

The ABC's of Finding a Good Daycare Center

This fall, millions of children throughout the country will begin their first away-from-home experience at a daycare center. It is a time that is both exciting and stressful, as parents try to ensure that their child's daycare center is as safe as their own home.

Whether a parent is sending their child to a daycare center or school for the first time, or the little one is beginning a new year at the same facility, experts recommend a thorough safety investigation. The type of steps below can help make the transition safe and easy for everyone.

Ask how the center cares for sick children

- How is medicine given?
- How are parents told about illness among the children?
- Is there a nurse or doctor to help with medical care?
- Are children required to have vaccinations before coming to daycare?
- Is a physical exam required before admission?

Check building and playground safety

- Are the windows of each classroom fitted with safe window cords? Safe window coverings do not have looped pull cords that children can become entangled in, and are equipped with cord stops (visit www.windowcoverings.org for more information).
- Are young children able to get to high places?
- Are fire drills held at least every month?
- Are there smoke alarms throughout the building?
- Are safety gates used in areas for small children?
- Are electric outlets covered?
- Are sharp corners of furniture covered?
- Are the toys kept clean? Washable toys should be washed every day with a disinfectant cleaner, such as Lysol or a solution of water and bleach.

What to do to keep daycare safe for your child

- Visit with the staff at the daycare center. Go to meetings for family members and learn about the concerns of staff and other parents.
- Suggest educational programs for parents and staff members. Helpful topics include child development, first aid, dental care, skin cancer prevention, general safety and recognizing abuse.
- Help with cleaning and repairs at the daycare center. Many centers appreciate parents helping out as playground supervisors.
- Ask your child every day about what happened at daycare.

Approximately 70 percent of parents use some form of daycare for their children. While they cannot always be with their child, they can leave their little ones in a safe, educational and nurturing environment.

