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# Oregon's Children



*Letters for parents of infants and toddlers: Letter 6*

# Oregon's Children



In the past, day care centers and homes emphasized meeting children's physical needs. But a new philosophy of infancy and childhood has trickled down from researchers to every parent and caregiver. They now want infants and toddlers to have more than "watching." Parents want quality developmental care that enriches each child so that growth and learning takes place. They want baby's self-image and abilities developed through experiences with play, sprightly music, interesting snacks, sand piles, puzzles, games, books, and climbing activities.

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## What is Quality Child Care?

Quality child care has three considerations: the caregiver, the setting, and the activities.

A good caregiver is one who:

- is gentle, friendly, and calm
- knows how children develop
- provides a healthy setting for children
- treats children as individuals
- gives positive guidance and praise
- comforts unhappy children
- helps children solve problems
- is prepared for emergencies
- can apply first aid
- relates well with parents
- has attitudes toward children like your own

Quality care settings include:

- play areas outdoors and indoors
- well lighted, safe, clean rooms

- adequate heating and ventilation
- places for naps or resting
- space for a child's things
- an accessible, safe bathroom
- emergency numbers posted by the phone

A variety of activities are encouraged with adequate suitable materials for children to:

- play with others or alone
- be active mentally, socially, and physically
- learn through play
- learn to talk clearly
- feel and express emotions
- be creative and pretend
- play indoors and outdoors safely
- build confidence through success

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## Kinds of Day Care

You'll want to choose child care that best fills the needs of your child. Three care settings are usually available:

**In-Home-Care.** It best suits the needs of families who want child care for a day or evening including babysitters. Parents of infants or young children, or those who work when centers are closed, often need caregivers who come to the home.

**Day Care Centers.** Most suitable for toddlers over age two who need full-day care and are ready for organized activities. They're a choice for children needing playmates of various ages and working parents needing dependable child care.



**Day Care Homes.** Families with infants or toddlers or who have several children most often use these. Sometimes children who are shy in large groups fare better in home settings. Many parents like day care homes because of the warmth of the home setting and the convenient locations.

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## Considering Needs

Start early to think about child care. Finding quality care takes time. Good day care providers usually have waiting lists. By checking early you'll have more choices when the need arises. Ask advice from pediatricians, social workers, and parents with children in day care programs.

When considering child care, ask yourself these questions:

**What type of caregiver is best for my child?** Caregivers must be interested in children as well as patient and loving with them. Infants are totally dependent so they need a safe but stimulating setting with loving adults. Toddlers need caregivers who encourage safe, exploratory learning.

**What kind of setting is best for my child?** Many parents use older physical settings with well-used equipment if the caregiver is warm and loving. Examine care settings to determine if the equipment is suitable for your child's age and if health and safety precautions are observed. If your children are cared for in your home, work with the caregiver so needs and safety for your children are ensured.

**What is the cost?** Child care is costly, but good affordable care can be found. Costs vary with the type of care and the hours of care used. Call care centers listed in the newspaper classified advertisements to learn the rates in your area. Some financial help is available from local government programs. Community service clubs and church groups may offer day care money or scholarships. Using day care to allow you to work may qualify you for federal income tax credits. The Internal Revenue Service will help you claim credits.

**How does the care arrangement fit with family schedules?** Avoid arrangements that require distant travel, unnecessary rushing to pick children up at closing time, or volunteer participation you cannot give. Look for day



care that adjusts to weekends or evenings if you are unexpectedly late. What is the policy about sick children?

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## Making a Choice

Begin with phone interviews to help you decide which settings to visit. Question caregivers about things that are important to you. How do they handle difficult behavior? What happens to a two-year-old who hits or bites? How sick is too sick to attend the program? What is the cost? How long does the caregiver expect to provide child care? It's reasonable to want a place you can depend on over time. Frequent changes may create adjustment problems for a child.

Personal interviews let you exchange information, see different settings, and observe how your child takes to a caregiver.

Invite an in-home caregiver who appeals to you to your home. Watch how a caregiver and your child respond to one another. Discuss questions you have such as experience in caring for infants and toddlers, activities they like to do with children, how they discipline and guide learning, and what they do when a child disobeys.

When interviewing teenagers for occasional babysitting, find a responsible youngster who is experienced with children or has had a babysitting workshop.

Interviews are a chance to lay ground rules for them. Mention these items:

- are they allowed to have company while they babysit?



- who provides transportation to and from your home?
- what are limitations on eating from your refrigerator?
- work expected and pay scale?
- what telephone limitations do you impose?
- what emergency and safety procedures to you expect?
- what play activities do they enjoy with children?

It's advisable to visit day care home providers with your child. Leave them alone for a short time to see how the child reacts to the caregiver and the other children. Talk over questions with the caregiver.

- how many children are cared for each day and what are their ages?
- what are daily activities?
- what foods are served for snacks and lunch?
- how are sick children cared for?
- what happens if the caregiver is ill?

Visit care centers while children are active so you see the staff and children in everyday activities. Ask the director your questions.

- what are rules for parent visitations during the day?
- how many children of what ages are enrolled? (For children under 3, one caregiver for every four or five children in a group of 12 or less is appropriate.)

- what foods are served?
- are activities suitable for your child's age and interests?
- are children in the center interested, happy, and relaxed?
- what is the daily schedule?

Ask about the training of caregivers for working with young children and the licensing of the home or center. In some places licensing is strictly enforced while it's barely checked in others. Licensing requires safe and sanitary physical conditions but it does not ensure developmental child care. For this reason, visit several settings before selecting a care center.

## How Is Your Child Adjusting?

Ease children slowly into day-care. Conversations about the delights of going to school or to a place to play promote positive feelings. Observe your child's attitude when you leave and pick them up to give you quick clues about the program. Children who are adjusting will:

- talk about what they did and about the other children
- share what caregivers say and do
- are happy to go to the center and happy to be home too
- are active and cheerful
- continue usual eating and sleeping patterns
- are eager to go new places and learn new things

It sometimes takes awhile for them to adjust. It's natural for children to cry when left by a parent. They may worry you won't come back. This is usually temporary. If anxiety continues, share your concerns with your caregiver. Sometimes a setting is not right for a child and should be changed, but give it a fair trial. Avoid frequent change. Children need continuity and time to form attachments to various people and places.

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**Dear Parent:** This letter contains ideas to help you choose caregivers for your children. Children thrive with many different people and settings. With you in their home is one— with other caregivers is another. But be realistic. Do not expect day care to duplicate or replace family life. It can offer experiences not available at home; home offers a loving family. The two should harmonize and compliment one another.

Sincerely yours,

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