

# Parent pages



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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## Finding the best childcare

**Y**oung children can be a mystery. They don't think, behave, communicate, or learn like their parents or even older siblings. They have their own way of doing things that supports the learning goals with which God blessed them.

When it's time to find a good early childhood center/preschool, it's also time to think like a child and find what works for them. If your child could evaluate programs and communicate that to you, here is what he or she would be looking for:

**"Mommy, I want a place that is safe."**

*"But let all who take refuge in You be glad"* (Ps. 5:11).

Children have an uncanny knack for finding the unsafe way to play or explore. For this reason, centers need to be one step ahead of children in order to best keep them safe. A vigilant and gentle discipline system is vital. A clean and well-kept center has taken the first step toward safety. Spaces should be designed to fit and entice children so they are led to safe ways of playing and exploring.

It is an imperative that a center be licensed. This indicates that the site and staff have been inspected, required to follow laws, and most likely trained in first

aid and CPR. Beyond licensing, many centers have sought accreditation with an agency such as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or National Lutheran School Association (NLSA). An accredited center has gone the extra mile to examine all they do to be sure it is safe and effective.

**"Daddy, I want teachers who know how to teach me."**

*"May the God of peace ... equip you with everything good for doing His will"* (Heb. 13: 30-31).

While the best-case scenario is an administrator with a master's degree and teachers with bachelor's degrees, this is not always possible given the low salaries of child care workers. If these degrees are not present, there are other ways for teachers to be equipped for working with children. Many community colleges have two-year degrees in child development, which go a long way in helping teachers know what is best for children. There are also continuing education programs available outside of the center. It is a good thing when the center takes an "education" day for the entire staff to attend a conference.

A good center will be able to point to in-service topics provided for staff to keep



everyone updated on teaching and safety issues. If the teacher or administrator does a good job of explaining why they do things the way they do, this is evidence of a good adult education program for the staff.

**"Mommy, I want a place where I know I am loved."**

*"And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them"* (Mark 10:16).

When children are born, they recognize and turn a head toward parent voices. The need to seek and find the familiar is very

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**A Growing Christian Makes the Best Parent!**

strong in young children. They want to know they belong. Being dropped off at a center or a preschool can easily become routine, but children are happiest when they feel they belong at the center.

Low staff turnover rates and a consistent plan of discipline are key to a center or preschool becoming a familiar and predictable place for your child. Pay attention to how many children are called by name and how many staff members know your child. Look for children's artwork and learning work proudly displayed on the walls.

How many different places in your child's classroom can you see your child's name? This will become important to your child as he or she learns to identify names in print. For infants and toddlers, a good center will provide you with a running record of what your child did and attempted to learn. Teachers, who document in this way, get to know their children very well.

**"Daddy, I want my center to care about my family too."**

*"Oh, for the days when ... God's intimate friendship blessed my house" (Job 29:4).*

Family is the first and strongest influence on a child. For a young child, it's nearly impossible to separate the child from the family atmosphere. It's very important for centers to recognize this and design programs accordingly.

While it is important for centers to communicate effectively with parents, seek parental input, and create programs that meet family needs, it is also a sign of a good center when parent education is valued and practiced. Centers should make the effort to meet the families that pick up and drop off their children, to know the make-up and culture of each family. A center should be ready to teach and minister to family members as well as the children in their care.

**"Mommy, I want to love to learn."**

*"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).*

Jesus had much confidence in children as learners. He even told us to be like them in order to enter the kingdom. Children do not learn like adults and, because of this, what may seem logical to adults does not guarantee that the unique needs of the child learner are being met.



Teaching children academics (skills) and intelligence (learning ability) are two different things. Young children are concrete thinkers and need to play and work with real objects before they can

do the more abstract skills on paper. Young children need to explore and move and build to develop the visual spatial skills that will allow them to make the best use of computers later in their education.

Too much attention paid to learning skills uses up valuable learning time for children without evidence of positive results. It is better for children to develop their intellect (language and problem-solving skills) than to spend a great deal of time on skills that will be taught again later. This is the way God designed their brains for learning. When evaluating centers, keep the following in mind:

- Children should not be wandering aimlessly or sitting quietly for large blocks of time. They should have access to a variety of materials, activities and teaching methods.
- They should be encouraged to do project work or play for at least an hour a day and should be given opportunity to develop large motor skills either inside or outside everyday.
- Teachers should be reading often to the children as well as designing lessons that allow children to learn skills in context of everyday experiences (learning math

while baking, for example).

• The curriculum should take into account that, in order to learn and develop social skills, children need many opportunities to problem solve and talk things through with each other or with adults.

**"Mommy and Daddy, I want a place that shares God's love with me."**

*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4).*

The appreciation that your child's center is Christian can be easily dismissed, but it should not be. When a center integrates the faith into everything they do, your child is surrounded by the love of God. Bible stories, chapel, devotions are all important but so is the teacher aid covering a scrape with a Band-Aid and the assurance that God made our bodies to heal themselves. Prayers and offerings are wonderful but so is the administrator comforting a homesick child with the reminder that Jesus is with him and loves him, too.

A center that truly stands apart from the rest is one that stands beside the Savior. A staff that worships and prays together has the benefit of guidance from the Holy Spirit. A staff that feels safe and loved because of the saving grace of God is also able to love your child the way you want him or her to be loved and cared for.

## For Discussion:

- ▶ What makes you feel comfortable when you visit a center or a preschool?
- ▶ What makes you uncomfortable?
- ▶ What do you consider the most important quality of a center?
- ▶ What would your child consider to be the most important?

## For Further Study:

- ▶ [www.childsday.com/10signs.html](http://www.childsday.com/10signs.html)
- ▶ [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org) (look for "children" under the Ministry Areas menu)

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