



▶ Choosing the right child care for your family

Fact Sheet 15

The Australian Government supports families in raising children to be happy, confident and successful throughout their lives. For over 800,000 Australian families, this includes access to early childhood education and care services outside the family home. The Australian Government supports choice for families by helping with access to quality and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care services.

To help in making that choice, families need information about the different types of care that are available, including long day care, family day care, preschool and outside school hours care.

In partnership with the states and territories, we are making important changes that will improve the quality of Australia's early childhood services. The new National Quality Framework for early childhood education and child care commenced on 1 January 2012. The introduction of a National Quality Standard will, for the first time, give families and services real information about what a quality child care service looks like. The Framework will ensure each child has access to the best start in life and parents can feel happy knowing their children are being educated and cared for by a quality service.

Parents and families will now be in a better position to find out about the best child care arrangements for them, and how to make the most of their child care experience.

Choosing the right child care arrangements for your family

Have a clear picture of what you want for your child and you

- What sort of social and cultural experiences do you want for your child while they are in care?
- Would your child be happier in a smaller, more 'home like' environment or in a larger group, so that they can mix with more children?
- If your child is approaching school age, would you prefer for them to be in care with children who they might be going to school with in the future?

Think about how formal care is going to fit into your child's and your day

- Does your child have siblings? Would you prefer to have them spend more time together and support one another in the same caring environment or do you want them to spend time independently, with children their own age?
- Is it easier for you to have your child care service closer to your home, your place of work or perhaps an older sibling's school?
- Will you need formal care every day of the week or just occasionally on some days or for only a few hours? Can you mix-and-match formal care with other regular arrangements such as trusted friends or family members?

Find out information about the types of services available in your area and what fee assistance you might be eligible for

- The Australian Government's www.mychild.gov.au website is Australia's online child care portal, where you can find information on different types of child care and how to get assistance with the cost of care.
- On the www.mychild.gov.au website you can also search a database to find child care centres in your local area and access vacancy and fee information. You can also call the *Child Care Access Hotline* on 1800 670 305.



- The Australian Government provides families with financial assistance to meet their child care costs, through the Child Care Rebate and the Child Care Benefit. You can find information about eligibility for these payments and estimate how much you might receive on the www.mychild.gov.au website.

Visit your preferred services and speak with the director or educators before making a decision

- Make an initial phone call to the services you are interested in to confirm that places are available for the times and days that you need. You can also make a mutually convenient time to visit a service with your child.
- Before you visit a service think about things that are important to you and your family and make note of some questions you would like to ask the director or educators, these may include;
 - How will I know what activities my child has done that day?
 - What is the sleeping routine like in my child's room?
 - How will my child's heritage be incorporated in the education program?
 - How does the service reflect the community in which it is located?
- Have a look at the physical set-up of the whole service and consider whether your child will be happy and safe. Consider whether the service is equipped to meet your child's particular needs, including disability or cultural requirements.
- Meet with the educators and make sure you and your child feel comfortable interacting with them. From January 2012 there will be new national requirements which will progressively improve the ratio of educators to children, so that each child gets more individual care and attention

How to make the most of your child care experience

Be familiar with the kinds of early education activities delivered by the service

- Under the National Quality Standard, child care staff and family day carers will soon be required to have (or be working towards) formal qualifications, enabling them to lead activities that inspire children and help them learn and develop.
- Services will develop early childhood learning programs based on an approved learning framework including the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care (for older children). The approved frameworks support educators to maximise children's potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning through play based activities.
- Services will also be assessed and rated against the seven key quality areas set out in the National Quality Standard. Not only will you be able to find out how your child's service rates against each of these key quality areas (and its overall rating), but you will also be able to see the Standard itself so that you can work out what each rating actually means.
- A service's ratings and the full National Quality Standard will be available on the www.mychild.gov.au website.



Develop partnerships with staff and ask for their opinions

- Well qualified child care staff and Family Day Care educators are able to give you a very good idea about how your child is going while he or she is in care. Your child's educator can give you important information such as whether he or she is feeling happy and secure at the service, how he or she is getting on with the other children or whether anything appears to be concerning him or her.
- A quality service will want to work with you to make sure your child is getting the best possible care and attention. It is important that they know about your child's changing interests, and how your child is growing and developing.
- Your child's carer will become a very important person in your child's life. Developing a strong partnership built on mutual respect will help ensure your child gets the best possible care.

Don't be a stranger at your child's service

- When your child first attends a child care service, he or she may want some comfort from you to help him or her settle in. A quality child care service recognises this, and should welcome your participation and work with you to make your child feel safe and secure.
- A quality child care service will make sure there are opportunities for you to visit the service and discuss how your child is going. You can also contact the service yourself and arrange a time to speak with your child's educator. Services must have a quiet, private area where you can talk.
- You should be aware of how to provide feedback to the service, and what processes are in place in case you have any concerns or complaints about the education and care being provided to your child.
- It is not always possible to get a full picture of a child care service before you make the decision to place your child in the service. By keeping in contact with your child's service, you can get a better idea of how the service operates.

Keep yourself informed about quality in the early childhood education and care sector

- The new National Quality Framework will give you, as a parent, more information about what a quality child care service should look like.
- As the National Quality Framework is implemented, the www.mychild.gov.au website will have updated information about child care quality.
- Other useful sources of information include:
 - the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website (www.acecqa.gov.au)
 - the state and territory government child care websites
 - the Early Childhood Australia website (www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)
 - the Raising Children Network (www.raisingchildren.net.au)

Finding the right child care service for you and your child is a very important decision for many Australian families. Governments can and will work to ensure that all early childhood services in Australia comply with the new quality standards to make sure each child gets the best possible start in life.

Having information about child care quality can help parents and families feel comfortable with the decisions they make regarding their child care, and will help parents and children make the most of their child care experience.

How can I get more information?

For further information about the quality of your child care service please contact the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA):



visit www.acecqa.gov.au



call 1300 4 ACECQA (1300 4 223 272)

For further information on the different types of CCB approved care in your area and reported vacancies:



visit www.mychild.gov.au



call the Australian Government Child Care Access Hotline 1800 670 305 (a service is also

available if you require information in a language other than English).

If you need assistance when contacting us (if you are deaf or have a hearing impairment):

Teletypewriter (TTY) users: phone 133 667 then ask for 1800 670 305. You need a TTY phone to use this service.

Speak and Listen users: phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1800 670 305.

Internet Relay Users: connect to the National Relay Service

www.iprelay.com.au/call/index.aspx

Useful resources

For news and information on child care visit the mychild website available at www.mychild.gov.au

Access the Child Care Estimator at www.humanservices.gov.au/estimators

Family assistance payment rates fact sheet, available at www.humanservices.gov.au