



What's a Doc to Do? A Child Care Primer for Pediatricians in Training

Introduction

Over 70 percent of children under age five with employed parents are in the care of someone other than their parents during part of the day. Families face significant challenges in affording and accessing quality child care for their children. Low (or poor) quality care, especially in the earliest year, can be detrimental to child development and educational outcomes.

There are immediate and long-term health concerns for children in child care. Immediate concerns include exposure to viral and bacterial infections as well as safety and injury prevention. Long-term health outcomes can include healthy habits, school readiness, and avoidance of risky behaviors. These positive long-term outcomes are all the result of experiencing high quality child care and impact life-long health and wellbeing.

This Primer will:

- Review common types of child care
- Distinguish between licensed and unlicensed settings
- Discuss quality in child care and how it is measured
- Suggest how pediatricians can connect families to high quality child care & discuss the developmental importance of child care choices with families
- Encourage pediatricians to assist children & families that are enrolled in child care during routine care
- Provide ideas to learn more and become more involved in this important early childhood issue

Types of Child Care

Choosing a child care arrangement is a very personal decision for parents. It is one of the most important decisions a parent can make since the care children receive influences their future development.

The basic types of child care are child care centers, child care homes, “family, friend and neighbor” care, and child care in your own home. There are also Head Start and Early Head Start programs. **Appendix A** in this document has specific definitions and further information on the types of care.

The language and number of programs can feel confusing. Luckily, there are community organizations to support you and the families you serve as you learn about quality child care in your community. You do not need to be the expert, you just need to support families and link them to the resources to support their decisions.



Regulated? Licensed v. Unlicensed

In making decisions about child care, many questions can come up for parents. One such question: Who is licensed and what does it mean to be licensed?

Regulation and Oversight - Programs regulated by the State Office of Children and Family Services in New York (or your state's regulatory body) must be licensed or registered. With only a few exceptions, every program that cares for more than two children three hours or more per day must have a license or registration certificate.

Non-regulated/Informal Care – Home-based care for one to two children at a time in addition to the provider's children. These settings are legally exempt and therefore not required to register.

Most importantly, licensed and regulated settings have specific standards and safety requirements that have to be adhered to. It is important that parents understand that unregulated settings do not have state oversight. It is not always obvious whether or not a setting is licensed, so ensuring that families know to ask and understand the implications is essential.

Quality Matters

Research demonstrates that the quality of child care matters for children's development. Longitudinal studies of high-quality early care and education programs link quality early education to long-term positive child outcomes like enhanced cognitive scores, decreases in grade retention, lower rates of special education placement and higher rates of school completion. These programs include factors that are associated with high-quality care such as: qualified teachers, low teacher-child ratios, small class sizes, developmentally appropriate curricula, and parental involvement. Quality child care provides an opportunity to influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as provide a link for children and families to comprehensive health, nutrition and social support services.

All of a child's early experiences- whether at home, in child care, or in other preschool setting- are educational. The indicators of high quality care have been studied and are available in many formats. When care is consistent, emotionally supportive, and appropriate to the child's age, development, and temperament, there is a positive affect on children and families.

Many children in this country do not receive high quality care. A major study of child care quality in four states conducted in 1999 found that only one in seven child care centers had an environment of sufficient quality to promote the cognitive development and socio-emotional functioning of children. States have licensing requirements for child care centers and family child care homes, but they only provide minimal protection for the health and safety of children and most do not meet recommended program standards to enhance early development.



Low-income families and families looking for specific types of care including care for infants and toddlers, for children with disabilities, and for children whose families work non-traditional hours have unique challenges in affording and identifying quality care. According to a 2012 statistic from [Child Care Aware](http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf) (http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf), the annual cost infant care in a child care center for 31 states and the District of Columbia cost more than a year's tuition and fees at a four-year public college. Paying for a 4-year-old's care for a year, which is comparatively less expensive than paying for infant care, is still more expensive than paying a public college tuition for a year in 19 states and the District of Columbia.

