



Easter Seals national headquarters supports many local initiatives for young children with special needs including early intervention, pre-kindergarten and

after-school programs, and an Easter Seals Child Development Center model program for children of all abilities. Contact Easter Seals national headquarters by telephone or Web site for help locating an affiliate program near you.

1-800-221-6827 www.easter-seals.org

Child Care Aware is a national initiative, conducted by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), committed to helping parents find the best information on locating quality child care and child care resources in their community. Child Care Aware, in partnership with local child care resource and referral agencies, builds consumer awareness and supports families in making choices for the care and education of their children.

ChildCareAware™
America's most trusted child care resource.

For more information about Child Care Aware or for help in locating your local child care resource and referral agency, call:

1-800-424-2246

www.ChildCareAware.org

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Choosing Quality Child Care for a Child with Special Needs



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Why is quality child care important for my child with special needs?

Most children, including those with disabilities and special needs, spend some time in a child care environment during early childhood, as well as while attending school.

In a quality child care environment, caregivers respond positively to differences in children's abilities, interests and experiences. Children with and without disabilities develop a greater appreciation of each other and of individual differences.

The focus is on planned developmental activities—individualized or in small groups. The environment will provide needed predictability and routine, as well as novelty and stimulation.

Your child with special needs will grow and learn physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially alongside his/her peers.

Good staff to child ratios allow for individual attention and help build strong relationships with caring, consistent adults.

You and your child's caregivers will develop a mutually respectful communication system, building and enhancing understanding and trust, leading to optimal development of your child.

Children who participate in quality child care programs are better prepared to enter public school, and are more empowered to maximize their independence and acceptance into society.



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Your child will be interacting positively, learning from and making friends with a diverse group of children in a "natural environment," as provided for in federal law. Some of these children will be developing more typically, and will be role models for your child.

You will be more productive at work or home when you know your child is in a program that emphasizes health, nutrition and safety, as well as positive learning experiences.

How do I select a quality child care program for my child with special needs?

1. Call your local child care resource and referral agency. For help locating your local agency, contact Child Care Aware (1-800-424-2246).
2. Call the state agency or agencies responsible for children with special needs. Ask for local contacts.
3. Contact your local school district and local early intervention program for resources and help.
4. Ask other families; check community resource and support groups.
5. Contact other national/state/local organizations such as Easter Seals (www.easter-seals.org), whose members provide services to children with special needs.

Once you have several referrals, speak with the director or family care provider in person. Ask about availability, hours, fees, accessibility, and other areas of interest.

Schedule visits with the programs you are most interested in. **Look, listen and ask questions** in all classrooms or areas.



Ask the director or family child care provider.

Remember to think about your child's needs, your family's needs and the needs of the other children and families.

Ask questions like:

- * Are you aware of national quality standards?
- * Is the program licensed by the state?
- * Are you accredited or working toward national accreditation?
- * Do you have a philosophy or mission statement that I could see?
- * May I have a copy of your policies and/or Parent Handbook?
- * What are your guidelines and procedures for involving children with special needs?
- * How are families involved in the program?
- * How will my child be introduced to the adults and other children?
- * How do you handle sick children?
- * Do you have an orientation for new families?
- * What do you consider "Special Needs"?
- * What educational opportunities are provided for you and your team?
- * How do you handle transitions?
- * How is discipline administered?

When observing and listening, pay particular attention to 5 key indicators of quality child care:

A positive and happy learning environment

- * Are the children engaged?
- * Are staff involved with children at eye level?
- * Are the rooms bright and cheerful without being overwhelming with too many sights and sounds?
- * Do the adults speak positively about all children?

The right number and mix of children and adults

- * Are all children receiving individual attention?
- * Do adults call children by name?
- * Are children comforted, when needed, by staff or other children?
- * Are there sufficient personnel to respond in the event of emergencies?
- * Is the "time out" tactic overused by staff?

Trained and supported personnel

- * Are caregivers trained in early childhood education and special needs?
- * Are teaching staff available to attend school district educational meetings with you?
- * Do those who work with children themselves receive positive support?

A developmental focus on the child

- * Do you see and hear a variety of developmental activities taking place?
- * Do the children have opportunities to control objects or events in their environment?
- * Are activities based upon a child's level of functioning?
- * Are learning materials accessible to children with special needs?

Parents treated as partners

- * Will child care personnel help you develop goals for your child and plans to achieve them?
- * Do personnel provide parents with regular schedules of activities and events?
- * Do teachers and caregivers describe their communication practices as "open"?
- * Do parents actively participate with their child or children?

Identifying Quality In Child Care

Look, listen and ask

- Are families and children welcomed, and are children greeted in a loving, respected way?
- Is the overall atmosphere bright, cheerful and child-focused, without being overwhelming?
- Do the child care staff **really listen** to you, and see your child and every child as a unique and special individual?
- Are the caregivers and teaching practices responsive to differences in children's abilities, interests and experiences?
- Are the majority of planned developmental activities individualized or in small groups?
- Are child care personnel willing to work with you and develop individual goals and plans to achieve them?
- Does the program accept children who are not yet walking or toilet-trained?
- Are caregivers trained and experienced in CPR, first aid, early childhood education and special needs?
- Are therapeutic services such as OT, PT and Speech Therapy provided on site, if possible?
- Are daily, weekly, monthly and special event schedules shared with families?
- Do child care personnel perform child and family advocacy functions for you if necessary?
- Is communication open between staff and parents? Are caregivers always ready to respond?
- Is the facility safe, secure and physically accessible (i.e., ramps, outside play area, bathrooms)?
- Is the program licensed and/or accredited?
- Are learning materials and toys sufficient, safe, clean and within reach of all children?
- Are the sounds of children predominantly happy? Does it appear the children and adults enjoy being together?
- Is there a daily balance of active and quiet activities? Are they right for each ability and age level?
- Do learning materials, books and pictures reflect diversity, including children with special needs?

Tear off this sheet and take it with you as you look for a program for your child. Ask questions and feel free to take notes about what you see and hear.