

30 GUIDELINES ON WHAT TO LOOK FOR, QUESTION AND OBSERVE WHILE LOOKING FOR A QUALITY DAYCARE

Remember, a neat, clean, kind, intelligent looking person may give you a positive outlook but appearance can also be most deceiving. Stay with your basic instincts and go with your heart, as they are so often correct. Look around at as many places of care as possible as you may be quite shocked at the different offers and facilities. New schools are not always a solution just because furniture and equipment looks clean and new. At the beginning of every year, I receive numerous distress phone calls from members of the Pre-School Care Association, with information regarding all the newly opened daycare in their suburb or street. I have been more often proved correct in my answer in that only the dedicated and non-quick profit seeking daycare last while many close their doors for many reasons including their inability to accept providing the quality and adequate requirements. Unfortunately, children are removed from established daycare and placed into alternative newly opened daycare and it is most distressing to note that these children are once again subjected to a further change when the new daycare closes their doors. Advertising can also be most deceiving, as wording, pictures and other contents of the advert can be totally misleading and most luring to say the least.

1. Does the daycare belong to any daycare, pre-school or any other relevant organizations or associations as the majority require high standards and so often membership is only awarded to those who apply for application and therefore adhere or wish to improve their standards. Regular meetings of such associations or organizations, provide on-going teacher stimulation and change of teaching techniques are discussed. There are numerous advantages of being a member of such an organization or association. Daycare that do not feel the need for membership of such organizations often do not like to take advice or may not practice as per required standards. Some daycare are not permitted membership of organizations or associations by committee decision for many reasons and this will obviously be omitted from being told to parents on registration. There are a few towns and cities where there are no known organizations and associations so find out this information first by contacting the Municipal Health Department before you make your judgement.
2. Are the grounds well maintained and the entrance to the school well presented?
3. Are the classrooms/playrooms bright, sunny, well ventilated, clean and full of colourful information? Check for signs of dampness. Are there suitable fans or any cooling system for extremely hot days? Is there suitable warmth on cold days?
4. Are there regular displayed parent information posters? Posters show signs of requested parental participation and involvement.
5. Are the staff suitably trained – what qualifications do the staff have and do they have certificates to justify their qualifications and do they constantly update their knowledge by attending meetings, courses and workshops and therefore offering professional service?
6. Does the daycare operate a daily programme and well-planned themes changed on a regular basis? Themes broaden general knowledge and a programme assists with providing security to the children and stability to the teacher.
7. **VERY IMPORTANT:** Are the different age groups separated into classes? Whether there are 2 or 22 children, development begins within their own age group.
8. Are the classes divided into music, book, puzzle, block construction, activity, fantasy, and nature and theme areas?
9. Does the daycare have an interesting playground with water play, covered sand pit, free area for running, plenty of well-maintained equipment and shady areas? Is the sandpit sterilized EVERY WEEK? Plenty of salt or H.T.H. is the most commonly used. Is the water-play clean and filled with fresh water? The playground must be suitably fenced and there must be space for the children to run and get exercise, preferably in a grassed area. Part of the garden should be in the shade.
10. Is there good security at the daycare? How does a parent gain entry and is their control over who fetches the child each day?