Measuring Quality

A Child Care Quality Rating and Improvement System is a method to set standards for quality care, measure and "rate" child care quality, and support programs in improving quality. In New York this is a voluntary system, and not all programs currently participate in it. QUALITYstarsNY is New York's Quality Rating and Improvement system.

Centers are rated by a number of stars, much like a movie or restaurant is rated. This gives families and communities a sense of where a program stands on a spectrum of quality. Although not all programs can participate yet, there are many resources available on the QUALITYstarsNY website. The website and its resources can be helpful for you and the families you serve.

There are many opportunities for you to champion QUALITYstarsNY.

- Visit their [website](http://qualitystarsny.org/) (<http://qualitystarsny.org/>)
- Utilize their [brochure for families](http://qualitystarsny.org/pdf/sqny-brochure-families-2014_02_27.pdf). You can print, download, or [request free copies](http://qualitystarsny.org/pdf/sqny-brochure-families-2014_02_27.pdf). (http://qualitystarsny.org/pdf/sqny-brochure-families-2014_02_27.pdf)
- Helpful tools to [find quality care](http://qualitystarsny.org/families-steps.php). (<http://qualitystarsny.org/families-steps.php>)

**If you are not from New York, find your state's Quality Rating and Improvement System here: <http://qrisnetwork.org/state-qris-contacts>.*

Connecting Families to High Quality Child Care

There are community organizations to support you and the families you serve as you learn about quality child care in your community. As a health care provider, you can support families and link them to resources that will help them in their child care decisions.



Finding Resources in Your Practice Community

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, or CCR&Rs, are a great resource for connecting families to high quality child care. CCR&Rs are **local** organizations that provide **free**:

- Referrals to local child care providers
- Information on State Licensing requirements
- Information on Child Care Subsidies
- Education to inform parents to make quality choice that meets their needs

As a pediatrician you can identify your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) – a great, free resource-to share information with families or link them to directly. Simply leveraging this resource and sharing with the families you serve can be very powerful.

To find you local CCR&R, contact [Child Care Aware](#):

<http://childcareaware.org/parents-and-guardians> (go to the area that says free childcare search and type in your zip code) or call 1-800-424-2246 Monday - Friday

Discussing Child Care Choices in Your Practice:

Prenatal and well-child care visits are a great time to discuss child care with families. During these visits, you can:

- Talk with families about child care
- Help families weigh their child care considerations. (**See **Appendix B** for a list of work/life questions for consideration and an online tool to support families in their decision*)
- Underscore the importance of quality child care. (**See **Appendix C** for helpful resources to help families explore the quality of child care settings*)
- Explain the different types of child care; their characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages.
- Provide information on finding child care.
- Address questions and concerns about child care.
- Remind parents to consider back-up child care arrangements for when their child is ill.
- Discuss the benefits and oversight that accompany regulated/licensed child care and ensure parents are aware that they can ask to see license or registration certificate



Helping Families with Children in Care

For children and families enrolled in child care continue the conversation about child care as part of routine care and during sick visit encounters.

Ongoing Child Care Discussions for Well-care

- Document the child care program in the child's medical chart.
- Complete the child care admission requirements. Make sure the child is up-to-date on immunizations and health screenings.
- Encourage families create partnership with their child's caregiver and promote a 3-way partnership among pediatrician, families, and caregivers.
- Develop individual care plans in cooperation with the family and child care center for children with special needs.
- Ask families about their transitions between settings as applicable.
- Remind families of the importance of good communication with the caregiver.
- Follow up with and support child care programs if they reach out to you.

Children with Acute Conditions

- Review the information on child's signs and symptoms from the parents and the child care provider.
- Ask the family about contributing factors at home and child care.
- Simplify treatment recommendations and medications.
- Discuss when the child can return to child care. The AAP resource titled [Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools](http://aapredbook.aappublications.org/site/resources/midsheets.xhtml) can be a useful tool in ensuring that centers receive a consistent message on return to care instructions. (<http://aapredbook.aappublications.org/site/resources/midsheets.xhtml>)
- Document the child's condition for the caregiver.
- Report specified conditions to the necessary authorities.

