

## Choosing the right daycare/ child care/ early learning program for your family

Let's face it-- trying to find child care/ home visiting is not a leisurely experience. You want your child in a quality child care/ early learning program or with a quality home visitor, but it's hard to know what will help your child be safe, happy and learning.



### When you choose a quality home visitor, child care/early learning or afterschool program:

- Your child is safe and secure while you are at school or work.
- Your child's teachers support and challenge your child to explore and learn new things.
- Your child learns important academic skills like language and numbers, as well as how to play well with others and follow directions.
- You and your child feel supported.
- Your child is more likely to be ready for kindergarten, do well in school, graduate high school and go to college or career training.

### What should you look for?

Some things are a matter of preference, such as choosing between a family child care program and a center. But others definitely affect your child's safety and what he will learn while he is there.

Use the Early Learning GPS at [www.earlylearninggps.com](http://www.earlylearninggps.com) to compare child care programs. Create a free family account and map for each child. In your child's map use the "Program Checklist" tab to download questions to ask when you visit a program, then enter your answers. You can compare answers to as many programs as you like.



Here are a few things to look for:



### Start your search with Keystone STARS!

Keystone STARS rates child care programs from one to four STARS on things you care about (meets state regulations for safety, offers a kid-friendly atmosphere with good teachers that partner with you to help your child learn) so you can find the program that feels right for your family. For more information on Keystone STARS, visit [www.papromiseforchildren.com/STARS](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com/STARS).

### Your child is safe and secure.

When you trust your child to someone else, you want to be sure that both you and your child feel safe. Child care programs must meet state health and safety regulations. Head Start programs are regulated by the federal government; preschool or pre-kindergarten programs can be regulated by either the Department of Human Services, registered with the Department of Education, or regulated by the organization that runs them.

#### Look for:

- Department of Human Services child care certificate posted.
- Check inspection and violation history of child care programs before you visit at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).

#### Ask about:

- How the program is regulated and if they it has any complaints or violations.

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### **There are good teachers and specialists that support you and your child.**

Because young children develop so many new skills so quickly in the first five years, teaching young children is special—it's about nurturing, learning what the child can do, and helping the child build new skills on her own path. It's important that your child's teacher has some education in child development or early childhood education, like a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or college degree. If you are looking for an afterschool program, teachers may have a Pennsylvania School-Age Professional credential.

#### **Look for:**

- You and your child get along well with the teacher or home visitor.
- Teachers and home visitors encourage children to safely explore new things. Children are comfortable, happy, and involved in the classroom. If there is a conflict or a child needs to be disciplined, the teacher handles this in a positive manner.

#### **Ask about:**

- Staff education and experience with young children.
- How long the teachers have been at the program (longer is better).

### **The atmosphere is kid-friendly with learning areas and activities that are right for your child's age and development.**

Young children learn by exploring and using many skills at once. Classrooms need to be designed to fit them with activities that work best for them.

#### **Look for:**

- Everything at kid level, with learning stations, books and activities that are not too easy or too hard for the children in the class (called "developmentally appropriate").
- The class sizes are small enough that teachers have time to work one-on-one with your child throughout the day.
- Home visitors should provide activities that are appropriate for your child.

#### **Ask about:**

- How the teacher uses the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards in curriculum and learning activities.

### **How can you find programs near you?**

- If you want to talk with someone to help decide what services are best for you, contact your county's Child Care Information Services (CCIS) office. You can talk to a parent counselor over the phone or meet in person. They can help you understand all of the options available in your area. You can find your CCIS contact information at <http://www.dhs.state.pa.us/helpfultelephonenumber/childdcareinformationservices/index.htm>.
- You can also use the COMPASS website to search for programs by the age of your child, location, additional services and more. For a quick tutorial on how to use the COMPASS website before digging in, visit [www.papromiseforchildren.com/COMPASS](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com/COMPASS).
- Plan to visit at least two programs and take your child with you when you go. You can get a feel for the atmosphere and if your child is comfortable there.

For more tips, visit the Pennsylvania's Promise for Children website at [www.papromiseforchildren.com](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com).

