

# 15 Must-Haves for All Child Care Programs

Can you check yes for each of these 15 must-haves? Print this list and take it with you when you visit potential programs. Use the “yes” and “no” sections to compare up to three different child care options.

**Can you check yes for each of these 15 must-haves?**

Questions	Program 1 Name:		Program 2 Name:		Program 3 Name:	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is the program licensed? Ask to see the license. If not, ask why and then check your State’s licensing regulations to make sure the program is not required to be licensed. Look at the program’s past inspection reports and complaint history.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are visits from parents allowed and encouraged anytime the child care program is open? If you are not allowed to visit at any time (without calling ahead), this is not the best program for your child and you should consider a different program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the program have an appropriate number of adults looking after each group of children? This is known as the child-to-adult ratio. Recommended ratios are usually lower for younger children. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that child care centers have no more than 3 infants under 12 months old per adult.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are children, including infants, supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the director (of a child care center) have a college degree in child development or a related field? Do teachers (or the owner and operator of a family child care home) have a credential or college degree in early childhood education or a related field? Do all adults in the program receive ongoing training in working with children and child development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a planned schedule for each day or week that encourages learning and includes active and quiet play, group and individual learning activities, rest time, and meal times?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questions	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is the environment safe, clean, and well maintained? For example, are safe cribs provided for each infant, and does the program follow safe sleep guidelines? Are electrical outlets covered? Are medicines and dangerous items, including cleaning supplies, kept out of the reach of children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written discipline policy that explains how behavioral concerns are handled? Do discipline techniques included in the policy teach and guide children rather than punish them? For example, does the policy make it clear that there will be no spanking, humiliating, or excluding children? How does the program make sure that techniques are used in ways that are clear, consistent, and fair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the program feel warm and welcoming? Are the children happily engaged in activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the adults seem to enjoy working with and caring for the children? Are they actively involved with the children and do they pay attention to the needs of each child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have all adults working in the program had state and national background checks, including fingerprinting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the adults in the program been trained on how to prevent child abuse and how to recognize and report the signs of abuse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there someone present at all times who has been trained in pediatric first aid and CPR? Do staff know how to respond to an allergic reaction? Is there a first aid kit available? Are the adults in the program trained in how to prevent injuries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the program have a clear, written plan to follow if a child is injured, sick, or lost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written plan for responding to emergencies and disasters such as fire or flooding? Does the program conduct regular fire drills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Portions of this checklist have been adapted from content originally created by Child Care Aware of America ([Is This the Right Place for My Child? 38 Research-Based Indicators of Quality Child Care](#)). The checklist also draws on the Parent Toolkit, from the U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This document was developed with funds from Contract # HHSP2332015000711, Order # HHSP23337006T for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.