

**“Children
learn to care
by experiencing
good care.”**

*James L. Hynes, Jr.
Child Psychologist and Author*

**A Parent’s
Guide to
Choosing
Quality
Child Care**



Helping Families Find Child Care

3301 C Route 66
PO Box 1234
Neptune NJ 07754-1234
732-918-9901
www.ccrnj.org



Child Care Resources

Founded in 1995 to coordinate, assist and strengthen child care services in Monmouth County, Child Care Resources is a not-for-profit organization committed to making child care work. High quality child care is a community resource that supports families, contributes to economic productivity, and nurtures children's growth.

Mission

Child Care Resources invests in Monmouth County's children by empowering parents to make informed child care choices and by providing quality resources and education to child care professionals.

Vision

Our vision is for all families in Monmouth County to access information that enables them to make the best child care choices from an array of high quality, affordable options.

We Believe:

- ◆ All children deserve to be cared for in a safe, nurturing environment that provides rich learning experiences and opportunities to form meaningful relationships with adults and children.
- ◆ All children are unique and their individuality should be respected.
- ◆ All children deserve to play, have choices and to be stimulated in ways that are appropriate for their age.
- ◆ In the availability of financial assistance for those unable to pay for child care.
- ◆ In advocating for better child care policies and greater investments in child care for all children in our communities.

**Child Care Resources...
Working Within Our Community
To Put Children First!**

Child Care Resources Complaint Policy

Any complaint received by Child Care Resources is followed up by the appropriate staff member. Depending on the type of complaint a Child Care Resources staff person will follow up with a call to either the Department of Children and Families, Office of Licensing and/or the Division of Youth and Family Services Child Abuse Hotline at 1-877-NJABUSE (1-877-652-2873). Our staff directly handles complaints that are violations of the Manual of Requirements for Family Child Care.

If the complaint involves curriculum concerns or personal matters between a parent and a child care provider or center, Child Care Resources will encourage both parties to discuss the situation while offering technical assistance.

Child Care Resources has developed this policy to ensure parents and the public that their concerns regarding the health and safety of their children will be addressed promptly.

Confidentiality Policy

All employees and volunteers are bound to respect each individual's rights of privacy. All personal information given to an employee or volunteer by any member of the community will be regarded as CONFIDENTIAL.

Disclaimer

The child care providers that are referred are for reference purposes only. This agency does not license, endorse, or recommend any specific provider. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to meet with providers in order to determine the child care arrangement which best suits the family's needs.

Checklist

SETTING

- Do adults and children wash their hands (after using the bathroom, changing diapers, eating, etc.)?
- Are cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials locked up, and out of children's reach?
- Is there a plan to follow if a child is injured or sick?
- Are first aid kits readily available?
- Is there a plan for responding to disasters (fire, flood, etc.)?
- Has a satisfactory criminal history background check been conducted on each adult present?
- Is the outdoor play area a safe place for children to play?
- Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- Are there different areas for resting, quiet play, and active play?

YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

- Does your child need a predictable schedule?
- Does your child have specific needs during nap-time?
- What kinds of people, activities, and spaces, make your child comfortable and happy?

Welcome

Parents Know Best

Research tells us that our children's healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences during the first few years of life. The learning process begins at birth and lasts a lifetime.



If you are a parent or guardian who is in need of child care, choosing quality care for your child is one of the most important decisions you will make.

Good quality programs provide opportunities for learning when parents cannot be with their children.

As a child care resource and referral agency, Child Care Resources supports families as they navigate the challenges of work and family life. We have created this guide to help parents understand how to better judge quality child care.

Your child deserves quality care. Quality child care means...

A loving caregiver: The caregiver is the most important ingredient of good child care. A caregiver should:

- ◆ Show real joy in being with children.
- ◆ Talk with children in a kind and attentive manner.
- ◆ Listen closely to what children are saying and take them seriously.
- ◆ Understand and appreciate children's different temperaments and personalities.
- ◆ Know about how children develop, grow, and learn.

A proper setting: The environment should be safe and healthy for children. For the child, it should feel:

- ◆ Clean and comfortable
- ◆ Roomy enough to play, indoors and outdoors.
- ◆ Cozy enough to find a place for quiet play.
- ◆ Spacious enough to sleep peacefully and eat pleasantly with friends.
- ◆ Interesting and fun with enough variety of creative materials and equipment that are safe and in good repair.

The right activities: Children should have a wide variety of experiences throughout the day that fit the child's age level and include:

- ◆ Exploring nature and natural materials
- ◆ Pretend and fantasy play (dress up clothes and puppets)
- ◆ Books (being read to daily and being able to handle books at all ages)
- ◆ Art (painting, gluing, and coloring)
- ◆ Music and movement throughout the day
- ◆ Building with blocks

*All of these experiences are crucial for
your child's healthy growth and learning.*

Checklist

Visiting a child care center for the first time can be overwhelming and confusing. What is most important? What should you look for? What matters most? There are very basic questions that need to be asked about health, safety, ratios, daily schedule, and the experiences that the children will be engaged in.

The following points are good questions to measure the quality of a child care program:

CAREGIVERS AND TEACHERS

- Are children watched at all times?
- Are adults warm and welcoming?
- Do you agree with the discipline practices?
- Do the teachers or caregivers have an educational background in early childhood education and/or experience in caring for children?
- Is there always someone present who has current CPR and First Aid training?
- Are caregivers and teachers continuing to receive training on caring for children?
- Are parents welcome to visit at any time?

