

PARENT'S GUIDE TO CHILD CARE AND PRE-SCHOOL



10 Questions Every Parent Should Ask and
How to Prepare Your Child for Pre-K

Finding the right child care solution for your family is a daunting task. The caregivers you choose for your child are an extension of you, the parent. These caregivers invest time, energy and love into your child during the times when you are apart.

Choosing a child care provider means selecting caregivers who best represent you, and who will give your child the tender loving care your little one deserves.

So where do you begin? How do you narrow down the vast number of child care options available? For older children, how do you prepare them for the transition from being in the home full-time to attending a school environment?

This guide is designed to help parents address those questions and conquer the monumental task of choosing the right child care solution for their child.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK?

Entrusting your child to someone else's care is not a decision to take lightly, yet it is a decision that most American parents will face.

The majority of young children in America are cared for by someone other than their parents on a regular basis. In fact, an estimated 11 million of America's children who are under age five are in some type of child care¹, whether that is private in-home care, a full-time nanny, or a licensed child care facility. (¹Child Care in America 2012 State Fact Sheets)

If you are faced with the decision about child care for your little one, you may be wondering where to start and what to look for in a child care facility. When weighing your options, it's important that you ask the right questions.

Here are 10 questions every parent should ask a prospective child care provider:

What safety measures does your facility have in place?

Safety is every parent's number one concern. From the safety of the facility itself, to the staff who will be caring for your child, you need to know what safety measures a prospective child care facility has taken. Some considerations when it comes to safety include: emergency procedures, background checks on staff, and security cameras in every room that are accessible to parents. Don't hesitate to ask as many questions as you need regarding safety -- it's important that you know exactly how a prospective child care facility will keep your child safe in each and every situation that may arise.

What will my child's day look like at your facility?

Some child care facilities are little more than a glorified babysitting service, while others incorporate an educational experience into the daily life of each child. Young children are at a critical age in their learning and development. When you're considering a child care facility, ask how a prospective child care facility will engage and educate your child. Inquire about which (if any) education curriculums are used and whether or not the facility employs certified teachers.

What is your policy regarding illnesses?

Having a sick child can be very stressful for working parents. Find out how a prospective child care center will handle sick children. For example, will a child with the sniffles be sent home, or must the child have a fever to be sent home?

How does your facility communicate with parents?

A positive child care experience relies heavily on strong communication between facility staff and parents. Seek information regarding a prospective child care facility's communication policies, including how often and in what means you can expect to hear from your child's teachers.

Does your school have an open door policy for parents?

While you want your child to be able to enjoy his or her child care experience and feel comfortable being away from you, it's important to know whether or not you are welcome to be involved in your child's activities. Are parents invited to attend or even help with special events such as holiday celebrations and field trips? Does the center have scheduled visiting times or are parents welcome to come at go at any time?

What is your discipline policy?

Kids will be kids, and from time to time, they will misbehave. How that behavior is handled is an important and sometimes sensitive issue for parents, but it is important that parents understand what approach a child care center will take in disciplining children. Ask to review the center's guidelines for discipline and how they will handle misbehaving children.

What types of meals and snacks are served in your school?

Although a child care center cannot cater meals to the likes of every child, it is important to know whether or not your child will be served healthy and nutritious meals and snacks. Ask how a center will handle food sensitivities and allergies.

What is your center's child care philosophy?

The answer to this question may go hand-in-hand with details about a child care center's stance on education and learning. Ask how staff will apply the center's philosophy on a day-to-day basis.

What is your staff turnover rate?

As with any workplace, turnover can be expected in a child care facility, with the national average sitting around 30 percent annual turnover. Too much change in staff can affect a child's sense of security and comfort level with the center. Child care centers with a low faculty turn over rate are likely to have more satisfied staff, which leads to a comfortable, happy, and engaging environment for children.

What value am I getting for what I pay?

Child care is an investment. How is the center you choose for your child taking the fees you pay and investing them back into your child? Education; extra-curricular activities; exposure to art, music, technology and languages; and field trips -- these are some of the things an excellent child care program should offer.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

During your time looking at various child care centers, it's just as important to be on the look out for any red flags or warning signs as it is to look for positive signs that a prospective center might be right for your child.

In addition to your own intuition and any negative reactions from your child, here are some red flags to watch for:

An environment that is not stimulating.

Mental and emotional interaction and engagement is critical in your child's development. Does the center have toys that seem out-of-date or that aren't age-appropriate for the children in a particular room?

