

# The Search for Quality Child Care

What Every Parent Needs to Know  
About Quality Child Care



Investing In Quality  
Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough

# Dear Parents,

*You want the best for your child—and so do we.*

That's why we've put this booklet together — to help you choose a child care arrangement that meets your needs as working parents while it nurtures all aspects of your child's development.

High quality child care is much more than babysitting. It is gently guiding children as they learn about themselves and the world around them. It is helping them master the skills and lessons of everyday life. It is nurturing their fast-growing minds and carefully handling the challenges of behaviour, sickness and relationships—so they will grow into healthy, responsible and productive adults.

As parents, you will select your child care arrangement. But we can help. Here you'll find information on different kinds of child care and hints on what to look for to find a quality child care centre or family child care home—plus child care checklists, financial assistance information and other important information. And you can call the services listed in this guide for personal assistance with your child care search.

Remember, quality child care lasts a lifetime!

Good luck,

The Investing in Quality Committee



# Different Kinds of Child Care

*The first step in making the right child care choice is to figure out what kind of child care is best for you. There are three main forms of child care:*

## Child Care Centres

Child care centres and nursery schools are places where children are cared for and, where, like a small school, they are grouped by age. It is normally open all year round and has regular daytime hours. Many parents choose centres because of their larger staff, facilities, space, toys, equipment and planned early learning activities.

Child care centres and nursery schools are licensed and governed by the Day Nurseries Act. This ensures uniform minimum standards in areas of health, programming, nutrition and staffing. When you choose centre-based care for your child you are choosing an organization and a program as well as a provider.

### **What is the difference between a nursery school and a child care centre?**

The difference is the amount of hours that the program is open.

## Family Child Care

A family child care home offers care in another person's home. The number of children is limited by Ontario law to a maximum of 5. Parents may prefer this type of care because they want their children in a more home-like environment. Family child care homes are especially popular for the care of infants and small children.

In Ontario there are two types of Family home child care. There are licensed home child care agencies that have caregivers providing child care through the agency, and informal home child care where providers are working independently.

Licensed home child care agencies must meet ministry standards and will provide opportunities for professional development. Agencies have home visitors that mentor and support their family home child care providers.

## In Home Child Care

In this category, a caregiver either lives in or comes to the family's home to care for the child, keeping the child in his or her normal surroundings, with familiar toys and routines. This is convenient for the family and offers flexibility.

However, it is considerably more expensive, unless there are several children to be cared for.

Parents/Guardians choosing this form of child care need to be aware that they become employers and need to follow the Employment Standards Act. [www.labour.gov.on.ca](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca)

### **Noteworthy:**

Regardless of the style of care you decide on, it is your responsibility to monitor your child's care. Being actively involved in your child's care will help you feel secure in your choice and give you opportunities to ask questions when you have concerns.

# ***Raising the Bar***

***Raising the Bar*** is a program designed to help families ensure their children are receiving high quality early learning and child care services. The presence of a ***Raising the Bar*** certificate is a sign that the program is committed to maintaining provincial regulatory standards as well as local community standards.

***Raising the Bar*** was developed and introduced in Hamilton, Ontario to promote and support observance of community standards in:

- Licensed, centre-based Early Learning and Child Care Programs
- Licensed School-Age Child Care programs
- Special Needs Resource Agencies
- Licensed Home Child Care Agencies
- Early Learning and Parenting Centres.

***Raising the Bar*** is an accreditation initiative to improve quality in all licensed centre-based, child care settings, across Peterborough City and County. ***Raising the Bar*** is a thoroughly researched, Canadian initiative, developed in Hamilton, Ontario as a program that promotes and maintains best practice and healthy child care environments.

***Raising the Bar on Quality*** strives to promote and recognize quality in licensed child care centres through voluntary accreditation. Participations strive to complete phases of achievement for their programs in the following areas:

1. **Quality Assurance** (e.g. conducting child health assessments, parent surveys).
2. **Best Practices in Child Care Management** (e.g. policies and procedures)
3. **Staff Professional Development** (e.g. first aid & environmental assessment training)

***Raising the Bar on Quality*** is to be **cooperative not competitive**. Participating child care centres work together to help each other succeed in this initiative. The centres will be made aware of all participating centres, however, the level of accreditation will not be used for marketing and promotional purposes, as competition between the centres is not endorsed. Participating centres may be working on different phases of the program. A gold certificate may not be an indication of better quality, from the program down the road with a bronze certificate. They may have just started the process.

