom floor space indoors per child and 75 square feet outdoors per child.

8 Are good health and nutrition practices followed? You'll want to be sure the place is clean, especially the bathrooms and diapering areas. Does everyone wash hands before serving, eating, bathroom visits and diapering? Is there a separate isolation area with adult supervision for mildly ill children? Does each child have an individual mat, cot or crib? Are counters, toys and equipment cleaned daily? Is the building warm enough in cold weather? Are meals and snacks well-balanced, nutritious, wholesome and geared to meet the nutritional needs of each age group?

9 Do teachers and parents work together for the child's well-being? Working well with your child's teacher is important to you and your child. You'll want to be able to share your child's day, talk over concerns and check your child's progress. Make sure you can stop in anytime. Be concerned if you're not allowed to come in anytime you like.

10 Do the child care costs, hours and policies match your needs? As a working parent, you don't want surprises. Make sure your center, home or in-home provider is affordable. Does she have hours that meet your workday needs? What happens when your kids are sick, have school vacations or emergencies? There should be written contracts and information on costs, handling sickness, vacations and emergencies.

Getting help with child care costs

Be sure to find out if you're eligible for tax credits from the IRS. You'll find information at the back of this book. If your income is low, see if your County Department of Job and Family Services can give you financial help.

A Good Child Care Program

- Offers a regular routine while allowing flexibility for the individual needs of the child;
- Has periods of quiet and active play as part of a well-balanced program;
- Offers a variety of experiences that allow each child to develop individual skills and self-confidence.

What to ask center or home providers

Chances are you'll think of lots of things to ask the center director or child care provider. It's a good idea to write your questions down—or make a copy of the suggested questions below—to be sure you remember them all.

- What kind of experience do you have caring for children?
- What kind of training have you had in early childhood development, first aid, CPR, nutrition?
- Who will be caring for my child?
- How many children does each caregiver handle?
- How long have your caregivers been with you?
- What kinds of indoor and outdoor activities do you have for kids who are my child's age?
- Who provides children's meals and snacks. Can I see a weekly menu?
- What is your daily routine? What kinds of activities do you offer?
- How will you make certain my child gets individual attention?
- What do you do if a child hits, bites another child, is uncooperative or has other problems requiring discipline?
- How do you soothe a child who is crying or upset?
- What is your approach to toilet training?
- Do you take children on field trips? Is permission required?
- What are the hours and days you offer care? What happens if I can't get there on time to pick up my child?
- What are your fees? When do I pay them? Are there any other fees?
- Do I have to pay if a child is absent or on vacation? Is there a discount if more than one child is enrolled?
- Do you have a backup provider to care for the kids if you are sick or have an emergency?
- What do you do if a child is sick, hurt or has an emergency? If my child's caregiver is sick? Does the caregiver have first aid and CPR training?
- What kinds of health and medical information do you require?
- Where do you keep medicines and cleaning products?
- How will you communicate with me about my child's progress?
- Do you encourage parents to be involved? If so, how are they involved?
- What are the phone numbers of other parents I can contact?

The Open Door Policy You have the right to drop into your child care center or family child care home unannounced—and see your child—anytime they're open.



What to ask yourself

Your visit is likely to give you a clear sense of whether or not it's the right place for your child. Remember your own feelings are your best guides. Ask yourself:

- Will my child fit in here?
- Do I like their approach to learning, play and discipline?
- Will my child be safe and secure in this setting?
- Can I easily talk with the staff about my child?
- Do I feel comfortable here?
- Is the location convenient for me?
- Do the costs, hours and policies meet my needs?

How to work with child care staff

Choosing child care is only the first step in a long relationship between the parents, child and caregiver. You'll want to stay involved to ensure your child gets the good quality care he or she deserves. The best care comes from a true partnership with the caregivers.

You'll want to prepare your child for the new child care arrangement. Talk about it, try to visit a few times before the child begins, and don't rush off on the first day. It takes awhile to get used to a new place and new people.

Tell the caregiver up front what you want for your child and communicate daily. You'll want to know how your child's day—and the caregiver's—went; what the children are learning and how your child is doing so you and the caregiver are on the same track. Volunteer to help if you can. Stop in unannounced and attend parent meetings and activities.

The more you work together, the better your child's care will be.

Period of Adjustment

After you've chosen your child care arrangement, you'll need time to adjust. And so will your child. So drop in and see how things are going. Is your child happy and excited when he sees his caregiver? Is your child comfortable with her? This is the best indication you have made a good choice.

If your child has a medical condition

Explain medical conditions, allergies and medications thoroughly to your caregiver and leave detailed written instructions.



Have a back-up plan for emergencies

You'll need to have at least two backups to handle child care when your regular child care arrangements break down, when your child—or the caregiver—is sick, on vacation, has an emergency, goes out of business, when schools are closed, etc.

It's a good idea to arrange in advance for spouses, relatives, temporary caregivers, drop-in centers or other backup sources to take care of children in these emergencies.

Keep a list of these backup providers, their phone numbers and available hours close to your phone.

Preregister with any backup child care providers who require advance paperwork, and keep a file handy with important phone numbers, family, medical and health information that you can bring with your child to the backup provider.

📞 If none of your backup providers can care for your child, call Starting Point at 216-575-0061 and they will help you locate care. *Never, never leave a young child alone when you go to work, in a car, anywhere.*

Leave emergency numbers with your caregiver for:

- Your pediatrician
- All numbers where you can be contacted
- At least 2 relatives or friends
- Your hospital emergency room
- Poison control center

call

Starting Point

Whether you're a parent needing child care or a child care provider looking for specialized training Starting Point is there to help.

As the child care resource and referral agency for Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake counties, Starting Point works to improve the quality and increase the supply of child care throughout our region as well as to ensure good child care legislation on the Federal, State and local levels.

If you live in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga or Lake counties and are looking for child care and early education information or referrals, call one of these numbers:

Main office and Cuyahoga County: **1-216-575-0061**

Toll-free Number: **800-880-0971**

Or, log onto the Starting Point website at **www.starting-point.org**, where you can find more information about Starting Point and even conduct your own child care search.

Starting Point hours are 8:30 am to 5 pm. If you need emergency child care after hours, dial First Call for Help at 216-436-2000 or 211.



Or use our toll-free number:

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www.starting-point.org

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