

Characteristics of Quality Early Learning Environments

What you want to see:

Educated, attentive, and engaged teachers and staff

- ✓ Teachers with training or education in early childhood
- ✓ No more than 8 infants and toddlers and no more than 20 preschoolers in a classroom
- ✓ Teacher to child ratios of 1:3 for infants and 1:10 for preschoolers
- ✓ Teachers who crouch to eye-level to speak to children and who hold, cuddle, show affection, and speak directly to infants and toddlers
- ✓ Families and teachers exchanging information about the child's development

A safe, healthy, and child-friendly environment

- ✓ A room well equipped with sufficient materials and toys
- ✓ Classrooms in which materials and activities are placed at eye level for the children
- ✓ Materials and toys accessible to children in an orderly display
- ✓ Centers that encourage safe, outdoor playtime
- ✓ Frequent hand-washing by children and adults
- ✓ Visitors welcomed with appropriate parental consent

Stimulating activities and appropriately structured routines

- ✓ Children who are engaged in their activities
- ✓ Children offered breakfast and lunch and a time to nap
- ✓ Children participating with teachers and each other in individual, small-group, and large-group activities
- ✓ Children receiving a variety of stimuli in their daily routine using indoor and outdoor spaces and age-appropriate language, literacy, math, science, art, music, movement, and dramatic play experiences
- ✓ Preschoolers who are allowed to play independently

What you don't want to see:

Inattentive, overwhelmed, or unengaged staff

- ✓ Unengaged teachers sitting on the side of the classroom but not participating
- ✓ Shouting, swearing, or other displays of hostile discipline
- ✓ Infants and toddlers crying without being attended to

An unsafe, unhealthy, or un-stimulating environment

- ✓ Small, cramped centers or homes without designated appropriate spaces for different ages
- ✓ A center or home that smells of urine, has visible safety risks, or is unclean
- ✓ Frequent use of television or video to occupy children
- ✓ Children easily distracted or frightened by visiting strangers

Activities and routines that are too chaotic or too inflexible

- ✓ Children wandering aimlessly, left unsupervised, or displaying unchecked aggression
- ✓ Children restrained in car seats or in high chairs at times other than meal time
- ✓ Children spending a lot of time waiting around for turns
- ✓ Children expected to sit at desks, perform highly structured tasks, or other forms of age-inappropriate expectations