11. Does the daycare offer a well-balanced lunch, offering variety and served in good quality containers? Is the correct quantity of food cooked to provide the children with an acceptable quantity of food? Are the basic table manners controlled during meal times? Children become bored with a routine meal so tried and tested new recipes add variety. Very few daycare provide teatime snack as it has been noted that the majority of parents prefer to supply their own, as they are then aware of their child's preference in sandwich fillings. Most daycare that provide snack, use the same sandwich filling for all the children and parents must be aware of this. Be sure to enquire if a variety of fillings are used during the week if you do not have to provide your own snack, as it is very cost effective and convenient to use basic spreads such as Bovril/marmite on a regular basis. Children are not to be force-fed but teacher encouragement does promote healthy eating at set times.
12. Are there hygienic working surfaces in the kitchen? Is the menu for the day displayed on a notice board or any other relevant position where parents will be able to note the menu without asking about it?
13. Is there sufficient equipment to cope with the number of children per class? Request to be shown as you have the right! - As to quote, "hidden or packed away equipment" may be misleading. This includes scissors, glue sticks, educational games, puzzles, blocks, crayons etc. It is important to view the different educational games and puzzles, as it is certainly not correct to provide 5 year olds with puzzles that are suitable for 3 year olds. There are many "cheap" educational games so be sure to note the quality and selection for the particular age groups. A shelf may look well stocked but you may be alarmed to note that the equipment is out dated, broken, pieces of puzzles missing, not relevant to the particular age group etc.
14. Are the chairs and tables the correct size and height for all the children?
15. Do the children partake in activities every day and are all the basic activities such as playdough, threading, painting, gluing, and drawing, cutting and tearing offered on a regular basis? Children should be offered the VARIOUS different types of activities such as feather painting, marble rolling, string painting, collage, splatter painting, chalk and coal drawings PLUS MANY MORE. Woodwork and baking should also be offered especially to children 4 – 6 years of age.
16. Does the daycare constantly repair and replace broken or lost outdoor and indoor equipment and are consumables such as glue, paint, crayons and waste materials replaced immediately after completion?
17. Is regular maintenance done on equipment such as toilets? It is easy to show that there are sufficient toilets for the number of registered children but who would really know if one or two were out of order with no immediate intentions to repair.
18. Does the daycare practice ALL basic health requirements and are the toilets cleaned throughout each day with strong disinfectants? To insure hygiene, this area must be clean at all times. Are the children supervised during toilet routine and preventing the incorrect usage of face cloths, towels and soap and thus teaching and maintaining hygiene? Is the inside and outside drains regularly cleaned and disinfected? Are the carpets regularly washed and daily vacuumed? Is the daycare frequently treated for pest control and sprayed for fleas? If you are unsure, you have the right to ask for proof.
19. If the daycare uses the face cloth and hand towel system, are they frequently washed, as well as the mattress covers? Are full day children permitted to sleep or rest for a limited period and are they provided with their own waterproof covered mattress with a symbol marked cover to prevent other children using the same rest time facilities? This practice eliminates contact contamination and the spread of germs and disease. Children must not be forced to sleep but should be encouraged to rest. Are there specific designated areas for rest time? Bathrooms, toilets and kitchens are not included in the designated areas.
20. Do the children go on outings and visit general places of interest at least once per term? This need only apply to the toddler and pre-school ages.
21. Are there refreshments available at all times and especially on hot days? Is the refreshment easily accessible to the children including during outside free play?

22. What method is used when disciplining the children? There is a definite correct and abusive way and children must never be hit, smacked, pushed, beaten or completely isolated from the other children in a daycare, as there are far more pleasant and rewarding procedures that offer greater success. Find out how “biting” is dealt with and make sure that the method whereby the child that was bitten is encouraged to bite back IS NOT USED as this is abuse and NOT successful.
23. Are the children greeted and welcomed in a friendly and loving manner on arrival each morning?
24. Are the staff neat and tidy in appearance and appropriately dressed for their work. Obviously very high heels, long nails, short skirts etc. cannot offer the staff freedom of movement as working with children requires plenty of movement and action.
25. Animals such as dogs and cats are not to be allowed near the children. However, an enclosed pet cage with animals such as rabbits and hamsters can assist children in learning about pet care. Feeding and caring for such animals can be very rewarding for little people.
26. Is there a well-stocked first aid kit and stored in an easily accessible place for adults only. Children should not be permitted to have easy access to the medicine and first aid kit. Daycare staff must have the basic first aid skills and the first aid equipment must be suitable in dealing with any accident. Is all medicine administered, (as instructed by parents) recorded in a specific medicine book and signed by staff members to avoid overdosing and incorrect administration? Are medicines requiring refrigeration, stored in the refrigerator every day?
27. Does the daycare maintain the correct teacher, assistant /child ratio?
28. Are activities such as water play and sand play offered to children on a daily basis? Is specific water play and sand play utensils utilized? Some daycare centres prefer not to offer water play on cold and rainy days and this is quite acceptable.
29. Are the cupboards and kitchen cupboards filled with poison for pest control? Is there easy access for children to take hold of any poison and/or detergents?
30. Look at the children, as they are the most important barometers for gauging the atmosphere at any daycare. They must be happy and at ease with their teachers and they should be occupied and not just walking around aimlessly.

Do you get the comfortable feeling that you will feel completely at ease during the day knowing that the daycare of your choice will provide love, security, understanding and a good education for your child? Do you feel that the teachers are suitably qualified to provide early intervention of any childhood problems? As the first 6 years are the most important in any child’s life, a suitably trained teacher can assist in all areas of the developmental stages that are imperative in preparing children for big school and for LIFE. Most children go through a “separation anxiety” problem and once the settling in process is over, do you feel that your child will enjoy the new daycare and that each day will be a new, rewarding and exciting challenge? Remember that your child may spend more time at a daycare than at home and they should be your most important asset in life – therefore their introduction to these important years, should be your main priority.

YOUR FAMILY, YOU AND YOUR CHILD DESERVE TOTAL PEACE OF MIND KNOWING THAT A HAPPY AND WORTHWHILE DAY HAS BEEN SPENT WITH ADULTS WHO HAVE A DEFINITE LOVE FOR WORKING WITH LITTLE PEOPLE.