

The Search for the Perfect Fit  
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Once you have decided on the need for child care, start your search. The search can begin at the local Child Care Resource and Referral (here is a link to the CCR&R for Kane and DuPage Counties: <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=euLRI7OZH&b=177294>), yellow pages, classified ads, churches, community groups, websites, or through networking with other parents. Beginning the search early allows for ample time for visits and avoiding long waiting lists.

The first decision when choosing child care is the setting. Type of Child Care Settings:

Child Care Center (it may be a stand-alone business or part of a chain)

Family Child Care Home (child care provided for one or more families within the child care provider's home)

In-Home Caregivers (this includes nannies who are hired to come to work in the child's home and those hired to live and work in the child's home)

"Kith and Kin" Childcare (child care provided by relatives, friends, or neighbors, either within the child's home or the caregiver's home)

While each setting has their pros and cons, ultimately the decision is determined by what is the best fit for your child and family. These settings will differ regarding provider credentials, schedules, fees, proximity, availability, and accessibility for children with special needs. The following is a link to Child Care Aware, which is a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). The Child Care Aware website may be used to assist parents in making choices about child care: <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/child-care-101/types-of-care/>

Once you have determined a setting, create a list of providers for child care and begin scheduling visits or, in the case of in-home caregivers, schedule provider interviews. At child care centers or family child care homes, visits can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. A longer visit can paint a more complete picture of the setting. During the initial visit, it is important to meet with the director and observe the center or family child care home. At this meeting, you will be given the opportunity to inquire about your list of questions. No question is a silly question when it concerns the care of your child. The Child Care Aware website suggests areas to consider when evaluating providers.

Make sure you are using this time wisely by doing your homework prior to meeting with the director. Ask questions that could not be answered by looking on the center's website, flyer, or brochures. This may vary from center to center. Preparing for these meetings will allow you to ask more specific questions that will in turn help in determining the right fit for your child.

Some things to think about concerning child care:

Credentials: License, Licensed-Exempt, Accreditation, References

Enrollment: Number of Children Served, License Capacity, Length of Waiting List

Classroom: Age Group Served, Teacher/Child Ratios, Age Groupings, Size of Groups

Center schedule: Hours, Holiday Schedule, Center Closings, Drop-Off, Pick-Up, Transportation

Cost: Fees, Scholarships, Discounts, Child Care Subsidy, Late Pick-Up Fee, Billing

Supplies: Provided, Needed, Replacement

Parent Involvement: Parent Visits, Expectations, Communication, Parent-Provider Conference

Staff: Number, Hours, Breaks, Turnover, Full/Part-time, Benefits

Staff requirements: Education, Background Check, CPR/First Aid, Credentials, Training

Child's Schedule: Daily Routine, Indoor/Outdoor Activities, Walks, Field Trips, Television

Policies: Discipline, Inappropriate Behavior, Developmental Delays

Health: Immunization, Sick Child, Medication, Hygiene, Sanitation, Hand Washing

Food: Breakfast, Lunch, Snack, Bringing Food

Nap: Schedule, Where

Since child care will be a significant part of your child's time away from home, it is important that you and your child feel comfortable with the child care. After enrollment, begin building the relationship with the caregivers. If you choose a child care center or family child care home, build relationships with the director, teachers (child care providers), and other parents.