



# Y Parenting Tips

## Selecting a Childcare Centre

There are many different childcare options available to parents:

- preschool, which provides a formal education structure in sessions
- long day care centres (LDC), which also include structured learning
- Family Day Care (FDC)
- occasional care.

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) is responsible for ensuring that all NSW licensed childcare services meet strict minimum standards, such as:

- adequate staff (both trained and untrained) in the centre at all times children are present

- operational policies and procedures in place

- appropriate programs, activities and facilities are implemented and monitored.

### Which type of service should I choose?

The following information will help you decide what type of childcare best suits your needs.

### What should I look for when choosing a centre?

The service you choose should have a

program of various indoor and outdoor activities to stimulate your child's development, so they learn:

- language skills (reading, singing, nursery rhymes, talking)
- physical skills (walking, climbing, jumping, balancing, using a pencil or using eating utensils)
- social and emotional skills (taking turns, sharing, conflict resolution)
- cognitive or thinking skills (problem solving, counting, grouping).

Once you've decided on the type of care, it's a good idea to arrange to visit service

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Service type & options *	Ages	Staff/child ratios & qualifications	Hours of operation	Fee Relief
LDC – private or council / church / school sponsored; parent-run committee	0–6 yrs	1:5 (under 2 yrs) 1:8 (2–3 yrs) 1:10 (3–school age) Staff – early childhood education training, including Certificate III (Children's Services), Diploma/Associate Diploma (Children's Services), university degree	min 10 hrs per day – 5 days/pw	Child Care Benefit for eligible families (contact Centrelink)
Preschool – council / church / school sponsored; parent-run committee	3–5 yrs	1:8 (2–3 yrs) 1:10 (3–school age) Staff – early childhood education training, qualifications vary with size of preschool	morning or afternoon sessions, or 9am–3pm to 5 days/pw	some fee relief available (contact preschool director)
FDC Scheme – run by council / community organisation	0–12 yrs	1:7 (to 12 years – including carer's own children) 1:5 (to school age) Carers – no formal qualifications required; scheme coordinator – early childhood qualifications	according to mutually-agreed arrangement	Child Care Benefit for eligible families (contact Centrelink)
Occasional care – run by council / community groups	0–6 yrs	1:5 (under 2) 1:8 (2–3 yrs) 1:10 (3–school age) At least one staff member + volunteers – training varies with size of the service	to 5 days/pw	ask service to contact Centrelink re availability
Mobile services (preschool and occasional care) usually	0–6 yrs	1:5 (under 2) 1:8 (2–3 yrs) 1:10 (3–school age) Staff – early childhood education training, qualifications vary with size of service	various	ask service to contact Centrelink re availability
Out of School Hours (OOSH) Care	5–12 yrs	Staff/child ratios not regulated – DoCS recommends 1:15 (OOSH care providers currently lobbying for legislation to require services meet this ratio)	various (including before/after school, school holidays)	Child Care Benefit for eligible families (contact Centrelink)

\* Services not run by a school must be licensed by DoCS



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providers and assess the most suitable carer/centre for you and your child. Talk to staff and—if possible—other parents using the service. Some centres hold open days (usually at the beginning of the year or the end of the preceding year) for parents thinking of enrolling their children.

Your first impressions are important. If you feel comfortable with the service then your child will most likely enjoy being there. Ask to be taken on a tour of the centre and introduced to the other staff (and perhaps some of the children). Don't be afraid to ask questions and look around. Observe the staff/carers and the environment, and ask yourself the following:

■ GENERAL—

- What is the service's accreditation status and can I have input in to this?
- What are the staff employment, management and training policies?
- What are the hours, fees, total number of children in each group, and what happens if my child is absent? What is the late-payment policy?
- What is the procedure with excursions?
- Does the centre follow inclusive practices regarding multiculturalism, children with disabilities?
- Are records kept by the centre accessible by me?

■ PROGRAM—

- Is it displayed and will it cater for my child's individual needs and interests? Do older children have input? Is there a balance of indoor/outdoor and active/quiet activities?

■ INTERACTION/COMMUNICATION—

- Are children receiving individual attention? Are siblings allowed time with each other (if in separate areas of the centre)?
- Are children clear about the behaviour expectations?
- Are my questions answered openly and honestly? Is the atmosphere welcoming, cheerful, busy (but not chaotic)?
- How will reports on my child's development be given to me? Are handbooks, newsletters, policy

manuals, and management committee information available? What are the procedures for dealing with complaints, concerns or grievances?

■ FACILITIES—

- Are there places children can play alone or in small groups? Is there adequate shade and a quiet rest area? Is the room temperature comfortable and is there plenty of natural light and ventilation?
- Are bathrooms/nappy changing areas clean and tidy? Are there plenty of toilet paper/hand soap/paper towels and are they easy for children to reach?
- Is there enough play equipment and is it suitable and in good condition?

■ HEALTH & SAFETY—

- Can children always be seen by staff/carer? Are emergency procedures and safety and hygiene policies clearly displayed?
- Are there regular fire emergency evacuation drills?
- What is the procedure for notifying me in case of accident or illness?
- Do staff and children wear hats and sunscreen when outside?
- Are staff qualified in first-aid and are there well-stocked first-aid kits?
- What is the centre's infection control policy?
- What is the child protection and reporting policy?

■ MEAL/SNACK TIMES—

- Are they organised? Are children involved in preparing food (eg snacks in an after-school program) and is nutritional information provided? Is fresh drinking water freely available, inside and out?
- If food is provided, is it varied and is the menu clearly displayed? Are cultural/dietary needs taken into account?

You might not get all this information in one visit, so plan to revisit at different times until you feel confident. However, be aware of the routine and avoid inconvenient times—eg when children are

arriving and staff need to focus on settling them in and talking with their parents.

Every service should have written information available about how the centre/service operates—these are called policies that officially answer many of the above questions. Add this information to your own observations to help you in your decision. It can be helpful also to talk with other people about their experiences with childcare, but do not automatically assume that the service they chose will be right for you and your child.

## What records will the service keep?

The records the service must keep on you and your child include:

- Childcare Benefit information for calculating the correct fees
- development details—notes on daily events, portfolio of your child's work
- individual development records
- court orders regarding who can collect or have access to your child while at the centre
- specialist medical reports (eg speech pathologist's), updated immunisation records, accident/illness records (kept for 25 years after the accident)
- changes in address or contact numbers
- attendance records.

You are entitled to view these records—and under the Privacy Act, change any incorrect information. Staff can access them, but they cannot share the information with anyone else without your written permission (except where a court order grants another agency, such as the Police, access).

For further information on childcare, see:

[www.ncac.gov.au/](http://www.ncac.gov.au/) – 'Things to Consider When Choosing Child Care' (National Childcare Accreditation Council)

[www.napcan.org.au/](http://www.napcan.org.au/) – NAPCAN (National Association for Prevention of Child abuse and Neglect)

[www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/childcare\\_serv/childcare.htm](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/childcare_serv/childcare.htm) (Dept. of Community Services)

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