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Essential Indicators of Quality Childcare

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Child care has become an essential component of life in our society. Quality child care can make a big difference in a child's development. There are six main quality indicators that should be considered when looking for child care. Keeping these in mind during your search will help determine if a setting is in the best interest of your child.

- **Ratio:** The number of staff required in a family child care home or child care center depends not only on the number of children in the setting but also on the ages of the children. A small number of children per adult is most important during a child's early years. Infants need an adult-to-child ratio of no more than 1:4 (one adult for four infants) in a child care center and 1:2 (one adult for two infants) in a family child care home. Four-year-olds do well with a ratio of 1:8 (one adult for eight children) in a center while the ratio is 1:4 (one adult to 4 preschoolers) in a family child care home.
- **Group Size:** Count the number of children in each age group. Research shows the quality of care is better when the group size is small, meaning the children receive more attention. The group size in a center, for infants should not be more than 8 in one room (with 2 adults). The maximum group sizes are determined by the ratio of staff to children, the larger the group, the more staff should be present.
- **Learning Environment:** The space where children play, learn, and grow in a quality program should be clean and inviting. Children should look happy and busy. The equipment, materials, and planned activities should stimulate learning. Adults should be listening to, talking with (not at), and enjoying interacting with the children.
- **Family Involvement:** Many child care programs encourage parents to stay involved by volunteering time when needed and joining in on special events, like field trips, Career Day, and regular parent meetings. Be sure to ask your provider how you can be involved. You should feel welcome to visit the program at any time and be invited to participate in decisions which affect your child.
- **Caregiver Education:** Caregivers who have experience with children and are trained in early childhood development are more likely to organize age-appropriate activities which allow children to grow and learn. Those providers who further their own education are more likely to promote a positive learning

environment. You want the staff to be knowledgeable and understand appropriate development and behaviors for children.

- **Health and Safety:** The environment should be clean with an emphasis on hand-washing. Tables should be washed, electrical outlets should be covered, and staircases should have gates. In the child care setting, caregivers protect children by making sure equipment is sturdy, toys are not broken and are clean. Outdoor play spaces must be free of hazards of all kinds. The program should have health policies in place which are followed by providers to ensure healthy and safe practices.
- **Accreditation:** This means that a child care center or family child care provider has made a commitment to provide a high quality program for young children and their families. Child care centers, family child care homes, and after school programs have different organizations that conduct the accreditation process. Family child care homes and child care centers must offer the kind of care, attention, and educational activities that satisfy parents' needs for their children. Ask the director if the program is accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children. For more information on this program visit QualitystarsNY.org.