



Quality child care matters.

Choosing quality child care matters because it makes today better and tomorrow brighter for your child. It helps your child get off to the best possible start and paves the way for him or her to do well in primary school. Quality early childhood experiences increase your child's chances of graduating from high school and reaching his or her potential as an adult.

Look for a caregiver who enjoys working with children and understands how they grow and learn. The caregiver should have special training in early childhood education so that he or she is able to plan experiences that are right for your child at each age.

Certified and licensed child care programs are a good choice because there are standards of care in place to protect children's health, safety and welfare. Accredited programs meet the highest standards of all.



When choosing quality child care, make sure that

- ▶ The child care providers are warm, caring and enjoy their work.
- ▶ The child care providers understand how children develop, and they receive regular training to improve their skills.
- ▶ The child care providers listen carefully to all children, answer their questions and respect their feelings.
- ▶ The child care providers believe that every child is valuable and can do well.
- ▶ The children are safe, relaxed and comfortable.
- ▶ The children are read to daily.
- ▶ The children are happy and actively involved in play or group activities.
- ▶ The parents are welcome to visit and have opportunities to participate in the program.
- ▶ The parents are respected and receive help or support if needed.

CALL 1-888-713-KIDS

Invest early in a child's future



Early learning matters.

Early experiences and relationships lay the foundation for how your child grows and learns. Brain studies show that a flurry of important learning takes place during infancy through preschool and early primary school years. Quality experiences during this time can make a difference in your child's later success in school and as an adult.

Depending on your child's age, a number of early childhood programs are available to support your family and child: family and center child care, Head Start, public schools, and special needs resource services. Regardless of the program you choose or utilize, look for caregivers who understand child growth and development. Watch to see that caregivers allow your child to make meaningful choices, explore with all five senses, and learn at the rate that is best for him or her.



What does a rich early learning environment look like?

- ▶ Caregivers understand how children grow and learn, and they receive regular training to improve their skills.
- ▶ Caregivers plan activities and experiences that are right for each child's age and level of development.
- ▶ Caregivers are respectful of children and help them solve problems.
- ▶ Caregivers read to the children every day and talk about what they are reading.
- ▶ Caregivers seek out resources or specialists when there are developmental concerns.
- ▶ Children feel safe and secure with their caregivers.
- ▶ Children have lots of opportunities to choose their own play activities.
- ▶ Children are happy and explore actively using all of their senses.
- ▶ Parents are invited to participate with their children often.
- ▶ Parents feel they are important partners in their children's early learning.

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In community, kids matter.

When we take good care of all children during their early years, they grow up knowing how to communicate, how to respect one another and how to work together. They grow up to be adults who can make positive contributions to society.

By supporting quality education and care for all kids, you help pave the way to a successful community future. Work to support quality early childhood education and care because when you do, kids will:

- do better in grade school and graduate from high school at a higher rate;
- be less likely to engage in delinquent behavior during their teenage years;
- be less dependent on social welfare programs as adults;
- become better employees, earn higher wages and give back more to the community.



Six things you can do to support kids in community

- 1.** Show support for individuals who care for young children, and for programs that offer them specialized training in early childhood education and care.
- 2.** Create a partnership with a local early childhood program by offering your time, expertise, resources and/or financial support.
- 3.** Make your vote count on behalf of young children and their families.
- 4.** Open up your workplace to an early childhood field trip.
- 5.** Recommend that employees be granted release time to visit or participate in their children's programs.
- 6.** Recommend that employees have access to benefits that support their families.

For more information about how you can support and promote quality early childhood education and care within your community, call:

1-888-713-KIDS

Invest early in a child's future



School readiness matters.

Beginning when your baby is born, there are many things you can do at home to help your child grow and learn. The quality things you do today and every day for your infant, toddler or preschooler help prepare your child to do well in school.

- Provide healthy food and a safe, secure environment for your child.
- Help your child learn to make friends and get along with others by offering him or her lots of opportunities for play with adults and with other children.
- Allow your child to learn at the rate that is best for him or her. There's no need to push formal academic skills too early.
- Provide toys and activities that help your child learn and develop at each age.



Ten things you can do to help your child be ready for school

- 1.** Always respond quickly to your baby's coos or cries.
- 2.** Play simple games with your baby, like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake.
- 3.** Provide a safe place for your baby or toddler to roll, crawl, play and explore.
- 4.** Read to your child every day and talk about what you are reading.
- 5.** Provide puzzles, oversize wooden beads for stringing, blocks and other toys.
- 6.** Provide drawing and art materials to help your child develop prewriting skills.
- 7.** Encourage pretend play such as "Let's pretend we're going to the store."
- 8.** Play rhyming games to help your child notice similar sounds.
- 9.** Ask your child questions that encourage creative thought ("What do you think about...").
- 10.** Be sure that your child has regular health checkups, including all recommended shots and immunizations.

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Invest early in a child's future



Healthy kids matter.

Good health is important during early childhood because healthy children grow and learn best. Keeping your child healthy involves a lot more than just taking good care of him or her during times of illness. Children do best when their overall well-being and that of their family is supported. Children do best when their early experiences involve learning how to make healthy choices.

Your doctor or health care professional plays an important role in promoting good health for your child. Visit him or her regularly and if possible do so as a family. By going together, your entire family will have a better understanding about healthy living and how to make the most of available resources.



Children with special health care needs, chronic illness, disabilities, or those who live in foster homes or have other special risk factors, usually benefit from seeing a health professional more often.

Simple steps for promoting good health

- ▶ Be sure to get regular checkups from a doctor who knows you, knows your family, and who can make sure that you receive all medical and non-medical services available to you (the “medical home” approach).
- ▶ Be sure that your child receives all Well-Child (HealthCheck) exams as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. These exams should include:
 - health & developmental history
 - unclothed physical exam
 - vision & hearing screening
 - dental exam
 - appropriate immunizations (shots)
 - appropriate blood & urine tests
 - discussion & guidance for parents
- ▶ Build a relationship with your doctor by participating in all of your child’s checkups.
- ▶ Learn about child development.
- ▶ Recognize that you may need extra help during times of family stress (divorce, remarriage, death, unemployment or relocation).
- ▶ Connect with people in your community.

For more information about child health services, call the Wisconsin MCH hotline:

1-800-722-2295

Invest early in a child's future



"Together – Children Grow"

Some children see differently, some think or learn differently, and others move differently. When these children with special needs are in quality early childhood education and care environments, right alongside typically developing children, everyone benefits. Society is rewarded down the line because when children grow and learn together, all are enriched. Children become adults who are able to look beyond someone else's disability to value that person for his or her abilities.

Supporting and including all children in activities together encourages us to celebrate individual differences in a way that has far-reaching benefits for all children, caregivers, families and communities involved.

When we focus on the positive and remember that "Together – Children Grow", it becomes very natural to include children who have special needs in all activities.



What you should know about including children with special needs

Especially for Parents:

- ▶ You are the expert where your child is concerned. You are a key member of the team and your ideas are valuable when it comes to planning the support your child needs.
- ▶ Federal and state laws give children with developmental delays or disabilities specific rights and protections in public early childhood settings.

Especially for Providers:

- ▶ Each child is an individual. Always look for strategies that build on the child's unique strengths and help him or her participate fully within the community.
- ▶ Children with special needs have many different providers in their lives. It is critical to the child's development that everyone work together as a team.

For more information about including children with special needs, contact your county Birth to 3 Program, public school or:

WISCONSIN FIRST STEP
1-800-642-STEP
www.mch-hotlines.org

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