## **How will I know if a child care centre is participating in RTB?**

- Ask the centre supervisor/director about their participation in Raising the Bar.
- Look for certificates on the wall of the child care centre/agency
- Visit the RTB website at [www.raisingthebar.ca](http://www.raisingthebar.ca)

## Quality Child Care Makes a Difference

Every child has the right to the best possible childhood. As your child's first and most important teacher, you have been working hard to provide the best environment you can for your little one. Most likely it is the need to go back to work or school that has brought you to a place where you need help from others to do this important job.

There is a great deal of research available to confirm that high quality child care is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. There is also plenty of research out there to confirm that child care environments that are of low quality can be detrimental to children.

*Children who thrive in primary school and whose pathways are set for later academic success are those who enter Grade 1 with strong oral communication skills and are confident, able to make friends, persistent and creative in completing tasks and solving problems, and excited to learn. These are the same qualities that children strengthen through high quality play during their early years.*

— *Early Learning for Every Child Today, ELECT*

Qualified early learning and care professionals - like Early Childhood Educators - with training in child development, is a very important piece to good child care.

An early learning and care environment that is safe, clean and bright, welcoming and gives children a sense of belonging is just as important.

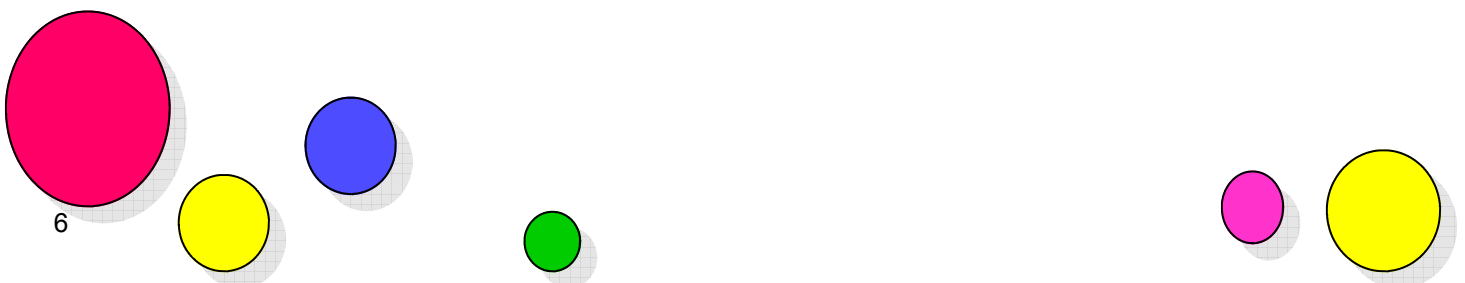
The pages that follow will help you understand what high quality child care looks like and how to find the right place for your family.



# Steps to Finding Quality Child Care

*Selecting your child care arrangement is one of the most important decisions you will make. Take some time to investigate your options and think about what you value most.*

1. **Think about what you value.** Take some time to reflect on your family values and beliefs. Write down the words that describe what you would like to see and what qualities you would like your child's primary caregiver to possess. When you begin visiting potential centres or caregivers, you will have an idea of what you want.
2. **Contact the centres or home child care providers you are interested in.** Begin to look at a variety of centres and providers to narrow down your contact list. Child care centres and home child care providers will have philosophies that guide their program. Look for the philosophy that closely matches your own.
3. **Observe the program or provider in action.** This step is one that should not be missed. It is very important to take the time to visit the child care centre or home child care provider. This is where you will get a better understanding of the environment your child or children will be exposed to. You will be able to ask questions, watch how the educators interact with the children in the program and how they guide their behaviour. Take your time during this step to ensure you have all the answers you need to make a decision. A checklist to help you with this step is located on pages 10 and 11 of this guide.
4. **Check References.** Once you have made a decision about the child care centre or home child care provider you would like to work with, it is time to ask others about the experience they had in the early learning and care environment you have chosen. At this point you can ask the child care centre supervisor/director or home child care provider for a list of parents that have had some experience with the program. 3 references is standard. Make a list of questions you would like to ask that will help you make your final decision.