Lack of emotional support from teachers and staff.

When visiting prospective child care centers, pay attention to how the staff interacts with children. Are they kind and loving, or does it appear that children's needs are being ignored?

Too many children.

Has the child-to-teacher ratio been exceeded? The maximum ratio is 14 children per teacher or caregiver in a large child care center. If this ratio is exceeded, children are likely not getting the attention and care they need or deserve.

An environment that is unsafe or unhealthy.

Safety is every parent's top concern. Pay attention for any warning signs that a particular child care center does not follow standards of safety and cleanliness. How clean is the environment? Do you notice a caregiver changing diapers without wearing gloves? Does the center have restricted access to classrooms, or can anyone get in the building? Does the playground appear to be well maintained?

State licensing requirements are not met.

Know your state's requirements for child care licensing, and do your research to determine whether or not a prospective child care center is following those requirements. When you go to visit a facility, look to see if the state license is displayed on site.

Poor communication between parents and staff.

Do you feel as though the staff are adequately answering your questions or concerns? Is the center's director accessible to parents? Ask other parents how open communication is between parents and staff. Does the center have an open door policy for parents?

If you notice any of these signs, something might be amiss with a particular child care center. When choosing a child care center for your child, you should feel comfortable with any answers given to your questions. Ultimately, trust your intuition.



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR PRE-K

The younger your child is when he or she begins attending regular child care, the easier the transition will be on your child. (It can be an emotional transition for parents, no matter the age of your child!) If your child spent his or her first few years at home and is now heading to Pre-K, the transition may be a bit more difficult.

Here are a few tips for preparing children toddler-age and older for the all-day child care or Pre-K experience.

Keep it light and fun.

Too much focus in the weeks leading up to the transition may cause your child to have more anxiety.

Explore the idea of going to Pre-K with your child through play.

Introduce the idea of Pre-K to your child, and take turns acting out the situation, including daily routines. Allow your child to pretend to be the teacher, parent, or child. Practice saying good-bye, singing songs, sitting and listening during circle time, playing games, reading books, and taking naps.

Read books about children going to preschool.

There are plenty of children's books that address this issue. After reading, take a few minutes to ask your child how the characters in the book felt about going to school. Ask your child how he or she feels about going to school.

Here are a few recommendations of books to read with your child:

- *D.W.'s Guide to Preschool (Arthur Adventures)* by Marc Brown
- *This Is the Way We Go to School: A Book About Children Around the World* by Edith Baer
- *First Day Jitters (Mrs. Hartwell's Class Adventures)* by Julie Danneberg
- *I Am Too Absolutely Small for School (Charlie and Lola)* by Lauren Child
- *It's Time for School with Tallulah* by Nancy Wolff

Explore the new school together.

Plan a time for you and your child to visit the school together. Check out the classrooms, playgrounds, and if possible, meet your child's teacher. Some children may benefit from visiting the school a few times before he or she begins the Pre-K program.

Begin practicing the new daily routine at home.

A few weeks before your child begins the program, implement the new bedtime and wake up time. Help your child acclimate to the routine of getting up in the morning and getting ready for school. This should help reduce some of your stress when it's time for your child to start Pre-K. Sometimes creating a unique "good-bye" routine is also helpful. Make up a secret handshake, or choose a song to sing with your child every day before you say good-bye. No matter how silly it may seem to you, these special routines can be comforting to your child.

Listen to your child and pay attention to his or her behavior.

As your child works through the transition, it's important that you take the time to listen to your child. Being too quick to reassure your child without validating his or her feelings can make things worse. If your child has concerns, take time to just listen and answer his or her questions. Children may also experience some regression in "big kid" behaviors, such as getting dressed and going to the potty. Though frustrating for parents, this is normal. Patience during this time is important and will help your child return to those "big kid" behaviors more quickly.

TLC operates three child care campuses in the Dallas area. Two TLC schools are in the Legacy area of Plano, and another is located in Arlington. Each campus serves about 300 children, ranging in age from six weeks to twelve years old and provides children a nurturing environment to learn and blossom. TLC offers your child the highest-quality educational programs and child care from qualified staff, combined with an exciting, safe, and secure environment that encourages growth and development. TLC Schools provides the best in child care for the Plano and Arlington areas.

If you would like to learn more about TLC Schools for your child, contact any of our three locations and schedule a tour.



TLC on DEMOCRACY

972-378-4100

TLC on HEDGCOXE

972-473-0167

TLC on GREEN OAKS

817-801-7105