

Helping Parents Choose Quality Child Care

When a parent asks what “the best” child care arrangement for their baby or preschooler, how should I, as a pediatrician, respond?

Parents often ask pediatricians how to select the best early education and child care option for their child. As pediatricians, we need to identify community resources that can help parents find quality programs. County agencies called Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs) are a great resource - these agencies are charged with helping parents evaluate their child care options and typically offer trainings for child care providers. They provide lists of licensed centers and education about quality indicators. These agencies can also provide information on child care subsidy programs and regulations. See www.childcareaware.org for more information on quality child care and a way to search for the closest CCR&R by zip code.

Numerous child care options are available, and these include: parent only care, relative care, nannies, friend and neighbor care, family child care homes, and child care centers. Not all programs or caregivers offer the same level of quality, and no two programs are exactly alike. Therefore, it is crucial that a parent spend time in the programs that he or she is considering. Research shows that high quality child care benefits children, but poor quality care may be harmful.

Selecting the best early childhood situation for one’s child is often a stressful activity for parents. As a pediatrician, you can help ease this stress by identifying good resources such as CCR&Rs that offer parents a contact where they can consult with counselors and receive literature on choosing quality child care. Helping parents understand what to look for, and what questions to ask, will also enable them to select the best care of their child.

Regardless of which type of program parents select, they should ask some common questions, and be sure to make general observations in order to select the best child care option for their child. Parents can download an easy-to-use booklet based on 38 Research-based indicators of high quality child care titled, *Is This the Right Place for My Child?* and a checklist of questions they can use to evaluate child care options, here: http://www.naccrra.org/parent/quality_indicators.php

In addition, be aware that all state child care regulations can be found online, here: <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/STATES/states.htm>

To find out more about these issues, read the AAP policy statement, “Quality Early Education and Child Care,” check out the AAP Web site www.healthychildcare.org or contact AAP early education and child care staff at 888/227-5409 or childcare@aap.org