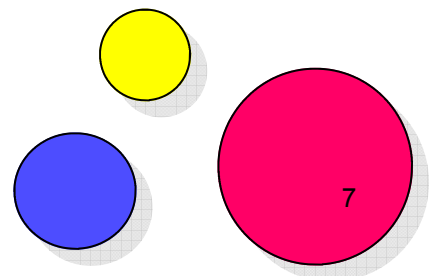
# Quality Early Learning and Care looks like...

## ***The Environment***

- Is safe for children regardless of their mobility.
- Has a pleasant, comfortable and clean atmosphere.
- Offers a variety of age appropriate materials and play spaces to promote your child's development.
- Values play that is child directed instead of adult directed.
- Has a variety of toys, books and materials that are in good condition.
- Offers opportunities for creative activities and exploration.
- Has space available for quiet time or naps.
- Maintains sanitary conditions for food preparations, diaper changes and bathroom facilities.
- Offers ample time for outdoor play (excluding nursery schools)

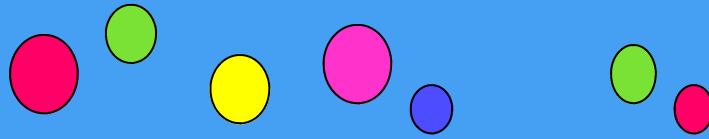
## ***The Teacher***

- Has a warm personality, enjoys and values children.
- Is attentive to your child's smiles as well as cries.
- Relates to your child as a unique individual and encourages growth towards independence.
- Is a knowledgeable, responsive early childhood professional.
- Understands the ages & stages of child development.
- Is flexible, patient and understanding.
- Has a child rearing philosophy compatible with your own.
- Plays with your child and provides a variety of play experiences that reflect your child's interests.
- Trusts and values parents suggestions, because parents understand the needs of their own children.
- Provides positive child guidance that builds self- esteem and confidence.
- Sees training and growth as a continual process.



# Ten

Things to look for on your visit.



**1 Are the children happy?** See if the children seem to enjoy coming to the program. When there, they should feel like they are at home - easily playing and talking with others. Look for smiles, happy faces and the sounds of a positive atmosphere.

**2 Are the children safe?** For the child's well-being and yours, it's important to know that your child is in the care of a responsible person and organization. It is important to know that the early learning and care environment is set up to avoid fire, accidents and other dangers. That there is a clear plan to deal with emergencies and illness. Look for smoke detectors, first aid supplies, safe play areas with covered outlets and toys in good repair. Make sure that children are not released to anyone parents do not specify and are never left alone or unsupervised.

**3 Are teachers caring and responsive?** First and most important, early learning professionals should love children. When they do, you'll find they talk and play with the children. They respond quickly when they have problems, set limits gently, comfort them and meet their daily needs. Even child guidance should be handled with care and understanding - by setting limits and offering consistent supervision.

**4 Are the teachers well qualified?** At the very minimum, caregivers should have some training in child care with an emphasis on child development, first aid, CPR and child guidance. Better yet, an Early Childhood Educator is a professional with an extensive knowledge of child development, curriculum planning to meet the needs of children and the ability to assess learning. Early Childhood Educators have credentials and certificates that support early learning and life readiness. They are registered members of the College of Early Childhood Educators.

**5 Do the activities lead to learning and development?** Just watching children isn't enough. High quality child care environments are places where the educators assess each child's development set appropriate goals and plan strategies to help the children meet these goals. Teachers plan for all areas of development and include activities and experiences that are of interest to the children in the program. Look for a number of special interest areas like dress-up, science/nature, book corner, block area, creative/art, and water/sand table to name a few.

**6 Is the room clean, pleasant and well-organized?** When you look around the room, do you see places to store the toys. Are the shelves at a height that make it easy for children to clean up when they are done?



