



# Determining the Right Preschool for Your Child

## For Children Ages Three – Five Years Old

## What Should This Checklist Be Used For?

A child's early years are the foundation for his or her future development, providing a strong base for lifelong learning. Early childhood education is essential for the development of learning abilities, including cognitive and social development. Research continues to emphasize the importance of quality early childhood education as an essential building block for a child's future success.

Selecting the appropriate child care center is critical to ensure your child has access to the appropriate level of cognitive development in a fun and nurturing environment.

This checklist is meant to help you **assess the quality** of child care centers in your area as you search for the right facility for your child.

## Key Terms in Early Childhood Education

**Assessments:** Quality learning centers typically utilize screening tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ); these assessments can be used to assess the developmental performance of children across the areas of communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem solving, and personal-social skills. These tools can also be used to identify children that would benefit from in-depth evaluation for developmental delays.

**Center-Based Child Care vs. Home-Based Child Care:** Center-based preschools tend to be larger and have more employees than a home-based center. Some advantages of center-based care include: more resources and supplies, more socialization, teachers who may be certified for certain age groups, school-like environment, more enrichment activities such as field trips, and usually a more standardized curriculum. Home-based centers are run out of private homes with the owner functioning in multiple roles. These centers usually have smaller class sizes and mixed age groups and provide more of a family type environment.

**Pedagogy:** Refers to the theory and practice of education, or the act of teaching. It can be thought of as the "how" in terms of "how" children are educated. For example, the use of a curriculum (learning theory) along with embracing active learning (learning practice) is an example of pedagogy.

**Developmental Milestones:** The physical and behavioral signs of development in infants and children (e.g., rolling over, crawling, walking, talking).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice:** The practice of a strong educator who knows and adapts his or her teaching practices to meet the students where they are developmentally. These practices can be based on theories of child development, individually identified strengths and needs uncovered through assessment, and the child’s cultural background.

**Active Supervision:** The most effective strategy for creating a safe environment and preventing injuries for young children. It requires focused attention and intentional observation, requiring staff to be positioned appropriately so they can see all children; watching, counting and listening at all times.

**State Licensing Authority:** As a parent, it’s important that you familiarize yourself with the name and website of your State’s Child Care Licensing Authority. For example, in Texas, Child Care Licensing is part of the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. In Georgia, it is part of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.

**Licensing Violation:** When a learning center violates a state requirement related to health, safety, ratios, etc. they receive a licensing violation. In some states, violations are rated by severity on a scale (e.g., high, medium, low). Before considering a child care center as a possible destination for your child, **always** check for licensing violations on the state website if available. If a center has a track record of many violations, it may not be the best choice for your family.

**STEM/STEAM:** Term to group **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering and **M**ath academic disciplines. The integration of **A**rts creates the abbreviation STEAM.

## Resources: State Child Care Licensing Websites

Before visiting a child care center, you should **always** consult the state licensing page of the center you are planning to visit. The steps below outline how to access a center’s licensing page:

1. Find the state you live in below and **click the link** to access the licensing page
  - a. Keep in mind that each state’s licensing page is laid out differently
2. When you access the page, you will be able to **search for the child care center** you are planning to visit. Please have the following information handy when searching:
  - a. Name of the child care center
  - b. Address and zip code of the center
3. After searching for the center using the information above, **click the name of the center** you are planning to visit to access the page

4. On the state licensing page, you will be able to see the following information:
  - a. Total capacity of the center, features (drop off / pick up, cafeteria, infant care, after school programs, summer camp, etc.), opening and closing time, and much more
  - b. The **most important information is the centers licensing history or inspection reports**. On center pages in many of the states, you will be to see approximately 3-5 years of licensing history for each center
  - c. We recommend you **review *at least* the last year of inspection reports** / licensing violations for the center you plan to visit

**Reference: State Licensing Center Websites**

*If your state is not listed below, Google "State Name Childcare Licensing" to find your local licensing website.*

**California:** <https://www.cclid.dss.ca.gov/carefacilitysearch/>

- Scroll to the bottom of the site and click "child care"
- Includes 5 years of inspections, ability to sort by violations

**Florida:** <https://cares.myflfamilies.com/PublicSearch>

- Inspection reports are available for the last 3 years. Report marked in green are reports that found a violation at the center

**Georgia:** <https://families.dec.state.ga.us/ChildCare/Search>

- Includes at least 3 years of licensing history for each center and review "enforcement actions" taken by the state if severe violations were found

**Illinois:** <https://sunshine.dcf.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/Daycare/ProviderLookup.aspx>

- Basic information only
- New, Quality ranking system for Illinois' Early Learning Programs. Gold, Silver or Bronze Circle of Quality designations indicate how program performed over 15 standards:
  - <https://www.excelerateillinois.com/provider-search/>

**New York:** <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare/looking.asp>

- Includes 5 years of licensing history. Able to find names of centers that are subjected to "Enforcement Actions" / have serious licensing violations

**Texas:** [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Care/Search\\_Texas\\_Child\\_Care/ppFacilitySearchDayCare.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Search_Texas_Child_Care/ppFacilitySearchDayCare.asp)

- Includes 5 years of licensing history for each center and review violations by severity (high, medium, low)

**Virginia:** <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc2.cgi>

- Includes 5 years of licensing history. Able to click on specific violations and read the narrative as well as the corrective actions taken

## Basic School Information

School Name and Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Tour: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ Licensed from State:  YES  NO

Tuition cost per week: \_\_\_\_\_ Tuition cost per month: \_\_\_\_\_

## Before You Visit – Online Research

These questions should be researched using the school's website and other online sources *prior* to your visit. Online research should take approximately 1 - 1.5 hours to complete.

