

# Choosing Childcare

A Paper Pinecone Guide



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paper  
pinecone

preschool & childcare directory



**Tip: Check  
Paper  
Pinecone's  
Current  
Openings  
section**

Choosing a childcare provider can be overwhelming, but Paper Pinecone can help make the process stress-free.

## How to start?

Start by figuring out when you want care and how old your child will be when she or he begins. This greatly impacts your choices.

## Where to start?

Start by visiting [our blog](#) and checking out our articles on preschool philosophies, what to ask on a tour, how to navigate wait lists, and tips on picking the perfect place.

## When to start?

There's no easy answer here, as it depends on your needs. If you need infant care you need to start immediately. Infant care is scarce because caregiver:child ratios are lower for children under 2 and it's typically not profitable for providers. Those who do offer it generally use it as a feeder into their older programs.

For infant care, you may end up paying for months before you actually need care to hold a spot. Providers will not hold spots for you if they have others willing to start immediately.

For preschool, the driving factor will be what kind of program you're looking for. The most popular programs will likely have [wait lists](#). If these are the places you prefer, you should plan on touring a year in advance, on average. However, placing your name on a wait list never guarantees you a spot. Schools give priority to siblings of currently enrolled students and alumni, staff members, and may have other priority criteria.

Rest assured, there are many amazing great schools without wait lists, and you should tour a variety of places.



## What to look for?

There are several things you shouldn't compromise on when choosing your childcare provider.

1. **High-quality interactions** between caregivers and children – look for positive discipline, enthusiasm, and warmth.
2. **Shared values** – this doesn't mean you need to talk politics with your provider before selecting, but your parenting style should align with their approach to care. If you practice attachment parenting you probably won't be happy with a provider who believes in CIO. Have these discussions before enrolling.
3. **Communication** – discuss the method, frequency, and level of detail and ensure this meets your needs.

4. **Safety** – ensure the best practices for sleep are followed, the facility is secured in a way you're satisfied with, and the classrooms are safe.

5. **Cleanliness** – within reason. Childcare facilities are filled with germs (more on that later), but there should be regular cleaning and tidying up throughout the day.

6. **Play-based approach** – don't worry about academic kindergarten readiness (more on that later too). Children learn best through play. We can't say it enough.

7. **Developmentally appropriate curriculum** plus plenty of free play – there should be a balance.

8. **References** – they should have enrolled families who are happy to chat.



Children see  
*magic*  
because they  
*look*  
for it.

CHRISTOPHER MOORE

**Tip: One play-based philosophy isn't inherently better than another – it's all personal preference.**



## Home or Center?

There are pros and cons to home and center-based care and with anything in childcare, it comes down to what feels right for you. Tour both if you're unsure.

### Home-Based Care

With home-based care you'll have the consistency of the same person caring for your child for years. You might find that home-based care has more flexible drop-off and pick-up times, or evening and weekend hours. Often these providers are willing to babysit occasionally in your home as well. However, a provider may not have subs readily available if they get sick, leaving you in a lurch last minute.

### Center-Based Care

With center-based care you might find a high turnover rate among teachers (industry average is 30%-45%), so consistency may be a problem. However, centers often have more resources than home-based care. You may also have the option of switching teachers if you're happy with the school, but not happy with the room your child is in. You'll often find larger play areas, and a lower caregiver:child ratio at centers.

Read more about home daycare versus daycare centers [here](#).

**Tip: Don't rely on childcare reviews. Parents often leave bad reviews for things that wouldn't bother someone else.**  
**[Read more.](#)**





The question we get every single day from parents: will my child be ready for kindergarten?

If your child is in a play-based program with a developmentally appropriate curriculum and a focus on social and emotional learning, then your school is doing their part to prepare children.

Play-based doesn't mean unstructured, although there should be ample time for free play, during which children learn critical social & emotional skills.

Children are sponges and are constantly learning. Often, however, parents can't actually see what they've learned because they don't bring home a worksheet of these social and emotional skills.