Is the room bright and comfortable? High quality programs have children's artwork and pictures of the children displayed at the child's eye level and is not cluttered. Is the space large enough for the number of the children attending? Can they spread out and become engrossed in an activity?

**7 Are good health and nutrition practices followed?** You will want to be sure that the place is clean, especially the bathrooms, diaper changing areas along with the food preparation area. Does the program have cleaning practices posted? Does everyone wash their hands before serving, eating bathroom visits and diapering. Does every child have their own cot or mat for rest time? Is the room warm enough in cold weather and cool enough when it is hot? Are the meals based on the Canada's Food Guide and offer healthy choices for children?

**8 Do teachers and parents work together for the well-being of the child?** Working together as partners is the best way to help your child get ready for school and life. Working together on behaviours and skill building both at home and in care help a child feel confident and loved.

**9 Are parents and families encouraged to be involved?** Child do better when they feel like the grown-ups in their lives are interested in what they are doing. They are happier and can focus on their job of

learning when everyone is working together. What opportunities does the program or provider have for you to get involved. there may be opportunities such as board member, a circle time visitor, or even baking your famous chocolate chip cookies for a bake sale fundraiser. Ask the supervisor or provider what they think about parent involvement.

**10 Do the child care costs, hours and policies match your needs?** As a working parent, you do not want surprises. Make sure your centre, home provider or in-home caregiver is what you can afford. Do the hours fit within your work schedule? What happens when your child is sick, on school vacation or has an emergency? There should be written contracts and policies that provide information on what to expect from the care arrangement.

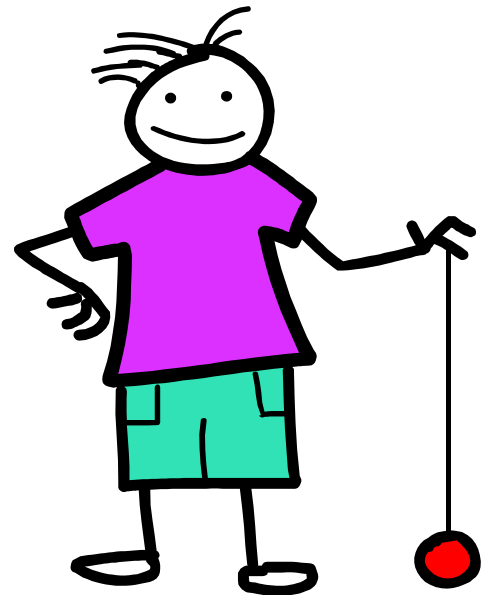


# What to ask a Home Child Care Provider

## *The Open Door Policy*

You have the right to drop into your child care centre or family child care home unannounced - and see your child - anytime they are open.

- \_\_What is your child care philosophy?
- \_\_What experience you have caring for young children? How long have you been providing care in your home? How long do you plan to continue working from home?
- \_\_What kind of training/education do you have?
- \_\_Will there be other adults in the house while my child is here?
- \_\_How many children do you provide care for?  
(note that home child care providers can only care for a maximum of 5 children at one time.)
- \_\_Do you have children of your own?
- \_\_What rooms will my child be in during care?
- \_\_What kinds of activities and experiences do offer children (inside/outside)?
- \_\_What is your daily routine?
- \_\_How will you make sure my child receives individual attention?
- \_\_What do you do if a child hits, bites another child, or is uncooperative?
- \_\_How do you sooth a child that is crying or is upset?
- \_\_What is your approach to toilet training?
- \_\_Do you take children on field trips?
- \_\_What are the hours and days you offer care? What happens if I can not get there on time to pick-up my child?
- \_\_What are your fees? When do I pay them?
- \_\_What is your vacation policy?
- \_\_What do you do if my child is sick, hurt or has an emergency? Do you have first aid and CPR training?
- \_\_What happens if you are sick or on vacation? Do you have a back-up care provider?
- \_\_How will you communicate with me about my child's progress?
- \_\_Do you encourage parents to be involved? If so, How can they be involved?
- \_\_Can I have the phone numbers of other parents to ask them some questions?



