



# Choosing Quality Child Care for Children with Disabilities and High Support Needs

Are you looking for child care for a child with a disability or who needs a high level of support? Interviewing potential child care providers can help you learn whether they will be able to meet your child's unique needs. This checklist can guide you to use what you know about your child to think through what safe and quality child care looks like for them.

## Important notes:

- ★ **Child care types:** Many of the questions in this checklist refer to “providers” to include child care programs with more than one adult caregiver. However, you can use most of the questions with one individual provider as well. The questions can also be used to evaluate self-contained programs (for only children with specific disabilities) or inclusive settings (for children of all abilities).
- ★ **Disabilities and support needs:** You know your child best. Some of the questions on this list will apply to them, and some will not. Ask the questions that make sense for your child. Be sure to add any other questions you have in order to learn whether a child care option will meet your child's needs.

## Gather general information.

### Ask:

Do you have space for my child?

What are your rates for my child's age? Are there any other fees? Do you offer any discounts?

*If needed:* Do you accept any type of child care subsidy (e.g., state assistance, military assistance)?

What are the hours that care is provided? Do you ever offer hourly or respite care?

How long have the providers worked in the program? Would my child have a consistent caregiver or teacher?

Who would care for my child if their regular provider is sick or on vacation? Would my child be familiar with that person? Would they have the same training and experience as their regular provider?

**Gather general information.**

What languages do providers speak?

What education and experience do the providers have in child development and child care?

Do the providers receive training in areas like inclusion, anti-bias and anti-racism?

Have you cared for other children with needs like my child's?

Can you provide references for families you've worked with that I can contact?

*For school-age children:* Do you provide care on holidays, days off or school breaks?

**Observe:**

Do the providers seem to enjoy being with children?

*(When the provider meets your child)* Do the providers appear to enjoy my child specifically?

Do the books, displays, toys and environment reflect children with diverse abilities, races, genders, family structures and cultures?

**Learn about regulation and monitoring.**

**Ask:**

Do you have a child care license? If not, why not? If so, is it up-to-date and in good standing?

If you are licensed, when was your most recent inspection? Were there supervision or health and safety concerns found?

*Learn how to access child care inspection reports where you live, or ask the provider to see a copy of their most recent inspection report.*

Do all adults complete background checks before child care begins?

*If care is provided in someone else's home, this should include adults who live in the home.*

**Consider your child's health, safety and medical needs.**

**Ask:**

What is the adult-to-child ratio?

*Adult-to-child ratio is the number of children that each provider is responsible for. Ratio requirements are usually based on children's ages. However, some children with disabilities may need more one-on-one care and a closer adult presence than their peers without disabilities. Consider whether the adult-to-child ratio would allow your child to get the care and attention they need.*

How many children will be in the group with my child?

*Group size is the maximum number of children allowed in the group. Ask yourself whether your child could be safe, happy and calm in the group size offered.*

How often do providers sanitize surfaces and toys?

**Consider your child's health, safety and medical needs.**

How often do children and providers wash their hands?

Are the providers certified in infant and child CPR and First Aid?

How do providers ensure safe sleep for infants?

*Infants should always be placed on their backs to sleep on a firm sleep surface (like a crib or bassinet), with no blankets, pillows or other soft objects in the sleeping area.*

Do providers have the training needed to meet my child's medical needs? (e.g., Medication Administration Training [MAT], seizure first aid, feeding tube daily care, injections, EpiPen use, O2, etc.)? If not, would they be willing to be trained?

If meals and snacks are provided, is it food that my child will/can safely eat? If not, can my family supply the food?

How will providers ensure that my child does not have contact with foods they are allergic to?

Are providers able and willing to meet my child's toileting needs? (*For a school-age child*) Does this include a private place where my child can receive help using the toilet or having a diaper changed?

**Observe:**

Does the environment appear safe? (e.g., outlets covered, no broken toys or equipment, no choking or tripping hazards, chemicals and medications locked away, etc.)

Do surfaces, toys and the environment look and smell clean?

Do all children have their own sleep space (crib, cot, mat) that is the same every day?

**Consider the environment and activities.**

**Ask:**

Are the providers willing to make changes in the space or schedule to meet my child's needs?

