

Excerpt from:

Parents' Guide to Selecting and Monitoring Child Care in BC



The Early Years of a child's life are vital

The care and early learning opportunities children receive in quality child care settings help children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially. A quality child care setting helps to prepare children for school and enables parents to work or study knowing their child is well cared for.

Scientists and researchers around the world suggest that the brain growth and development of infants and young children is deeply affected by their early experiences. Positive experiences early in a child's life have been shown to have an important impact on their development and help them to succeed later in life. This is the time when parents, can help to set the foundation for their children's lifelong development.

Finding the right care arrangement for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent, because that care provider will have a significant impact on your child's life. Choose a care provider who will work with you as a partner in your child's development, one who will respect and support your ideas, and who will nurture and stimulate your child - in short, a care provider who will provide you and your child with quality child care.

Quality Child Care is built on co-operation and trust, and leads to rewarding relationships involving children, parents, and care providers. Care providers should genuinely like children; understand their differences; be able to recognize behaviour that indicates that a child needs help; be aware of cultural and religious diversity; and should provide stimulating activities designed for different children's age groups, interests, and developmental levels.

A quality child care arrangement has care providers who nurture children's development and provide an environment that:

- has a happy, relaxed atmosphere;
- ensures children are well supervised, safe, and secure;
- demonstrates positive behaviour guidance;
- is well planned and inviting;
- promotes children's self-esteem and independence;
- offers age-appropriate stimulating activities that help children learn and grow;
- is clean, healthy, and comfortable;
- has quiet space for rest or sleep;
- offers a range of books, creative materials, toys and both indoor and outdoor play areas
- encourages parents to become involved in their children's care.

Parents can recognize quality child care by looking for characteristics in the setting and provider that will help ensure the well-being of their children, and by asking questions to feel confident that their child is well cared for.

The First Call

Begin your call by describing your situation and needs. Questions you might want to ask in this first phone call may include:

- Are you licensed under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act?
 - If you are licensed, can I see a copy of your most recent inspection report? Is your program currently under investigation by the local health authority?
 - If you are not licensed, are you registered with the local Child Care Resource and Referral program?
- How many children do you care for?
- What ages are the children in your care?
- What are your hours of operation? What days are you closed?
- What are your fees? What is your refund policy?
- What child care experience/training do you (or any other care providers) have?
- Do you accept children who require extra support? Why/why not?
- Are you willing to adapt your program to meet the needs of a child who requires extra support?
- Does your program have any special features?
- What do you do with the children over a typical day/week?
- Can you give me at least two references, preferably of parents whose children attend your child care setting?
- Who supplies diapers/blankets/meals/snacks - parent or provider?
- What are the arrangements for when you (or other care providers) are ill, on holiday, or in case of emergency?
- Do you encourage parent involvement? Can I visit whenever I wish?
- Does anyone in your child care setting smoke? (Note: Smoking is not permitted on the premises of licensed facilities when children are present).
- When can I come visit your center? Can I bring my child?
- Do you have a space available? If not:
 - Is there a waiting list? How long is the waiting list?
- Do you know of any other centres or care providers with vacancies?

Observing the Child Care Setting:

If you find a child care setting you like from that first phone call and there is space available, set a time to go and observe the child care setting and meet the care provider.

Since there is much to look at and talk about, you may want to use the following checklist as a tool to help you remember what you've seen. The checklist will help you look for important indicators of quality child care. Space is provided for you to note your observations and assist you to make an informed decision.



Name of Child Care Facility: _____

Type of Child Care Setting: _____

The Care Providers

The quality of the relationship between children and their care providers is the most important factor in assessing quality care. When your child is away from you, your child needs people to trust - people who genuinely enjoy children, make them feel secure, give individual attention, and provide a rich environment for play and learning.

Does the care provider(s):	Notes:
Listen to children when they speak and respond with interest and respect.	
Accept and value the children's ideas and suggestions.	
Set reasonable limits for behaviour and respond to inappropriate behaviour in a fair and consistent manner.	
Respond with care and understanding to a child who may be fearful, shy, upset, hurt or angry.	
Encourage children to cooperate with each other, share and take turns.	
Display a sense of humour.	
Make the children feel good about themselves and other people.	
Take time to talk to/play with children individually.	
Initiate conversations with the children other than instructions, commands, and announcements.	
Promote problem-solving skills and a sense of independence.	
Allow children a choice in many situations.	
Speak to each other, children and you calmly and respectfully.	
Supervise the space at all times.	

The Daily Program

Children's time in a program is important and contributes greatly to their development. Exposing children to a variety of activities and experiences will stimulate cognitive development and imagination and build confidence and self-esteem.