Children with Chronic Conditions and Developmental/Behavioral Issues

- Ask the family about contributing factors at home and child care.
- Offer to speak with the child care provider.
- Consider doing an on-site observation at the child care program.
- Develop a written plan for the child.
- Simplify treatment recommendations and medications.
- Reference [Managing Chronic Health Needs in Child Care and Schools](http://shop.aap.org/Managing-Chronic-Health-Needs-in-Child-Care-and-Schools-A-Quick-Reference-Guide-eBook/) to ensure a consistent message to providers. (<http://shop.aap.org/Managing-Chronic-Health-Needs-in-Child-Care-and-Schools-A-Quick-Reference-Guide-eBook/>)



Conclusion:

Pediatricians can play a significant role in supporting families around child care choices and needs and linking families to quality child care every day. Opportunities to further partner with child care include:

- Assessing where you are at Promoting Quality Early Learning and Development Programs in Practice by using our [CHECKLIST](#)
- Playing a role in child care settings as an advisor, health consultant or simply by connecting and providing information and education
- Using your powerful, credible voice to advocate for stronger investments in quality child care
- Working with the state to promote quality child care, such as exploring areas of licensing/ technical support/consultation/quality rating systems and other key areas
- Reaching out to [Docs for Tots](#) if you want to be more involved (dft@docsfortots.org)

Useful Links to learn more:

Docs for Tots: Quality Early Learning Settings Can Transform Our Nation's Health: A Prescription for Growing Up Healthy. (<http://docsfortots.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/staplesfinal-brief.pdf>)

AAP site on child care (<http://www.healthychildcare.org/>)

AAP infographic "Impact of Pediatricians on Early Education and Child Care" (<http://www.healthychildcare.org/PDF/ImpactPeds.pdf>)

HECKMANEQUATION.org: Longterm health benefit of quality ECE (<http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/early-childhood-investments-substantially-boost-adult-health>)

Future of Children: Work and Families Issues for Families with Young Children http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/21_02_03.pdf



Appendices

APPENDIX A: Types of Child Care

Child Care Centers

A child care center provides care for groups of children by a staff of caregivers. The staff have some type of early childhood education training. Centers are generally licensed by the state. Centers are either privately operated for profit by a chain or individual, or operated by non-profit agencies, such as churches, public schools, government agencies, or non-profit vendors. Some Pre-K programs funded by the state that serve 4 (and sometimes 3 year olds) are located in child care centers.

Child Care Homes

A child care home provides care for a small group of children in the caregiver's home. These homes are registered or licensed in most states.

Child Care in Your Own Home

This type of care takes place in a child's own home. The caregiver may be a baby-sitter, a professional "nanny" trained to care for young children, a student "au pair" who lives in your home, or another caregiver who has some experience with young children. Parents need to check references carefully.

Family/Friend and Neighbor Care

Informal arrangements made for a child to be brought to and cared for by a family, friend or neighbor. This care is not regulated.

Sick Child/Back-Up/Emergency Care

All children get sick from time to time. Most child care centers have policies about sick children and very few allow children with contagious diseases to attend. Some day care centers set aside space to care for mildly ill children. These centers usually have a nurse on staff or on call.

Part-day Preschool Programs and Nursery Schools

Part-day preschool programs and nursery schools are group child care programs which operate less than a full day. These programs are located in a variety of settings, including churches, public schools, and child care centers. State licensing regulations may be different for programs operating less than a full-day schedule. This type of care, generally for children two and a half to five years of age, provides an opportunity for interaction with other children of similar ages. These programs usually follow the same academic year and holiday schedules as the public schools.



Head Start

Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in the following domains:

- Language and literacy;
- Cognition and general knowledge;
- Physical development and health;
- Social and emotional development; and
- Approaches to learning.

Head Start programs provide comprehensive services to enrolled children and their families, which include health, nutrition, social, and other services determined to be necessary by family needs assessments, in addition to education and cognitive development services. Head Start services are designed to be responsive to each child and family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Head Start programs build relationships with families that support:

Early Head Start

Early Head Start is a federally funded, community-based program that provides early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income pregnant women and families with children under age three. Early Head Start represents the best of what scientific research recommends for ensuring good health, strong families and positive early learning experiences for infants and toddlers.

