

What is Quality Childcare?



Choosing a quality early care and education program is one of the most important decisions you will make as a parent or guardian. High quality programs foster social emotional development, school readiness, and achievement contributing to overall success in life. There are three main components of high quality childcare:

Learning Environment

A quality environment for children is healthy, safe, and well supervised.

Health and safety includes the following components: supervision, staff training, nutrition, hygiene and emergency procedures.

There are plenty of opportunities for physical activity, ample space to play and active hands-on learning experiences.

Respect

Each child's unique qualities and individual needs are respected.

Providers interact with children in ways that encourage positive social behaviors and view communication with parents as a partnership.

A quality program provides a balance of daily activities by giving children choices, celebrating diversity and offering positive discipline.

Staff Education

Providers are trained in Early Childhood Education and participate in ongoing professional development. They listen to children with interest and plan activities that recognize each child's abilities.

Childcare providers in El Dorado County can take advantage of several professional development opportunities throughout the year. These include workshops and trainings hosted by Catalyst Community and Quality Counts El Dorado. Additionally, state subsidized programs have access to the above offerings and the Quality Counts El Dorado rating system.

Please ask potential providers about their participation in professional development.

To find a high quality program, follow the steps on the next page.

Toolkit for Selecting Quality Care

1. Contact Catalyst Community

Catalyst Community is here to help you with your childcare needs. We have up-to-date information about licensed childcare centers, preschools, licensed family childcare homes, and license exempt centers. Contact your local Catalyst Community office to get a list of childcare options and develop your childcare plan.

- Western Slope **530-676-0707**
- South Lake Tahoe **530-541-5848**
- Alpine County **530-694-2129**
- Visit **www.catalystcomm.org** for more information and office locations.

Please note: The names of childcare programs that you receive from Catalyst Community are referrals, not recommendations.

2. Call Potential Providers

Save time and energy by calling the provider to narrow your search. You may have to leave a voicemail as providers are often busy with children. When you speak with the provider or director ask questions about:

- Openings
- Hours, vacations & holidays
- Rates and what is included
- Number and ages of children enrolled
- Experience caring for children
- Play and learning activities offered
- Guidance and discipline

3. Visit Potential Providers

It is very important that you visit a home or center before making a decision. Be prepared to spend time there to observe the daily routine and interactions between the children and provider. Use the provided list of **Questions to Ask** to guide your observations. Look for these basic signs of quality:

- Providers are respectful.
- Environment is healthy, safe and well supervised.
- Children are involved in a variety of activities.
- Providers participate in professional development.

4. Check Provider Licensing History

As a parent you have the right to access all public files pertaining to licensed facilities. The public record contains full reports from licensing visits and the results of any complaint investigations. To help you make a decision, look for a history of complaints and/or noncompliance against a provider.

- To get a complete licensing history, call Community Care Licensing **1-844-538-8766** with the provider's name and address OR facility number.
- You can also complete a facility search on-line at **www.cdss.ca.gov/** by following these steps:

Click Find Licensed Care and then Search for a Facility. Click Childcare, Facility Number, & Search.

5. Make A Decision

Now that you have visited several childcare programs, you can use the provided **Making A Decision Checklist** to compare each program and make a final decision. Once you have selected a program:

- Call the provider and let them know you would like to enroll your child
- Find out what information is required for the enrollment process
- Upon enrollment, licensed providers must inform you of your rights

During the Visit: Questions to Ask

Use the provided list to document your observations and guide your decision

Center or Provider Name:	
R e s p e c t	How many children attend this home or will be in my child's classroom?
	What would a typical day be like for my child?
	How do you help children feel secure and comfortable when they first begin your program or when they are sad?
	Do you have a contract or parent handbook that describes rules, fees, and policies (sick, late, etc.)?
	How do you communicate with parents about their child's development and about activities in the program?
	What forms of discipline and guidance do you use?
E n v i r o n m e n t	Can you show me your main play areas inside and outside, napping areas, and eating areas?
	What kind of learning/creative opportunities are children offered?
	Do you participate in a childcare food program? Do you provide meals or are families required to bring their own?
	Is there ample space and materials to encourage play and learning within the children's reach?
	How do you ensure supervision of children is maintained at all times?
S t a f f	Who else will be working with my child and can you introduce me to them?
	What kind of experience and training in Early Childhood do you or the staff have?
	Are you and your staff participating in ongoing professional development?
	How long have your staff members worked for the program?
O t h e r	Is there anything about your Licensing History that I should know?
	What are your rates? Do you accept subsidized payments?
	Do you provide diapers and/or potty training support?
	Do you have references I can contact?

After the Visit: Making Your Decision

Answer these questions about potential providers. If you can answer yes to most of these questions, this program is demonstrating many quality standards and may be a good fit for your family.

Center or Provider Name:		Yes
R e s p e c t	Communication – Communication with children and parents is courteous, considerate, attentive, and patient.	
	Policies – I received written information and agree with program policies.	
	Inclusion – Diversity and the individual needs of all children are accepted and respected.	
	Socialization – Positive interaction between children is encouraged.	
	Discipline – I agree with the rules, limits, and guidance techniques used.	
	Engagement – Children are interested and involved in what they are doing and seem happy.	
E n v i r o n m e n t	Activities – Children are able to choose from a variety of toys and activities both indoors and outdoors.	
	Toys – There are enough toys, equipment and books in good repair.	
	Supervision – Children are supervised at all times.	
	Safety – The environment is safe, clean, and well organized.	
	Health – Good hygiene such as hand washing is encouraged.	
	Nutrition – Healthy nutritious foods are encouraged.	
S t a f f	Early Childhood Training – Provider or staff participate in professional development activities.	
	Consistency – Program has low staff turnover and consistent teachers	
	Staff Engagement – Staff are engaged and truly enjoy working with children.	
O t h e r	Licensing History – I am comfortable with the program’s licensing history.	
	Goodness of Fit – This program seems like a good fit for my child’s personality and needs.	
	Impression – I feel comfortable in this environment and talking to the provider.	