- ▶ **Is the program** accredited by an external agency (NAEYC, NAC, AMS/AMI)? \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the school have web cameras with constant access to your child's classroom?** (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **What is the name of the curriculum?** \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the school post a menu online and are menu offerings nutritious** (limited processed foods)? (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **How frequently do teachers provide updates to parents?** (newsletter monthly/quarterly, teacher/ parent conferences quarterly) \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the school have strong online ratings** (Google business reviews, Facebook reviews, Yelp reviews greater than 4 stars)? (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the curriculum seem to have a balance of activities** (art, music, physical, literacy, STEAM, etc)? \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the school have less than 3 licensing violations in the last year** (if reported by the state, see pg 5)? \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Does the school have a mobile app for parent updates?** (Y/N) \_\_\_\_\_

## During Your Tour/Visit of the Facility

Score: \_\_/11

These questions should be answered during the tour, or immediately following the tour. A typical tour of a childcare center usually lasts about 15-20 minutes. Each question counts as "1 point" for a total of 11 points.

- Secure entry into the building** for parents and students (buzzed entry only, secure sign-in process)
- Ample space for students inside the classroom** to play vigorously (including running)
- There is evidence of learning, fun and engagement** such as art/projects on the walls, smiling and engaged children, happy staff, etc.
- At least 4-5 interest centers are used including an area protected from active play** such as a reading nook or circle time area. Look for a variety of materials and areas for play: blocks, science, art, dramatic play (kitchen), table toys, etc.
- A clear and easy to follow schedule is posted for parents** inside or outside the classroom
- There are no visible safety hazards** such as small toys in room, inattentive staff, tripping hazards, blocked doors, etc
- There are bathrooms in the classroom** and are devoted potty-training bathrooms available [where relevant]
- The staff seems genuinely engaged in the classroom with the children**
- Outdoor area appears safe** (soft landing areas, ample shade, access to water, fenced in, etc)
- Allergies of students are clearly posted** within the classroom and in eating areas
- The Center appears and smells clean**

## During the tour: Questions to Ask the Center Director

Typically, at the end of a tour, parents will be able to ask questions to the Center Director in his or her office. See below for suggested questions to learn more about the center.

- ▶ **Can you provide me an overview of your health and safety procedures at the center?**
- ▶ **How often are parent events held, and what are the largest events of the year?**
- ▶ **How does your center provide a loving environment?**
- ▶ **What is your sick/injury policy at the center if a child is sick or suffers an injury at the center?**
- ▶ **How often do children go on field trips [if relevant]?**
- ▶ **Could you tell me about the benefits of your curriculum?**
- ▶ **At the end of the academic year, what can I expect my child to know? What milestones will they achieve?**
- ▶ **What will be the max teacher/student ratio in my child's class?**
- ▶ **How do you handle behavior issues?**



- ▶ **Is there a waiting list?**
- ▶ **If the child has special needs, what accommodation is available?**
  
- ▶ **Beside the weekly/monthly tuition, are there any additional fees such as activities, food, field trips?**
  
- ▶ **Are there any financial aid programs available?**
  
- ▶ **What documents are needed for my child to attend?**
  
- ▶ **What activities are done to support infant development?**
  
- ▶ **Is the Director always on site? If not, who is in charge?**

## **During the Tour: Additional COVID-Related Questions**

To ensure your child care provider is following best practices and guidelines set forth by the CDC and State authorities, we recommend asking the following questions before re-enrolling your child. Please compare the answers to these questions to CDC and State guidelines.

- ▶ **Are teachers required to wear masks and other PPE in your facility?**
  
- ▶ **What is the screening procedure for allowing parents and children inside your facility (temperature checks, questionnaire, etc)?**

- ▶ **What is your maximum class size and teacher/student ratio during COVID-19?**
  
- ▶ **How will my child's class be kept separate from other age groups?**
  
- ▶ **How is cleaning done throughout the facility and in my child's classroom?**
  
- ▶ **How and how often are toys disinfected?**
  
- ▶ **How is food preparation handled for lunch and snacks [if available]?**
  
- ▶ **What are your revised drop-off and pick-up procedures?**
  
- ▶ **What is your policy if a teacher or student is sick or positive for COVID-19?**
  
- ▶ **Are parents notified if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your facility?**