

INVESTING IN QUALITY

(A publication of the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#), Washington DC)

INTRODUCTION

What constitutes a "[high quality](#)" child care program? An intricate blend of qualified and motivated people, an excellent work environment, and careful orchestration of the day-to-day business operation.

The quality of a child care program is based on:

- (1) **The daily experiences of the children and their families**, based on staff-child interactions, curriculum, and communication with parents.
- (2) **The staffing practices** that establish hiring procedures, staff qualifications, and staffing structure.
- (3) **The type of environment that supports the program**, including program administration, physical environment, health and safety, and nutrition.

This brochure is designed to provide you with concrete indicators of each of these elements of quality, based on a national, voluntary [Accreditation](#) system for child care centers and preschools, administered by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#). These indicators can provide you with the assurance that you are considering a quality program.

STAFF- CHILD INTERACTIONS

Interactions between children and staff provide opportunities for children to develop an understanding of self and others and are characterized by warmth, personal respect, individuality, and responsiveness. Staff facilitate interactions among children to provide opportunities for development of social skills and intellectual growth.

CONVERSATION

Adults spend the major share of their time talking to, listening to, and observing the children. Adults engage children in conversation, at their eye level, that encourages them to express their feelings and ideas.

ACTIVITY

The environment is primarily marked by pleasant conversation, spontaneous laughter, and exclamations of excitement rather than harsh, stressful noise or enforced quiet.

INVOLVED CHILDREN

Children and adults are actively involved with each other and with materials. Adults help children play cooperatively. Aimless wandering, fighting, and withdrawn behavior is kept to a minimum.

ACCESSIBLE TEACHERS

Children show no hesitation to approach adults with questions, bids for affection, and requests for help. Adults liberally provide individual attention when they are asked or when it is needed. Adults do not spend long periods talking to other adults or involved in housekeeping chores that don't include children.

AFFECTION

Affection is expressed spontaneously and frequently; children in distress are comforted.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum encourages children to be actively involved in the learning process, to experience a variety of activities appropriate to their stage of development, and to pursue their own interests in the context of life in the community and the world. Children learn through play that is planned by adults to teach them language, concepts about the physical world, social skills, problem-solving, motor coordination, and self-confidence.

VARIETY

A wide variety of materials is available that is geared to young children's interests, such as picture books, records, puppets, blocks, puzzles, paints, climbing equipment, and props for make-believe play.

INVOLVEMENT

Hands-on activity is encouraged. Materials are readily accessible to the children: For example, toys are on low shelves, not in toy boxes; children are busy and actively involved with the materials, rather than passively watching or following rote instructions.

CHILD-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES

The planned, daily schedule balances indoor and outdoor activities, quiet time and active time, periods when individual children choose their own activities and periods for group activities, and child-initiated and adult-initiated activities.

TEACHER-GUIDED ACTIVITIES

The teachers' role is to plan and arrange the learning environment. It is important to see adults asking questions of children, reading to children, making suggestions for "next steps," setting up new experiences such as a special visitor or holiday celebration, adding

new materials as children master familiar tasks, and observing and recording children's progress in acquiring new skills and interests.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Multi-racial, multi-cultural, non-sexist, non-stereotyping pictures, dolls, books, and materials are fully part of the classroom to teach children the value of diversity and to ensure that all children's backgrounds are respected.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Daily, routine activities are part of the learning process. For example, children are given responsibility for setting tables at mealtime and helping with clean-up during the day.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

All communication between center and families is based on the concept that parents are the principal influence in children's lives. Parents are welcome as observers and contributors to the program.

INFORMED PARENTS

Parents are given written information about what to expect from the program and what the program expects from them through a parent handbook, newsletters, bulletin boards, and other similar measures.

HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Parents have opportunities to communicate with the staff about their child's needs and progress through notes, phone calls, conferences, and face-to-face conversations at arrival and pick-up times.

WELCOME ACCESS

Parents are welcome in the center at all times and are encouraged to participate in a variety of ways, such as eating lunch with the children, observing during the day, volunteering, and attending parent meetings.

