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*Listening, learning,
and living together:
it's the science of life.*

Quality Child Care¹

Suzanna Smith²

Shortly before each of my children were born, the last thing I wanted to think about was leaving my baby in someone else's care. However, as a working mom, I needed some time to decide which type of care would be best for my babies and family, and to visit several different facilities and caregivers. Like most parents, I needed to know that my children were safe, healthy, happy—and learning, too. Certain factors are especially important in choosing the right child care for your child (Nation's Network of Child Care Resource and Referral, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

In addition to making sure the adult to child ratio is appropriate for your child's age group, check out the caregivers' education and training in childcare and child development. Caregivers need to be trained in first aid, cleanliness and safety standards, and emergency procedures. Trained caregivers understand what children need to grow and learn (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002; Child Care Aware, 2001-2006; National Association for Education of Young Children, 2006).

Ask about staff turnover. Children do better when they can get to know their caregiver, and changes interrupt the developing relationship. Check how long

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caregivers have been at the center or providing care from their homes (Nation's Network of Child Care Resource and Referral, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

A high-quality program has activities and materials geared to the age of the children, a daily schedule, indoor and outdoor play every day, and warm and responsive relationships with caregivers (American Academy of Pediatrics, n.d.; National Association for Education of Young Children, 2006). The facility or home itself should also be safe and secure, clean, and well-maintained (National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, 2005).

Several checklists are available to help you select quality child care. See our Web site for details or contact your local child care resource and referral agency or Child Care Aware [1-800-424-2246; <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/>] (Child Care Aware, 2001-2006).

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