



Choosing a Child Care Centre ?!

Overview

For many children, a child care centre is the first step into the wider "big kid" world. But deciding when your child is ready for it can be confusing. Read on to see how to figure out what's best for your child, and ways to ease the transition.

Is your child ready for the child care centre? Good indicators that the answer is yes:

- He knows what the potty is. Some child care centres require that children be trained. Even if your child isn't, if he has almost mastered the toilet, he's probably ready to go to a child care centre.
- He shows signs of independence. He can play by himself for a few minutes, and take care of himself in some ways, such as putting on his shoes. He can follow simple instructions. He's starting to get comfortable around other people. Children who go to mother-child groups often take it better when they have to separate from you at the child care centre / pre-school. But if you think your child will have a hard time, start introducing him to the idea by leaving him with other caregivers - your mom while you shop, for instance. Sign him up for a playgroup so he can get comfortable with other children.

At the child care centre, your child will be expected to follow simple rules, such as straightening the play area and putting his shoes or bag in the closet. If you think this might be tough for him, start practicing at home by giving him responsibility for some daily routines, such as leaving his shoes by the front door or putting dirty dishes in the sink.

Need to switch gears!

- Your child will have to follow a schedule when he's at child care centre, so he'll need to make transitions throughout the day. You can help him get used to moving on to the next thing by giving him advance

notice when he has to stop an activity at home ("After you finish that puzzle, it'll be time to rest").

- If you're concerned that your child isn't ready for a child care centre, it's okay to start him the next semester or even hold off another year. It's important that both parent and child are ready for it. Your child however is often more ready than you think and not only his/her social skills will develop fast amongst peers. You will be surprised that the initial tears of separation in the beginning days will soon be replaced by joy and excitement of you both from joining the child care centre.

Finding the right child care centre?

You think your child's ready. But what's the best centre for her? What to keep in mind when you're gearing up for visits to each place:

- Make an appointment. Unannounced visitors can disrupt the children, and you may not be allowed to tour the classrooms. However, the child care centre should have an open-door policy that lets parents of enrolled children come anytime.
- Leave your child at home so that you're not distracted. (Bring her back later if the child care centre meets your approval.)

When you visit, pay special attention to:

- **The space:** Classrooms should be childproofed, bright, well-maintained, and organized into easily identifiable play areas. Toys and materials need to be stored within children's reach. Look for labels on shelves, containers, and playthings - they encourage pre-reading skills. There should be cozy spots for playing alone or with friends, as well as a large area in which the whole class can participate in activities or story-time. Toilets and sinks, tables and chairs and cubbies should be kid-size, and artwork and other visual displays should be hung at children's eye level.

- **The curriculum:** Young children learn through play, so the bulk of their day should be made up of choice. The rest should be more structured, with time for listening to stories or working on art projects; there should be an emphasis on group activities like singing and sharing. Just as at home, a predictable schedule in the child care centre helps children feel more secure. Many child care centres expect children to meet certain goals during the year; watch out for ones that seem too strict (count to 20 by December) and look for more socially oriented ones (play well with others).
- **The teachers:** They should be approachable, flexible, and respectful. Children should be encouraged to work-out their own disagreements, and a child care centre's discipline policies should emphasize consequences for misbehavior rather than embarrassment, threats, or punishment.
- **The teacher/child ratio:** For children over 4, one teaching staff for every ten students and no more than 20 children in a class.

Preparing for the first day

Ways to make the transition a little easier:

- Introduce your child to the teacher ahead of time so he'll see a familiar face in the classroom.
- Start some daily routines, such as an earlier bedtime or laying out his clothes the night before, in advance of the first day.
- Explain what to expect. Give him as many details as you can about what happens during a typical day: Children paint, play outside, sing, and look at books.
- Mark child care centre days on a special calendar. That way, he'll have a sense of when child care centre begins and which days he'll be going.

Solving common child care centre problems

Separation anxiety: You try to drop off your child at the centre and she shrieks as though you're never coming back.

The solution: Say your goodbyes and leave. She'll be fine. Really! Every time you leave your child at the centre and come back as you promised, you're helping to build her security and confidence. Whatever you do, don't sneak out when she's not looking; that will only make her cling harder next time. Instead, tell her you're going now and that you'll be back. You might create a goodbye ritual, such as a kiss on each cheek and then a hug.

Social isolation: You notice that your child is sitting by himself whenever you pick him up at the end of the day. He complains that he has no friends.

The solution: A good teacher will keep an eye out for unpleasant social dynamics; ask her what you can do to help your child fit in. Remind your child that making friends takes time, and that you often have to share them with other classmates. You may also want to ask yourself: Are other

children really ostracizing my child, or might he be pushing them away? A shy child may not feel comfortable reaching out to other children. Arranging play-dates with them outside of the child care centre may help.

Biting: You get a call from the child care centre saying your child tried to bite another child in her class.

The solution: Although adults view biting as particularly barbaric, to a small child it's no different from kicking or hitting. When children bite, it's often triggered by a frustrating loss of control (say, when a change in routine happens) or by not being able to communicate as effectively as others. Encouraging a child to express her anger or frustration with words instead - and praising her when she does - can go a long way toward curbing the habit.

Potty accidents: Your child is more or less potty trained when you sign him up for the child care centre. But a month in, she/he's having an accident every few days.

The solution: Potty accidents are common, and most teachers will understand this and accommodate the children. Let your child's teacher know about any particular potty hang-ups, and simply continue to reinforce training at home. Added pressure will only make things worse. Just make sure he has a change of clothes at the child care centre. Or send your child to the centre wearing his favorite big-kid underwear, with whatever cartoon character or action hero he likes most - it's an incentive to stay dry.

Behavioral fallback: Crying, mood swings, nighttime wake-up calls -- don't be surprised if your child suddenly starts behaving like a toddler again.

The solution: Regression doesn't necessarily mean that your child isn't ready for the child care centre. It's typically a sign that she's stressed out and needs support. Acknowledge that she's having a hard time. But tell her, "I know you can do this and I'm going to help you."

Connect with her teacher at dropoff or pickup time -- say hi and tell the teacher what's going on with your child and family. Also, have some extra one-on-one time together at home, even if it's 10 or 15 minutes. Let her decide what you're going to do - that may give her the security and sense of control she needs. The good news is, regression is completely normal and usually lasts for only a few weeks.

Summary

Good child care centres provide children with rich experiences that give them the social, emotional, and intellectual skills that will prepare them for the primary grades, and for life. But don't rush yourself or your child into it. Take your cues, join parent child-groups, go to social play areas and let your child explore. Don't let your separation anxiety get in the way of your child development.