

Many questions and feelings surface when choosing the right children's service for your child. Will my child be happy and safe? Will staff nurture and encourage my child to grow and learn through a quality educational program? How many staff should there be in the service?

There are many key indicators that will help you determine the level of quality within a children's service, including the presence of qualified early childhood professionals, low numbers of children to staff ratios, good interaction between children and staff and planned education and learning programs for each child.

Regulation

The first important indicators of quality are linked to State and Federal legislation:

Licensing

- Is the centre licensed by the Department of Community Services? The current Licence should be on prominent display.
- Are qualified early childhood teaching staff including a 4 year trained Early Childhood Teacher employed? (A licensing requirement for centres with more than 29 children per day.)
 - 30 to 39 Children = 1 University Qualified Early Childhood Teacher
 - 40 to 60 Children = 2 University Qualified Early Childhood Teachers
 - 60 to 79 Children = 3 University Qualified Early Childhood Teachers
 - 80 or more Children = 4 University Qualified Early Childhood Teachers¹
- What are the child to staff ratios?
 - 0-2 year old children = 1 staff for every 5 children
 - 2-3 year old children = 1 staff for every 8 children
 - 3-5 year old children = 1 staff for every 10 children²

Accreditation

- Is the centre accredited by the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc? The Certificate of Accreditation and Quality Profile should be on prominent display.

¹Minimum Standard of Licensing and Regulatory Requirement by Department of Community Services for centre based long day care.

²Minimum Standard of Licensing and Regulatory Requirement by Department of Community Services for centre based long day care.

Quality

Once you have established the minimum standards, the following questions are designed to assist you choose the right service for your child:

- What are your first impressions on entering the centre? Do you feel welcome? Your initial feelings are an important indicator.
- Is there a relaxed and happy atmosphere? Do children look engaged and settled in the environment?
- Are children treated with respect and encouraged by staff? Is there evidence of sustained and caring interactions?
- Are there examples of an education and learning program that identifies the importance of children's development? Is this information shared with families? e.g. Daily diaries, portfolios etc
- Are a wide range of experiences available throughout the day? Are children able to engage in these at a leisurely pace and for extended periods of time?
- Is there nutritious food and a qualified cook in the centre?
- Do you notice evidence of parent participation in the centre e.g. parent information / committee meeting notices?
- Is there evidence that the centre values children and families from diverse backgrounds?
- Are you encouraged to view centre policies and are policies displayed around the centre? e.g. sun safety and hygiene
- Is the property clean, well-maintained and safe? Do the staff encourage children to take pride in the environment? e.g. Display of children's work, equipment easily accessible and stored appropriately, etc
- Is the service 'profit' or 'not-for-profit'? Are resources reinvested to provide the best possible environment and staff possible?
- Do you feel you and your child have been provided with enough information on the centre as part of a potential new enrolment? Are you encouraged to ask questions? Do you have an information pack for future reference?

Affordability

Of course one critical deciding factor for families is affordability. The following questions will assist calculate the actual fee payable:

- What is the full daily fee prior to Government subsidy?
- What Government rebates are available?
- How do I access / apply for rebates?
- Does the service offer in-house subsidies for exceptional circumstances?

For more information on available rebates please see our UnitingCare Children's Services Childcare Assistance Checklist.

UnitingCare Children's Services is committed to providing accessible children's services that are affordable and of the highest quality delivered in a not-for-profit community services approach.

For more information about our children's services please contact UnitingCare Children's Services Central Office on 02 8267 4244, email admin@uccs.nsw.uca.org.au or visit our website: www.unitingcarechildrensservices.org.au

Other resources may be found on the National Childcare Accreditation Council Website:

- Family Fact Sheets
http://www.ncac.gov.au/resources/family_factsheets.asp
- Choosing Quality Long Day Care
<http://www.ncac.gov.au/resources/cqldc.asp>
- Choosing Quality Outside School Hours Care
<http://www.ncac.gov.au/resources/cqoshc.asp>

What should I look for when choosing a children's centre for my child?

