



PARENTS BEWARE: **THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LICENSED AND UNLICENSED CHILD CARE**

Centre-Based Care

In Ontario, all child care centres must be licensed under the Day Nurseries Act and adhere to government regulations related to virtually every aspect of the centre's operation. From staff qualifications, to the ratio of staff to children, to the safety and cleanliness of the care environment, behavior management and much, much more, these regulations help ensure that any potential risks to your child's well being are kept to a minimum.

Home Child Care

Some home child care agencies are also licensed under the Day Nurseries Act, which requires that the homes in which the children are cared for meet certain standards, that caregivers follow certain procedures concerning safety and cleanliness, and so forth. If an individual providing child care in a home setting is not affiliated with a licensed home child care agency and doesn't specifically say she/he is licensed, probably she/he is not. While some unlicensed or informal home child care providers do a very good job, the absence of regulatory safeguards or of a back-up caregiver should the home child care provider fall ill or be otherwise unavailable are two of the major reasons many parents prefer licensed child care.

Look For Child Care That Exceeds Regulatory Standards

Beyond minimizing basic health and safety risks, a high quality child care program offers caring staff who take

the time to get to know each child and family personally; activities, surroundings, toys, equipment and books that promote children's development; nutritious meals and snacks; and is a place that your child looks forward to going to each day. As a parent, it's important that you understand that while the Day Nurseries Act, and government licensing and regulation have allowed for the establishment of basic standards of care that all child care programs in Ontario must meet, these are very basic standards. It is always wise to choose a child care program that far exceeds them, and that provides both general early learning experiences as well as any specific developmental opportunities such as music, sports, computers or other activities you feel would be of interest or benefit to your child.

Do Your Homework

Not every licensed child care program is right for every family or every child. It pays to be an informed consumer, to ask questions, to explore your options and to know what to look for. Ultimately, government licensing and regulation, combined with your own judgment, instincts and experiences as a parent are the best assurances of child care quality. **The Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services web site provides a searchable directory of licensed child care in Ontario, as well as details about the licensing status of individual child care operators. You may access this information at:**

www.ontario.ca/ONT/portal51/licensedchildcare

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF DAY CARE OPERATORS OF ONTARIO (ADCO)

Child care owners and managers building a better world, one family at a time.

Since 1977, ADCO has provided a forum for the owners and managers of Ontario's licensed child care programs to work together to enhance child care quality and achieve common goals. ADCO membership provides centre-based programs, home child care agencies, nursery schools, preschools and school age child care facilities with convenient ways to share ideas and expertise, and access highly specialized information, products, services and staff training, so they can focus on what's most important: making a positive difference in the lives of the families they serve.

To learn more about ADCO and ADCO member centres in your area, please visit: www.adco-o.on.ca or call 1-800-567-7075.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING LICENSED CHILD CARE

The checklist below will give you some ideas about what to look for when you're visiting programs and shopping for child care, but you know your child's needs better than anyone else. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Always trust your instincts.



Safety

- Is the program's operating license posted and up-to-date?
- Do all staff members hold current first aid & CPR certificates?
- Is there a first aid kit easily accessible if it is needed?
- Are there working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on the premises?
- Are the fire exits clearly marked and escape routes posted?
- Are fire drills conducted on a regular basis?
- What security measures are in place to prevent strangers from entering the premises?
- Is the outdoor play area securely fenced and in good repair?
- Are electrical outlets capped?
- Are cleansers, medications and other hazards securely stored?
- If the children are to be transported in a motor vehicle, what provisions are made for car seats, safety belts, etc.?
- If the children will be walking to and from other facilities or locations, how will they be supervised and their safety on the street assured?
- If computers and the Internet are accessible to children, how is their use of these tools monitored and supervised?

Cleanliness

- When you first walk in the door, do you notice any odours?
- Are the windows and floors sparkling clean?
- Does the classroom equipment appear to be wiped down regularly and in good repair?
- How often are the toys disinfected?
- Are the children encouraged to wash their hands after using the washroom, coughing and before eating?
- Are wastepaper baskets and garbage cans emptied before they're overflowing?
- Is the kitchen area clean?
- Do staff members preparing meals or snacks have appropriate food handling certifications?
- What measures are taken to ensure the cleanliness of the sleeping area?
- Is the outdoor play area litter-free?

The Physical Environment

- Is there enough room indoors and out for the children to play without feeling crowded?
- How is the indoor lighting? Is there at least some natural light in most areas?
- Is the furniture the right size for the children?
- Are the walls decorated with the children's artwork?
- Are there thematic bulletin boards and other displays that relate to topics about which the children are learning?
- Is there evidence that the learning environment is continually being refreshed, so there is always something new for the children to see or do?
- Are items from the natural world incorporated into the daily environment—for example: rocks, wood, sea shells, plants or classroom pets?
- Are there books or toys on shelves or in bins where children can reach them?
- Are there enough toys to go around?
- Do the children have to wait a long time before getting a turn on larger pieces of equipment?
- Are there areas where children can play quietly, read or be alone?
- Is the sleeping area quiet, relaxing and comfortable?
- If you're seeking school age care, is there an appropriate homework area for your child?

Activities

- When you visit the centre, do the children appear busy and involved in what they're doing?
- Are the children involved in wide variety of activities, such as singing, finger plays, pretend play, outdoor play, blocks, puzzles, games, drawing, painting, crafts and reading?
- Are there toys and books that would appeal to a wide variety of children's interests?
- Are parents provided with an outline of the children's activities?