The program should consist of age and developmentally appropriate activities, learning experiences, routines, and staff/child interactions. Daily opportunities may include sand and water play, dress up and pretend play and outdoor activities. Books, puzzles and art supplies should be readily accessible for children's exploration.

Does the child care program:	Notes:
Allow for both individual play and group play.	
Provide opportunities for children to explore the environment in different ways such as through music and movement, dress up/pretend play, games, art, construction toys, and outdoor play.	
Offers a balance between free (unstructured) play and organized 'adult led) activities.	
Have a consistent yet flexible schedule.	
Follow routines for rest, toileting, and mealtimes in a relaxed manner.	
Monitor television/video/computer (if used) program content and viewing times and length.	
Reflect our multicultural society.	
Practice proper hand washing and toileting/diapering.	
Provide drinks and snacks that are healthy and nutritious.	
Have a care philosophy that fits with your own beliefs about how children should be raised.	

The Physical Environment

Space that is attractive and thoughtfully organized contributes to the overall function of the child care setting, the amount of space, access to the outdoors, arrangement of rooms, availability of materials, air quality, equipment, and lighting play a role not only in safety and health but in children's well-being, happiness, and creativity.

Ask to see the kitchen and eating area, washroom, and sleep areas, as well as indoor and outdoor play activity areas.

Is the child care setting:		Notes:
	Safe (cupboards with cleaning agents are locked; kitchen knives are out of reach, stairs are gated etc.). Are the toys clean, safe and in good repair.	
	Warm, inviting, and appealing, are there a variety of toys and activities and materials available.	
	Well lit, comfortable in temperature with child sized furniture and equipment.	
	Clean, organized, well-maintained and safe.	
Does the environment include:		
	Areas for both quiet and active play, an area for children to be alone, are the play materials inside and out, age and developmentally appropriate.	
	A safe and easily accessible outdoor play area.	
	A variety of safety precautions; fire extinguishers, stairway gates, smoke detectors and electrical outlet covers.	

For parents of children who require extra support:

- *Look closely at the indoor space available at each child care setting, particularly if your child needs more space to move, to manipulate a wheelchair or use support equipment.*
- *Outdoors, you may want to make sure there is enough space for your child between and around swings, slides, etc. You should also look carefully at the playground surface. A gravel surface or stairs, for example, may not be suitable for a child who uses a wheelchair or walker.*

Meeting With the Care Provider

Child care involves both a business relationship and a caring partnership. In addition to comments and questions regarding what you have (or have not) observed, an open discussion about what you can expect of care providers and what they can expect from you will help avoid misunderstandings and build the basis for a good relationship in the future.

<i>Some questions you may wish to ask the care provider:</i>	<i>Notes:</i>
Why did you become a child care provider? What is your training and experience?	
What is the most satisfying part about caring or children?	
How long have you been a care provider?	
Are you licensed? How many children are you licensed to care for?	
How many children are in your program?	
How many staff are in your facility? What training/qualifications do they have?	
How long have the staff being working with you?	
Do you/staff have first aid training?	
Do you have gradual entry/orientation for new children to become comfortable in your facility?	
How do you handle difficult behaviours? (e.g., a child who was biting or refuses to eat)	
How do you guide children who misbehave?	
What arrangements do you have for children who do not sleep at rest time?	
Where are medications stored, who administers them, and how are they administered?	

Do you encourage parental involvement or assign parental responsibilities?	<i>Notes:</i>
Can I call or stop by regularly to find out how my child is?	
What are your procedures if a child falls ill or in case of an accident? What about emergency preparation and fire drills?	
What are the arrival and departure times? What if I am late picking up my child?	
What is your pre-payment and refund policy?	
How much notice do I have to give if I want to withdraw my child from our facility?	
How much notice is needed when I want to take my child away on vacation? Am I charged when my child is on vacation or away ill?	
What happens when you are ill? Who will replace you? Do they have experience and training caring for children?	
If you close the facility for a day/week and I have to find alternate care, will I still be charged by you?	
Do you have liability insurance? (Insurance is not required, but strongly recommended.)	
Is your facility linked with other services in the community (drop-in programs, schools, or others)?	
Are there other professionals who work in the centre? If so, who are they and what do they do?	

Licensed child care facilities must have a written statement describing the methods of guidance and discipline that they use. The Child Care Licensing Regulation prohibits the use of physical punishment, humiliation, and other discipline methods that undermine a child's self-esteem.

There are many approaches related to guidance and discipline, the goal remains constant: to build children's self-confidence and encourage socially acceptable behaviour. A booklet called [Guiding Children's Behaviours](#) may be helpful and is available online.