STAFF HIRING AND QUALIFICATIONS

The quality and competence of the staff are critical determinants of the quality of an early childhood program. It is critical that the program is staffed by adults trained in child development, who can recognize and provide for children's needs.

CAREFUL HIRING

Hiring procedures include careful checking of personal references of all potential new employees. New staff members serve a probationary employment period during which the director makes a professional judgment of their suitability for working with children.

TRAINED TEACHERS

Requirements for directors and teachers include training in child development or early

childhood education. The training must include specific instruction in the age group for which the adult is responsible. The director has also received early childhood training and has experience in management.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

The program provides regular in-service training for staff to improve and expand skills in working with children and families.

RECORD KEEPING

Accurate, current records are kept of staff qualifications, including transcripts, references, and documentation of in-service education.

STAFFING STRUCTURE

The program is sufficiently staffed and organized to assure that the needs of individual children are met, and to maintain positive interactions and constructive activity among the children and staff.

SUPERVISION

There is a sufficient number of adults for the number of children in the program to ensure adequate supervision, frequent personal contact, and time for individual instruction as needed.

CONTINUITY

Staffing patterns are planned so the same adults have primary responsibility for the same children each day. This allows for greater consistency in the daily experiences of children and enables the staff to be highly familiar with each child's needs, interests, and background.

SMALL GROUPS

Group sizes are limited to facilitate constructive interaction activity.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The quality of the early childhood experience for children is affected by the efficiency and stability of the program's administration. Effective administration includes good communication, positive community relations, fiscal stability, and attention to the needs and working conditions of staff members.

WRITTEN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The program has written policies and operating procedures.

RECORD KEEPING

Program records, such as attendance, health, budgets, and confidential personnel files are maintained and regularly updated.

INSURANCE

Accident and liability insurance is maintained for children and adults.

STAFF MEETINGS

Staff meetings are held regularly to facilitate joint planning.

SELF-EVALUATION

The educational plan and budget are assessed to identify program strengths and weaknesses and to specify program goals each year.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The indoor and outdoor physical environments are designed to promote involvement in activities and easy, constructive interactions among adults and children.

SPACE

The amount of space is adequate so children are not crowded and freedom of movement is encouraged.

EASY MOVEMENT

The room arrangement and placement of materials make it easy to identify different activity areas (block building, book corner, water play, and dress-up areas, for example) and to move from one area to another. Views are not obstructed, so adults can easily observe the children.

ACTIVITY AREAS

Indoor space is arranged to provide a variety of activities. For example, there are private areas and public areas, and there is space for both active and quiet activities.

EXERCISE

Outdoor space and equipment also allow a variety of activities such as riding, climbing, balancing, sand play and digging, as well as individual play. The outdoor area includes a variety of surfaces such as soil, sand, grass, hill, flat section, and hard areas for wheel toys.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health and safety of children and adults are protected. Good programs act to prevent illness and accidents, are prepared to deal with emergencies, and educate children about healthy practices.

LICENSED PROGRAM

The program is licensed, and is therefore in compliance with legal requirements for the health and safety of children in group settings.

HEALTH RECORDS

Health records, including immunization records and emergency contact information, are complete and available for each child.

MAINTENANCE

The facilities are maintained in a safe, clean condition and are in good repair.

SUPERVISION

Children are supervised by adults at all times and are released only to authorized persons.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

When transportation is provided for children by the center, vehicles are equipped with age-appropriate restraint devices.

ACCIDENT REPORTING

All medical problems and accidents are recorded and reported to staff and parents. Suspected incidents of child abuse by parents, staff, or others are reported to appropriate local agencies.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Written emergency procedures are posted and staff are familiar with these procedures and with evacuation routes.

HAND WASHING

Staff wash their hands before feeding and after diapering. Children wash hands after toileting and before meals.

SAFE EQUIPMENT

Cushioning materials such as mats or sand are used under climbers, slides, and swings. Equipment of this type is stable.

PRODUCT SAFETY

All potentially dangerous products such as medicines or cleaning supplies are stored in original, labeled containers in locked cabinets inaccessible to children.