



**START EARLY
START STRONG
QUALITY EARLY LEARNING**

STEPS TO FINDING QUALITY CARE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The early years of life are critical to a child's learning and development. Quality early learning programs, like child care and preschool, help children start early and start strong on the path to life-long success.

Colorado Shines and Child Care Resource and Referral agencies work to connect parents and caregivers with quality early learning programs, like child care and preschool, that have a big impact on a child's development.

STEP ONE: LEARN ABOUT YOUR OPTIONS

Think about the kind of care you need for your child (a center, home-based care, Head Start, etc.). A Child Care Resource and Referral agency can provide information on these options. Call **1-877-338-2273**.

STEP TWO: SEARCH FOR A QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAM

A Child Care Resource and Referral agency can provide you with a list of available child care programs in your community, or you may search for a program at ColoradoShines.com.

Both resources can also provide information to determine if you qualify for financial support, like the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program.

STEP THREE: VISIT AND ASK QUESTIONS

Visit programs in person and speak with the provider or center director. Ask them questions to find out what you can expect from their program. Use the Colorado Shines Child Care Worksheet to determine what questions to ask.

STEP FOUR: TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

When looking for child care programs, it is important to understand what makes each program unique, qualified and successful. Colorado Shines assesses and supports improvement in the quality of all licensed early learning programs.

It is also important to learn about the licensing history of a program. This information is available at ColoradoOfficeOfEarlyChildhood.com.

STEP FIVE: YOUR CHILD IS ENROLLED! WHAT'S NEXT?

Be part of your child's early learning experience. Play, read, sing and talk with your child. Find more tips at EarlyLearningCO.org.

Communication is important. Talk to your child's teacher often about how your child is doing at home and in care.

COLORADO SHINES CHILD CARE WORKSHEET

Use the following question and observation worksheet when you visit providers as a way to further narrow your list of options and make notes. Print additional worksheets at ColoradoShines.com.

Name of program: _____

Date of visit: _____

1. Is your program licensed by the State of Colorado?
2. What hours are you open? Are your hours flexible?
3. What days are you closed for holidays or staff training?
4. What is the age range of the children in your care?
5. How many children are in each classroom or home? What is the teacher to child ratio?
6. How will my child spend his/her day? What is a typical day like?
7. What is your philosophy regarding caring for children?
8. What training have you and your staff had?
9. May I have a list of current parents to contact for feedback on your program?
10. What do you do when a medical emergency occurs?
11. What kind of daily communication can I expect from you?
12. Are there ways for me to participate in the program?

CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO LOOK FOR:

Health and Safety

- Equipment is clean and in good repair.
- Electrical outlets are covered.
- Emergency route and emergency numbers are posted.
- The doors are locked and visitors are required to sign in.
- All toys are clean and in good condition.
- The playground has safe surfaces, is fenced and has both sun and shade.

Environment Basics

- The room is warm and inviting.
- The children are happy and involved with both staff and with other children.
- The furniture is child-sized and the materials are at the children's level.
- Materials are age-appropriate and there are enough supplies for children to either play alone or to share.
- Different cultures and traditions are seen in the classroom.

Daily Activities

- Nutritious meals and snacks are provided.
- Nap and story time are built into the day.
- Puzzles, blocks, music and make-believe stations are provided.
- Children have a time to choose their own activities.
- Activities are varied and include both outdoor playtime and indoor quiet time.
- A daily schedule is posted.

Teacher/Child Interactions

- There is shared respect between teachers and children.
- Teachers are at children's eye level when talking with them.
- Teachers listen closely to each child and use positive language when talking with them.
- Children are asked questions and not just given directions.
- The teacher attends to children who are upset.
- I am comfortable that my child's culture and traditions will be welcomed