Programs for Children with Special Needs

Finding child care for children with disabilities can be especially challenging for parents. However, information and assistance is available from national and community organizations and parent groups to make the search easier. One of the organizations that can help parents of special needs children find child care is the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY).

NICHCY can send you free of charge two very useful publications, A Parent's Guide: Accessing Programs for Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-schoolers with Disabilities and A Parent's Guide: Accessing Parent Groups The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers child care centers and family day care homes stating that they must accommodate children with special needs.

APPENDIX B: [Tool for Parents to Stay at Home or Return to Work](#)

Adapted from Child Care Aware

(http://ccaapps.childcareaware.org/en/tools/decision_making_tool/)

Step 1a: Finances *(links available through website above)*

- What does child care cost in my area? (Click [here](#) for cost information)
- What is the family budget? With one income? With two incomes? (Use the [Budgeting Child Care Options Calculator](#) to review family finances)

Step 1b: Support

- What can I/my partner do to support/assist with this child care decision?
- What can other family members do to support my/our child care decision?
- How can I/we turn to non-parent friends for support?
- How do I/we turn to friends who are parents for support?
- What support opportunities are available to families in my/our area?
- Are there any parent education resources in my/our area?

Step 1c: Relationships

- What were my/our role expectations prior to becoming a parent?
- How will these expectations change if I stay home to care for the child(ren)?
- How will my relationships with my partner/children/family/friends be impacted based on our child care decision?
- What if I choose to stay home and I am jealous of my partner?
- What if my/our family/friends/peers do not agree with my/our decision?
- What if I am jealous of my friends/peers who are working/have chosen to stay home with their children?

Step 1d: Work Assessment

- Do I need to be in the workforce to be happy?
- Am I career driven?
- How do I tell my employer I want to adjust my schedule/work from home/will not be returning?
- If I choose to stay home to care for my child, what if I feel guilty about not bringing home a paycheck?
- If I don't work out of the home, how can I be an 'equal' provider for my family?
- Is it possible for me to work from home?

Step 1e: After the Decision is Made

- What if I feel guilty about my decision to return to work?
- What if I have trouble leaving my child with someone else?
- How will I manage the family schedules after returning to work?
- What should I do so I don't feel isolated if I choose to stay at home with my child?
- What if I get upset or jealous at my peers who are working out of the home?
- How will I manage family schedules if I stay home to care for my child?

Step 1f: Child's Needs

- How will my/our child react/adjust to the family's child care decision?
- What do I need to know about my child's development/ what's best for my child?
- What child care situation is the most appropriate for my child's temperament?
- Does the size of my/our family affect my/our child care choices?



APPENDIX C: Is This the Right Place for My Child?

Adapted from the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies:

(http://www.naccrra.org/sites/default/files/publications/naccrra_publications/2012/isthitherightplaceformychild.pdf)

The telephone interview questions provided on the following pages can help you to screen the child care centers/homes. There are separate questions for centers and homes. They can help you determine whether the provider's services meet your needs and your child's needs, and also help you reduce the amount of time spent actually visiting the child care providers. Before beginning your telephone interviews, you may want to make a few copies of these forms and have them available when calling the centers/homes on your list.

Telephone Interview Questions for Child Care Centers

Name of center: _____ Phone
number: _____ Address: _____

Tell the person answering the phone your name and the age of the child needing care. Ask if he or she has time to answer a few questions. If not, ask when it would be a good time to call back.

- Do you have any openings? If not, do you anticipate having openings in the near future?
- Is the center licensed? By whom?
- What is the cost per week? \$ What does this include? (e.g., snacks, meals, diapers)
- Are there any extra costs?
- Is transportation available? To and from what locations?
- What days and hours is care available?
- Does the center close for vacations, holidays, staff training, or other reasons?
- Is sick care available? What are the policies regarding sick children?
- How many children in each group?
- How many caregivers for each group? (See Section 2 for recommended staff/child ratios)
- What is the total number of caregivers in the center?
- How many caregivers have left the center during the past year?
- What are the education and training requirements for the caregivers?
- What meals are served?
- Is there a safe outside play area?
- What are some sample activities that my child would be involved in?
- How does the center communicate the curriculum to the parents?
- Is there a weekly and/or daily written plan available to parents?
- Does the center provide written policies?
- Are parents permitted to visit their children unannounced at any time during the day?
- Add other questions you may have.