# What to ask a Child Care Centre Director

- \_\_What is your agency's program philosophy?
- \_\_What experience you have caring for young children?
- \_\_What kind of training/education do the teacher have?
- \_\_Who will be caring for my child?
- \_\_How many children does each teacher have responsibility for?
- \_\_How many children will be in the room with my child?
- \_\_How long have your teachers been at the centre?
- \_\_What kinds of activities and experiences do offer the child (inside/outside)?
- \_\_What is your daily routine?
- \_\_How will you make sure my child receives individual attention?
- \_\_What do you do if a child hits, bites another child, or is uncooperative?
- \_\_How do you sooth a child that is crying or is upset?
- \_\_What is your approach to toilet training?
- \_\_Do you take children on field trips? Is permission required?
- \_\_What are the hours and days you offer care? What happens if I can not get there on time to pick-up my child?
- \_\_What are your fees? When do I pay them? Are there any other fees?
- \_\_What is your vacation policy?
- \_\_What do you do if my child is sick, hurt or has an emergency? Does the my child's teacher have first aid and CPR training?
- \_\_How will you communicate with me about my child's progress?
- \_\_Do you encourage parents to be involved? If so, How can they be involved?
- \_\_Can I have the phone numbers of other parents to ask them some questions?

# Self Reflection

Now that you have visited some child care centres, sat and observed them in action and have asked many questions, you probably have a sense of where the right fit is for your child and your family. Your instincts and feelings are a good guide and you should listen to them. Here are some questions to ask yourself before you make your final decision.

- Will my child fit in at this centre/home child care?
- \_\_\_ Do I like their approach to learning, play and discipline?
- \_\_\_ Will my child be safe and secure in this setting?
- \_\_\_ Will I feel comfortable talking to the staff/caregiver about concerns?
- \_\_\_ Do I feel comfortable at the centre/home child care?
- \_\_\_ Is the location convenient for me? If not, can I live with it?
- \_\_\_ Do the costs, hours and policies meet my needs and do I agree with them?

## Your Role in the Child Care Arrangement

As a working parent, one of the most important relationships you will have is the one with your child's teacher and caregiver. When you choose a program or a family child care provider, you are not just paying for a service - you are choosing a partner to help raise and care for and teach your child. This partnership must be based on mutual respect, trust and on-going communication. By working together, you and your caregiver will be able to achieve your common goal - meeting the child's physical, mental, social and emotional needs. It is important that you build a strong and open relationship with your child's teacher. Offering ideas that work at home and being open to suggestions that work at child care is a great way to build that relationship. Volunteer to help when and if you can. Show your appreciation when you can. Everyone likes to hear that they are doing a great job!



## Helpful Services

So now you know what to look for and what questions to ask, but where do you begin your search? The local phone book will have most child care centres and agencies, but there are better places to start. The Peterborough Family Resource Centre has a Child Care Resource Consultant that maintains the Child Care Information Exchange. This is a registry of the child care centres, licensed home child care agencies and the informal home child care providers that choose to list their name. Parents and Guardians can visit the PFRC during office hours or visit a Mobile Outreach location. The PFRC also has a website with an online registry.

Peterborough Family Resource Centre  
201 Antrim St.  
Phone: 748-9144  
Fax: 748-9177  
Website: [www.pfrc.ca](http://www.pfrc.ca)

## Do you need help with child care costs?

A fee subsidy is financial assistance available to eligible residents of the City and County of Peterborough, to assist with the cost of licensed childcare for children 0 – 12 years of age. If eligible your childcare fees may be fully or partially covered through the fee subsidy program.

**The first step is to contact the Children's Services at 705-748-8830 extension 3616.** You should plan to apply for subsidy well in advance of when you will require assistance, as there is periodically a waitlist for funding. The information you provide during your phone intake application will be used to determine if you might qualify. If you appear to qualify, your name will be placed on the subsidy waiting list. Your eligibility cannot be confirmed until your name gets close to the top of the subsidy waiting list. At that time, you will be contacted and a verification appointment will be scheduled at the Peterborough Social Services Family Centre at 175 Simcoe Street in Peterborough.

Children's Services also has a website with information about the licensed child care options in the Peterborough area.

# Notes

