

accreditation system sponsored by National Association for the Education of Young Children, which serves as a model for optimum care. References from other parents are also helpful, provided that they have investigated the center carefully and have remained involved with the agency's activities.

The same conscientious attention should be applied to locating competent babysitters. References from other employers are essential, and there is no substitute for observing the interaction between the individual and the child.

Important areas for parents to evaluate are the center's daily program, teacher qualifications, the nurturing qualities of caregivers, student-to-staff ratio, discipline policy, environmental safety precautions, provision of meals, sanitary conditions, adequate indoor and outdoor space per child, and fee schedule. Although fees vary considerably, a program that charges a minimum fee may also be providing minimum services. Parents should arrange to meet the director and some of the employees, especially those who would be caring for the child. Resources to familiarize parents with characteristics of quality child care and checklists to systematically evaluate the center and compare it with other facilities can help parents make successful choices. At all times, the parent should have the right to visit the child, and regular conferences should occur to review the child's progress.

One of the areas that is increasingly important in selecting child care is the center's health practices; however, parents often do not check the center for health and safety features. Evidence shows that children, especially those younger than 6 years old in daycare centers, have more illnesses—especially diarrhea, otitis media, respiratory tract infections (especially if the caregiver smokes), hepatitis A, meningitis, and cytomegalovirus—than children cared for in their homes. The strongest predictor of risk of illness is the number of unrelated children in the room. Proactive infection control measures and education of staff have been effective in reducing the incidence of upper respiratory tract infections, diarrhea, and rotavirus. It has been reported that families that have children in out-of-home child care lose an estimated 6 to 29 days of work per year as a result of children's illnesses ([Shope and Hashikawa, 2012](#)). Parents should inquire about the center's policy regarding the attendance and care of sick children.