- If the basic information sounds like it will meet your needs, ask when you can visit. Be sure to make your appointment for a time the children will be present. Are the sounds in the background O.K., i.e., are many children crying in the background?

Telephone Interview Questions for Child Care Homes

Name of caregiver: _____ Phone
number: _____ Address: _____

Tell the caregiver your name and the age of the child needing care. Ask if he or she has time to answer a few questions. If not, ask when it would be a good time to call back.

- Do you have any openings? If not, do you anticipate having openings in the near future?
- Is your home licensed? By whom?
- What is the cost? What does this include? (e.g., snacks, meals, diapers) Are there any extra costs?
- What days and hours is care available?
- If you are sick or on vacation, are there provisions for backup care?
- What do you do when a child is sick?
- How many other children are cared for in your home? (See page 6 for recommended staff/child ratios)
- What meals are served?
- Is there a safe outside play area?
- What are some sample activities that my child would be involved in?
- Are parents permitted to visit unannounced any time during the day?
- Add other questions you may have.
- If the basic information sounds like it will meet your needs, ask when you can visit. Be sure to make your appointment for a time the children will be present. Are the sounds in the background O.K., i.e., are many children crying in the background?

On-Site Interview Checklist

Center/Home provider: _____ Phone
number: _____ Address: _____

- How does it LOOK?
- Is it clean, colorful, and in good repair?
- Is there a safe outside place to play?
- Is it "child proof"?
- Medicines and cleaning supplies are out of reach.
- The fire evacuation plan is satisfactory.
- Electrical outlets are covered or above children's reach.
- Are there different areas for each activity and are you satisfied with the amount of space for each?
- Are there at least 35 square feet per child of usable playroom floor space inside and at least 75 square feet per child of outside play space?



- Are there sufficient numbers and a variety of toys that will appeal to your child and that are in good condition?
- Are the meals nutritious? Do they include foods your child will eat? (Ask to see a weekly menu.)
- How does it SOUND?
- Do the children's voices sound happy and are they at a reasonable noise level?
- Are the caregivers' voices calm and caring?
- Is there children's music or singing at some time during the day?
- The STAFF:
 - Are the caregivers actively involved with the children, not talking to each other, doing paperwork, or "chores"?
 - Are good health habits followed (hand washing, diaper changing)?
 - Are the parents encouraged to make unscheduled visits?
 - Do the caregivers establish rules that children can follow?
 - Do the caregivers spend time holding and talking to the children?
 - Are the caregivers warm and friendly toward the children?
 - Do the caregivers treat each child as an individual?
- Is there a schedule of activities posted?
- Is the discipline fair and consistent without yelling or hitting?
- Are the children supervised at all times?
- Do the caregivers talk to the children frequently, pleasantly, and in a way the children can understand?
- The CHILDREN:
 - Do the children seem to be comfortable, happy, and enjoying themselves?
 - Are the children encouraged to be independent, allowed to "do it myself"?
 - Is there a balanced schedule that includes active and quiet times, group and individual times, and indoor and outdoor play?
 - Are the children comforted when needed?
 - Are the children actively engaged in a variety of "hands-on" activities appropriate to their age and interests?
 - Are the children allowed to make choices among a variety of activities and learning opportunities?
- How do YOU Feel?
 - Do you feel your child will be well cared for?
 - Do you feel the home/center is safe and cheerful?
 - Do you feel your child can learn here?
 - Would you feel comfortable leaving your child here?
 - Would you feel comfortable calling or visiting unannounced at any time?
 - Would you feel comfortable talking and working with the caregivers?

If, after the visit, you are considering sending your child to this center or home, ask for several references, preferably parents of children already participating. You will want to contact these parents and ask them about their experiences with the center/home.