We have several [articles](#) on our blog that go into great detail about play-based learning, but to break it down quickly:

When children play they learn negotiation skills, patience, self-regulation, empathy, and problem-solving. All vital to success in elementary school and beyond.

Academics are successfully taught through play by using project-based lessons on a variety of topics. Even songs are play-based learning!

**When children struggle in kindergarten it's typically because they lack social and emotional skills, not that they're behind on academics.**





## Tour Questions

Our [blog](#) has a complete guide to what questions to ask but here's a brief list. You might have specific needs that you should ask about.

1. Philosophy and curriculum
2. Safety & security
3. Staffing ratios & turnover rate
4. Approach to discipline
5. Parental involvement expectations, including fundraising
6. School closure frequency
7. Time spent outdoors & in free play
8. Screen time in the classroom
9. Communication method & frequency

## Illnesses

Hand, Foot, & Mouth. Ear Infections. Strep. Colds. Snot. Oh, the snot.

You can expect all of that, and more, when your child starts daycare or preschool. Some children even get a persistent cough for months.

With group childcare, it's impossible to avoid germs and illnesses. The first year will be hard as your child builds up their immune system. The good news: children in group care get more ear infections but less upper respiratory infections when they're school-age.

**Tip: Be prepared with back-up sick care if you're unable to take off work when your child must stay home. Lining someone up ahead of time will ease the stress when illnesses hit.**



# FAQs

The most common questions we get at Paper Pinecone.

**Q: Does my child have to nap?**

A: We all wish we could force a child to sleep, but we can't. Rest periods are mandatory in full-day preschool, however full-day is defined differently in different states. Some states require that a school provide a quiet activity for children to do if they don't sleep. That activity may take place on sleeping cots, and may include giving children books or crayons. A school does not have to provide a separate area for children to go if they're not sleeping. Ratio laws change during nap time, permitting teachers to take breaks. Most places do not have the staff to stay in ratio and allow children in other rooms.



**Tip: A provider should give you 'the feels' when you tour. You know in your gut if something's right.**

**Q: Why is childcare so expensive?**

A: There are three things that largely drive the cost of childcare:

1. The staff – the lower the ratio the higher the cost. This is why infant care is so expensive.
2. The facility – as with any business, they need to pay rent and while laws vary by state, a facility (home or center) must have a specific number of square feet per child.
3. Insurance – the cost of insurance in childcare is extremely high.

Always ask if a school offers financial aid or scholarships if cost is an issue. Religious schools are especially likely to.

**Q: Are Montessori schools better?**

A: Any school is only as good as its staff. Some Montessori schools are great and some aren't. Montessori is one of many play-based approaches to early childhood education. It's right for some families, but not all.

Tour schools with several different play-based approaches and see what's a good fit. More on our [blog](#) about this.

Send your daycare & preschool questions to us at [questions@paperpinecone.com](mailto:questions@paperpinecone.com)

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The most common questions we get at Paper Pinecone.

**Q: My child isn't potty trained. Will that be a problem?**

A: Most preschools that only provide care for children ages 3 and older will not accept children in diapers. They legally have to have certain diaper changing facilities and most likely won't if they only serve older children.

Some schools won't allow children to move to a new classroom if they're still in diapers. This is unfortunate, but not illegal (unless a disability is involved). As with anything, children learn toileting at their own pace. Many schools assist with toilet learning. If you're considering one that does, speak with them about their methods and ensure no child is ever shamed for accidents.



**Tip: Parent & Me classes at preschools are a great way to get on top of a school's waitlist.**

**Q: I'm unhappy with my current provider but my child loves his/her friends. Should I switch?**

A: This depends on why you're unhappy, if the issue can be resolved, and how much longer your child at this facility. Healthy & safety issues are non-negotiable. Any violations should be reported to the state licensing boards. Other problems can frequently be solved with the director or teachers. Work with them before pulling your child, if possible.

**Q: How many days and hours per day should I send my child to preschool?**

A: As many as you need to get things done. We're kidding. There's no magic number. There's no need for preschoolers to go full-time, unless the parents work hours that require it. If you send half-days or only a few days per week, your child will still reap the benefits.

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