PROGRAM

- How many children will be in your child's group?
- Do caregivers talk with the children during the day?
- Is the play space organized and are materials easy-to-use?
- Does the program provide a wide variety of age appropriate activities?
- Is the program accredited by a national organization?

Types of Child Care

SUMMER CAMPS

Families are challenged each summer to find a quality, enriching, and enjoyable program for their school-aged child. Many families combine vacation time from work, relative care, family child care, and an organized summer program to ensure the child's well-being while school is out of session.



If you want to send your child to a summer camp or organized summer program, **PLAN EARLY!** Day camp registrations usually begin in the winter and many fill up by April. Many sleep away camps accept registrations in the fall for the following summer. As with all child care arrangements, look at a variety of programs before enrolling your child.

Make Sure To Visit & Ask Questions

You might want to visit several different child care programs before you decide which one is best for your family. Call each child care program and schedule an appointment for your visit. Once you are there, stay for at least an hour to observe activities, check the surroundings, and ask questions (use the attached checklist as a guide).

Be sure to visit every program you are considering. Visit more than once, and at different hours of the day. Remember, quality of care may vary from one program or provider to the next.

Most importantly observe the caregiver's interaction and relationship with the children. A positive, loving relationship is the key indicator of quality care.

MAKE A CHOICE

Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family. Follow your instincts!

STAY INVOLVED

The work is not over when you find good care for your child. It is important to stay involved and communicate with your caregiver on a regular basis. For example, ask the caregiver at drop-off and pick-up times how your child is doing.

Visiting and participating in events at your child care provider's program sends a strong message. It tells your child and your child's caregiver that you think what your child is doing and learning is important.

Types of Child Care

When it comes to finding child care, you may feel a little overwhelmed at first. **That's perfectly natural!** You have a lot to decide and several options to choose from:

- ◆ Do you want a child care center or family child care in a person's home?
- ◆ Do you want your child near your home or near your place of employment?
- ◆ Do you want your child cared for with a few children or in a larger group setting?

CHILD CARE CENTERS

Child care centers are licensed by the State of New Jersey. In order to be licensed a program must meet minimum health and safety, program, staffing and training requirements. Licensing does not insure quality, but it does set minimum standards that centers must maintain. For more information see the **Manual of Requirements for Licensed Day Care Centers** at: www.state.nj.us/def/divisions/licensing/ccmanual.pdf



Adult/Child Ratios for Child Care Centers

Under 18 months.....	1:4
18 months to 2 1/2 years.....	1:6
2 1/2 years to 4 years.....	1:10
4 years.....	1:12
5 years.....	1:15
6 years.....	1:18

Child care centers generally group children by age, allowing children to interact and learn with their peers. Some centers that have met rigorous standards for staff qualifications, curriculum, environment, health and safety, and staff to child ratios are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For more information, please visit their website at www.naeyc.org.

While each center may meet the same requirements, centers can vary greatly in program content, equipment, staff development, philosophy, and cost. **Please make sure to visit, ask questions, and observe.**

Types of Child Care

PRESCHOOLS & NURSERY SCHOOLS

Preschools and Nursery Schools are licensed as child care centers. Parents seeking part-time care may look into a preschool program in their community. Preschools tend to run on a nine month schedule and take children from 2 1/2 to 5 years old.

FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

In New Jersey, Family Child Care providers are not required to be licensed, but may voluntarily register with the state after meeting basic health, safety, and training requirements. Family Child Care providers offer care for children in their private homes. This type of care is often described as a “home away from home.” Most providers care for children of varying ages in a warm family setting. Family Child Care providers are able to offer a more flexible schedule for working parents than a child care center. The maximum number of children in care at one time is five. In order to receive a Certificate of Registration a Family Child Care provider must:

- ◆ Be 18 years of age, in good health and reside in the home where the care is provided
- ◆ Provide a safe, healthy environment for children
- ◆ Receive clearance on a Child Abuse Record Information background check
- ◆ Attend an eight hour pre-service training session
- ◆ Attend additional training during the three year registration period
- ◆ Have current CPR and First Aid Certification
- ◆ Provide age appropriate activities for the children in an interesting and stimulating environment

Child Care Resources serves as the sponsoring organization for over 100 Family Child Care homes in Monmouth County.

Types of Child Care

CARE IN YOUR OWN HOME

Care in your own home can consist of a relative or family friend watching your children. It can also be a nanny or au pair. A nanny is a child care provider paid for her expertise and experience and as an employee of the family for whom she works. An au pair is a young foreigner between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who lives in the United States for up to one year as part of a cultural educational exchange program. This person could be living in your household or come to your home on a daily basis. In the state of New Jersey, there are no official standards or regulations pertaining to in-home child care. A parent will need to decide what best fits the family’s needs.

It is important that you agree to a contract with the caregiver. Establish set hours, pay rate, discipline policies, and your child’s routine. Allow a time to talk regularly, when children are not around, about concerns you both might have.

(Child Care Resources is limited to providing families with placement agencies for nannies or au pairs. Families often seek such care through word of mouth with co-workers, friends, relatives, and faith-based communities.)

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE (Before and After School Care)

While only parents can determine the age at which their child is responsible enough to care for himself, it is recommended that children twelve and under be supervised by adults. Many school districts offer before and after school care, usually at the school your child attends or at a nearby facility. These programs may be operated by the school district, a for-profit company, or a local civic organization and must be licensed by the state. Programs operated by the local district or private schools do not have to be licensed. Check to see if your child’s program is licensed and ask questions about staff qualifications and the daily plans.

For additional information contact the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition at www.njsacc.org.

