

Tip sheet from the series

# Getting started in early childhood education and care

## Choosing a quality service

*The following information is provided as a guide to help you identify the important features of a quality early childhood education and care service for your child.*

### What should services offer?

A quality early childhood education and care service should offer children:

- nurturing and enjoyable adult company
- opportunities to play with other children
- an active learning environment in which children are encouraged to follow their interests, play, explore and learn
- times and places to be quiet, relax, rest or be alone
- freedom and support to express feelings appropriately, for example, to be happy, irritated, satisfied, frustrated, energetic or tired
- clear and reasonable expectations of behaviour that is respectful of others.

### How to find a quality early service?

The Early Childhood Information Service can provide you with contact details and other important information about licensed services in your area.

To access the latest information, refer to our website: [www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood)

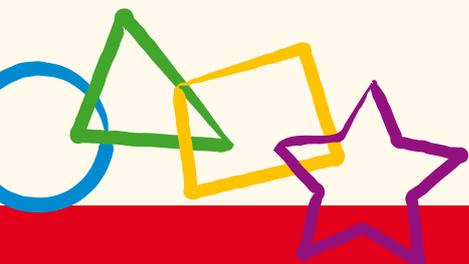
If you don't have internet access, Freecall: 1800 637 711 (calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates).

### How will I choose the right service for my child?

While you can expect licensed services to meet minimum standards, it is a good idea to investigate a number of services before choosing one that best meets your needs.

By comparing information given to you by each service and seeing what they look like, you can choose a service that best meets the needs of your family.

If you can, visit several services with your child and speak with educators before making a decision. If you have time, make an appointment for your first visit to ensure someone is available to talk to you. Once you are there, try to stay for a while and watch activities, check the surroundings and ask questions.



## What to look for

As a guide, consider the following when choosing a service.

### *The educators*

The educators' training, attitudes and manner are important factors in your choice of service. In general, being in a small group with low numbers of children for each educator is desirable. For children in the year before starting school, it is also preferable to be in a group with a qualified teacher designing and delivering the program.

Displayed in the service will be:

- a notice detailing the maximum number of children and the age range for the group
- the number of educators and their work hours for each day, including rest periods
- each educator's name, qualification and position.

When visiting an early childhood education and care service, it is a good idea to talk to the director/ coordinator of the service, as well as the educators who will be directly caring for your child. When you talk to educators, you should consider whether they:

- make you feel welcome and answer your questions willingly

- try to find out how best to care for your child by speaking with you about your child
- seem keen to help you to get to know them and the activities and experiences offered
- discuss ways that you may be able to be involved in the service and in planning your child's day.

### *Relationships*

When the educators are with children, consider whether they:

- relate to children at their eye level
- use each child's name, ask questions and respond to each child warmly and positively
- encourage children to ask questions, make choices and solve their own problems
- help children to learn about themselves, other people and the world around them
- provide opportunities for children to participate in activities where they can explore everyday life, like assisting in preparing meals or helping tidy up
- allow children to make decisions about what they would like to do
- ensure regular times for children's meals, rest and relaxation
- use a positive approach to guide children's behaviour.



### ***Educational program***

You might ask for information about:

- the activities and experiences offered to children
- the goals relating to the knowledge and skills to be developed through the activities and experiences
- the service's philosophy in relation to learning and child development outcomes, and how it is intended the outcomes will be achieved
- how you will be kept informed about your child's progress
- how your child's learning will be documented.

The service should be able to give you information about the Early Years Learning Framework which aims to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school.

### ***Atmosphere***

When you first enter a service, you may immediately sense the atmosphere of the place and the attitudes of the person or people who work there. The service should offer a safe and comfortable environment, interesting opportunities, and a choice of activities that are fun and challenging.

Watching the children who are being cared for can help you get a feel for the service. Look for children who:



- look happy and content
- interact well with each other and the staff
- show a willingness to participate in group activities.

### ***Space***

It is important that children have access to a variety of spaces. Even if your child is in care for just a couple of hours, they need a variety of indoor and outdoor experiences, which will interest and challenge them.

When looking at the play space your child will be using, check that:

- the indoor and outdoor areas and equipment are clean and well-maintained
- your child will have a choice of things to do that will encourage them to try new things and still be safe
- equipment can be moved and changed to give your child variety in their day
- there is space for your child to talk and play with other children, space for running and being noisy, as well as spaces for quiet play
- pictures and photos of real-life images as well as children's creations are displayed at children's eye level.





## Book early!

Many early childhood education and care services have waiting lists. It is recommended that you make arrangements for education and care well in advance of when you think you will need it. This will give you the greatest chance of getting a place in the service of your choice when you need it.

### Written information

The service should be able to give you written information about:

- days and times when the service is open
- fees payable by parents (including public holidays, late fees, holidays and when your child is away sick)
- dropping off and collection of children
- how your child's day will be organised and their individual needs met
- excursions and outings
- injuries, illness and infectious diseases
- storing and giving medicine to children
- hygiene, safety, emergency and evacuation procedures
- staffing, staff development and child-free preparation times
- how you can participate in the decisions which affect you and your child
- how the service will respond to complaints and concerns from parents and carers.



### Further information

The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care has developed a series of practical tip sheets for parents, carers and families on topics including: *General parenting, Babies and toddlers, Children 4–12 years and Early childhood education and care services.*

The Office's free, 24-hour Early Childhood Information Service provides families with up-to-date information about local early childhood education and care services, advice on what to look for in a quality service, what to expect as a consumer and how to access support and assistance.

#### For free tip sheets and information

Freecall 1800 637 711\* (24 hrs)

\*Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.

Email: [ECIS@deta.qld.gov.au](mailto:ECIS@deta.qld.gov.au)

Web: [www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood)

#### Early Childhood Education and Care Services Search

Visit the Office's website to locate early childhood education and care services in your area.

#### [mychild.gov.au](http://mychild.gov.au)

Helpful information about assistance with fees and other issues is also available at [www.mychild.gov.au/](http://www.mychild.gov.au/).

#### Disclaimer

The information in this tip sheet is offered as a guide only and should not be treated as an exhaustive statement on the subject.

#### Other languages

For assistance with other languages call Translating and Interpreting Service National on 131 450 and ask to be connected to 1800 637 711.

#### National Relay Service

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment you can call through the National Relay Service:

TTY users phone 133 677 then ask for 1800 637 711

Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech relay) users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1800 637 711.