

Choosing Child Care

Choosing a program for your infant, preschooler, or school age child is a very personal choice for each family. The best program is the one that matches your own child's temperament, likes and dislikes, health, interests, and behavior. A program should also be compatible with your family's philosophies, and schedule, and should provide a safe environment that is fun, educational, and nurturing.

Choosing child care is just the first step. It is important to maintain an open dialogue and to play an active role in your child's care in order to promote a successful experience for you and for your child.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN EARLY EDUCATION OR AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

- ✓ The EEC license!
- ✓ Space is clean and inviting.
- ✓ You can imagine your child learning and having fun.
- ✓ Activity level in the program matches your child's personality.
- ✓ The behavior management policies of the program are compatible with your parenting philosophy.
- ✓ The daily routine includes indoor and outdoor play and a mix of active and quiet activities.
- ✓ Teachers/providers are qualified to work with children and are warm and welcoming.
- ✓ Snacks and meals are well balanced and nutritious.
- ✓ Parents are invited to play an active role.
- ✓ Staff engage children in activities and conversation.
- ✓ Books and toys match the age of the children.

TIPS, BY AGE GROUP

INFANTS

- ✓ Caregivers are responsive, nurturing, engaged, and clearly enjoy babies.
- ✓ Caregivers take primary responsibility for specific babies to create consistency in care and the opportunity to establish secure relationships.
- ✓ Space allows developing infants to freely explore their environment.
- ✓ Organized, comfortable sleeping, eating, diapering and playing areas.
- ✓ A daily routine that meets the needs of each baby.

TODDLERS

- ✓ Caregivers set clear and consistent limits, but do so with kindness.
- ✓ Space is stimulating to allow active toddlers to safely explore their environment.
- ✓ Caregivers spend most of the time engaging with the children at the children's level (on the floor, at low tables).
- ✓ There are books in the space for children to look at on their own and that are read to them by adults.

PRESCHOOLERS

- ✓ Teachers plan activities that engage the interests and learning needs of the children.
- ✓ There are opportunities for children to choose activities, or to play alone, or with other children.
- ✓ Children access toys and materials on their own at appropriate times during the day.
- ✓ Opportunities for children to help and cooperate in the classroom.

SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

- ✓ Involve your child in the selection of a program which best meets his or her interests, such as hands-on activities, art, music, science, sports, creative dance, community involvement, field trips, academic support; or a combination of these activities.
- ✓ The program provides space for socialization and a quiet space to work on homework or to have down time and has a rich learning atmosphere that supports your child's education.
- ✓ The program seems to encourage your child's independence and builds self-esteem.

LOOK FOR THE EEC LICENSE

The EEC License means:

- Programs must be healthy, safe, and offer activities that help your child develop and grow;
- Providers have training in first aid and are CPR certified;
- Providers have specialized training in child development, and curriculum implementation;
- All employees are required to undergo a criminal background check; and
- Programs must maintain appropriate ratios of teachers to children.

To view EEC licensing regulations, and teacher/provider requirements, please visit: www.eec.state.ma.us

QUESTIONS TO ASK PROSPECTIVE CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

- ? Is your program EEC licensed or authorized as license exempt?
- ? Do you have any openings?
- ? What hours are you open?
- ? What are the ages of the other children my child would be grouped with?
- ? What is the ratio of adults to children?
- ? Are there holidays or other dates that the program closes?
- ? Do you offer part-time or flexible care?
- ? What backup care is provided in case of provider illness?
- ? What activities would my child experience?
- ? How will you accommodate my child with special needs?
- ? What is your policy when a child is ill?
- ? Do you have a written discipline policy?
- ? What type of indoor and outdoor activities do you provide?

■ Types of Child Care

Almost all child care provided outside a child's own home, whether it be in a child care center, an after school program, or in a family child care home, must be licensed or authorized by EEC. There are different types of licensed providers for which EEC sets rules for health, safety, and staffing:

Center-Based Programs

Centers serve children full or part-time in groups or classrooms of children. Children are usually grouped according to age:

- **Infant/Toddler:** birth through two years and nine months old.
- **Nursery Schools, Preschools, and Pre-K:** two years and nine months old to kindergarten.
- **Early Head Start/Head Start:** infants through five years old whose families receive public assistance, children with a disability, and low-income families.
- **School-Age:** five through fourteen years old (these programs are sometimes called extended day or after school programs and are open before and/or after school and/or during school vacations).

Family Child Care

Family child care is delivered in a provider's home. Children in a family child care home may range in age from infant through school age and programs may serve between a maximum of six or ten children (with an additional assistant).

The current license for all these programs will be posted in a prominent location, so look for the license.

Some Family Child Care Providers are part of a *Family Child Care System*, which may provide additional supports to providers and families.

Other Authorized Programs

EEC also authorizes programs that are license-exempt, such as **Public School Preschool Programs**. To find out if your local Public School offers an early childhood program, call your local public school, or visit the Department of Education's web site at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

EEC'S MISSION

EEC will lead the way in helping Massachusetts children and families reach their full potential. By providing and coordinating a range of services and assistance, EEC will continuously improve the quality, affordability, and accessibility of early education and care in the Commonwealth.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR CHOOSING CHILD CARE

- The EEC website for listings of all licensed child care providers: www.eec.state.ma.us.
- Your local Community Partnerships for Children Council (CPC), for preschool programs.
- Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R), for additional information regarding child care providers.

To find the CPC and/or CCR&R agency in your area, please visit "Find Child Care" at the EEC website www.eec.state.ma.us.

You may also call 1-800-345-0131 to find the CCR&R agency that serves your community.

EEC REGIONAL OFFICES

You can also call an EEC Regional Office to talk with an EEC licenser about a particular child care program.

Central MA
10 Austin St.
Worcester, MA 01609
(508) 798-5180

Southeast and Cape
21 Spring St.
Suite 2
Taunton, MA 02780
(508) 828-5025

Metro Boston
1250 Hancock St.
Suite 120-S
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 472-2881

Western MA
95 Liberty St.
Suite 1124
Springfield, MA 01103
(413) 788-8401

Northeast
360 Merrimack Street, Building 9
Third Floor, Entrance 1
Lawrence, MA 01843
(978) 681-9684