

What does a high-quality program for infants look like?

How do you know if a child care program is a good fit for your infant? The right early learning program will keep your child healthy and safe while working to support their learning and development each and every day. This resource will give you information and tips on what to look for when selecting high-quality care for your infant.

Parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and early learning professionals play a big role as well. Caregivers in high-quality early learning programs understand that infants' and toddlers' brains are growing quickly. They have knowledge and training on how to provide nurturing and stimulating experiences that support development from the earliest months into the preschool years.



High-quality programs provide responsive care. This means they are responsive to each child's development. Responsive caregiving recognizes that every child has unique needs and preferences and that young children learn best through back-and-forth social interactions with trusted adults. For example, the caregiver tunes into a child's cues (eye gazes, gestures, facial expressions and sounds) and they think about what the child is trying to communicate and respond in a sensitive way.

High-quality programs use developmentally appropriate practice. This means caregivers provide challenges that are not too hard or too easy. It also means caregivers plan daily activities based on each child's individual age and stage of development, help each child meet goals that are just right for that child and value each child's family and culture.

High-quality programs prioritize health and safety. This means your child's health and safety is top priority. This includes following safe sleeping practices, proper handwashing, bottle storage and sanitation procedures.

High-quality programs see families as partners. This means they communicate regularly with families and respect what they want for their child.

Finding the Right Fit

Each child is different, and it's important to remember that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to caring for an infant. You know your child best, and it is important that you use this knowledge when evaluating your child care options. Look for a program that will support and value your child's style while also providing responsive care to each child.

While each program might look a little different, some elements stay the same for all high-quality infant environments. Here are a few things to look for:

- **Secure open spaces (both indoors and outdoors).** Infants need to move on firm surfaces without being in a device or carrier in order to strengthen their muscles. This also allows them to explore their environment.
- **Simple, interesting materials.** The toys and objects can be used in a variety of ways, like baskets and pails that infants can dump and fill. There are different types of the same toy, like blocks or balls, in various sizes and made from different materials.
- **Child-size furniture.** Furniture is sturdy, safe and the right size for infants so they can be more independent as they start crawling or walking.
- **Diverse books.** Caregivers read simple stories to children and provide them with sturdy board books. The books should reflect the children's cultures and families.