Unlicensed/Licence-not-required child care provider

Unlicensed - Licence-not-required (LNR) or Registered License-not-required (RLNR) child care providers can only care for two children or one sibling group of any age, that are not related to the care provider by blood or marriage, at any one time.

LNR care providers may or may not have had formal child care training or previous child care experience. Care providers set their own hours of operation, fee schedules and operating policies. Parents are solely responsible for assessing and monitoring the quality of care provided in any unlicensed child care arrangements.

<i>Additional questions for unlicensed child care providers:</i>	<i>Notes:</i>
Who else lives in the home, how old are they, and what is their relationship to you?	
Is your child/children part of the child care setting?	
How do your family members feel about you providing child care in the home?	
Will you be present and in charge during all the hours child care is provided?	
Who will replace you when you are ill or on vacation?	
Do you have first aid training?	
Can you provide a written medical reference about your physical, emotional and mental health?	
Have criminal record checks been completed on yourself and any one else living in your home who are over the age of 12?	

Making Your Decision

Once you've visited several child care settings, it's time to consider how each meets your family's needs and values.

- Review the information you gathered and discuss it with family and friends.
- Trust your own initial feelings about the physical environment, the program and the people. If the setting feels right to you, it will probably be good for your child.
- Finally, contact the setting you've selected to confirm your decision and the date your child will start.

Making your child's transition to child care successful

- Talk to your child about the new child care, and let them know about the routine and what they will be doing.
- Tell your child the names of the child care provider/s
- Talk to them about arrangements - who is dropping off and picking them up.
- Arrange a visit to the program and familiarize your child with the program, space and people. Give your child time to play, and potentially have them stay for a short time to give them time to settle.
- Talk to the child care provider/s about your child's likes/dislikes, sleeping and eating habits.
- Tell the child care provider/s if your child had a restless night, isn't feeling well, didn't eat breakfast, and share with them if any changes are happening in the child's life.
- Try to get involve in any special events.
- Discuss regularly with the provider/s your child's progress, and any concerns you have about your child.
- Be punctual when picking up children, call if you must be late, and be prepared to pay a late fee.
- Talk to your child about their day at child care.

Signing an Agreement

Licensed child care facilities - and some licence-not-required care providers - will have a parent information package that includes policy and procedures, and a written child care agreement for you to sign. If they do not, you will need to draw up an agreement - to be signed by both you and the care provider, setting out the terms you have discussed and agreed to.

Important! For the safety and well-being of your child, it is essential that the child care setting maintain accurate and current records and information. These records should include the child's medical history, any known allergies or health concerns, family and emergency contacts, and the names of those authorized to pick up the child.

The child care agreement may include such items as:

- Start date, hours and days of care;
- Child care fees and when they are to be paid and a refund policy;
- Holidays, when the facility is closed;
- Termination of care policy;
- Name and contact information of parents;
- Name and contact information of care provider;
- Name and date of birth of the child/ren;
- What to do if the child is ill;
- Who may pick up the child;
- Arrangements for snacks, meals, and supplies (extra clothes, diapers);
- How the child's behaviour is to be guided; and
- What to do in an emergency, including permission to call a doctor or ambulance.

Monitoring the Child Care Setting

You will want to make sure that the child care setting you have chosen continues to be good. It is very important that you visit the child care setting regularly to see for yourself how your child is doing.

While Health Authorities are responsible for monitoring standards of care within licensed child care settings, they cannot visit these settings as often as parents. And in the case of LNR settings - particularly those not registered with the local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program, parents may be the only people keeping an eye on their child's care.

Leave yourself time to talk to the care provider both when you drop off and pick up your child. If you have any concerns or questions, talk to the care provider and try to arrive at a solution that works for both of you.

Talk to your child about how the day went and listen to your child's feelings. It will of course take some time for a child to adjust to a new situation, but this should not last long. Be alert for warning signs - such as changes in your child's usual behaviour - that could indicate something is wrong with your child care arrangement.

If you are worried about possible abuse of your child or any child in a child care setting, you must report your fears immediately to your local Ministry for Children and Family Development office, or - if the facility is licensed - to the Medical Health Officer through your local health authority. You can also call the Helpline for Children, toll-free. Dial 310-1234 (no area code needed).

Observe how your child reacts, if your child:

- is unusually fearful of going to the child care facility,
- is anxious to leave,
- has unexplained bruises or other signs of physical abuse, or
- talks about inappropriate actions on the part of adults or other children at the child care setting, you may want to consider making other child care arrangements and notifying the appropriate authorities.

Any concerns that a child has been mistreated can also be reported to the Health Authority Community Care Licensing Program.