What would a typical day look like for my child? How can I request changes to the schedule or activities to meet my child's needs?

Will my child be able to choose which activities they would like to do during much of the day?

Do you ever take field trips? If so, how would you support my child and keep them safe? Are there other options for care if we determine my child should not participate in a field trip?

**Observe:**

Is there anything about the environment that might be stressful for my child?

*Think about lights, smells, sounds and crowds.*

Are all child care areas accessible to my child? (e.g., entrances, exits, indoor and outdoor play spaces, hallways, bathrooms, eating and sleeping areas, etc.)

Are the tables, chairs and playground equipment accessible to my child?

*Consider the environment and activities.*

Is the space arranged in a way that would allow my child to move freely without tripping, getting stuck or bumping into furniture?

Would providers be able to help my child evacuate quickly in an emergency?

Will the activities and equipment meet my child's sensory needs?

*Consider whether your child needs frequent big body play; equipment or space to swing, jump or spin; quiet sensory activities (sand, play dough, paint, water); or other types of play.*

Are toys, books and other supplies located where my child can reach them? Are those items appropriate for my child's abilities and stage of development?

If my child needs to be lifted or carried, are the providers able to safely do so during normal care and in case of an emergency?

## Consider your child's communication and social support needs.

### Observe:

Are children encouraged to celebrate each person's differences and to support one another?

Do providers have consistently positive interactions with children and other adults?

Do providers have back-and-forth interactions with every child all day long?

Do providers adapt how they interact with each child according to how the child can and prefers to communicate?

Do providers help children learn how to communicate successfully with each other, especially if they communicate in different ways?

## Consider your child's behavioral and emotional support needs.

### Ask:

What steps are taken to prevent a child from leaving the child care areas on their own?

How do providers help children who need extra support with their behavior or emotions?

*Share examples of behavioral or emotional support that your child may need.*

How do providers help ease transitions for children who have a hard time moving from one activity to another?

How are guidance and discipline handled?

*Ask to see the guidance and/or discipline policies.*

What is the policy on restraining children for aggressive behaviors? Are providers trained in proper restraint techniques and de-escalation to prevent the need for restraints?

Have the providers been trained on managing aggressive behaviors?

Consider your child's *behavioral and emotional support needs*.

Have the providers received training in trauma-informed care in early childhood?

**Observe:**

Are the providers sensitive and responsive to the needs of all children?

Is there space away from groups or activities where my child could go for quiet and comfort if they are overwhelmed?

## Consider the provider's **communication and policies**.

**Ask:**

How do providers monitor and document children's development and health? How will they communicate their concerns? How can I share if I have concerns?

Do providers seek families' suggestions for accommodations that may be necessary or helpful for a child?

What is the sick child policy?

Does the provider have an open-door policy that allows families to stop by at any time?

*It is normal for providers to discourage visits during nap time or other busy times of the day. However, families should be able to drop in if they desire.*

Is there a policy on excluding a child from care for behavioral reasons? If so, what is the policy?

Are there written policies and procedures?

*Ask to see a copy of the policies. Review them carefully to make sure you agree with the requirements and expectations. Other policies to be aware of are the provider's media policy, pick-up policy and termination policy. If hiring an individual, you may need to create your own policies as a part of your child care contract. Find tips on what to include in a child care contract [here](#).*

## Consider how the provider can help **work toward your child's goals**.

**Ask:**

Do providers understand the goals, steps and strategies in my child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

Will providers work with or allow my child's therapy services to be held on-site during child care hours?

Do providers follow guidance from Early Intervention (EI), Early Childhood Special Education (ECSPED) or Special Education (SPED) on ways to adapt activities and environments according to children's IFSPs or IEPs? If possible, are the providers willing to communicate directly with EI, ECSPED or SPED?

Can I or a family member be present initially to help my child adjust or to help providers learn what works well for my child and what may not?

**When looking for the right child care provider, be sure to visit the providers that interest you.**

A visit will allow you to get a feel for the provider or program and give you time to ask questions and observe the environment and interactions. Use this page to take notes and compare several different providers.

**Provider 1**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

**Provider 2**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

**Provider 3**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: