

Choosing Quality Child Care with Maryland EXCELS

Interviewing and Visiting Potential Programs

After finding potential programs, your next steps are to reach out for a phone, virtual, or in-person interview and to visit the program.

An interview is an opportunity for you to find out more about the program's services, fees, staff qualifications, and philosophy or approach to care and learning.

Visiting a program allows you to observe interactions between children and providers, activities taking place, business operations, and learning materials that your child will use. You can also use this time to ask more detailed questions about how a provider will communicate with you and how they would work with your child's individual needs.

For your convenience, we have provided sample checklists for interviews and visits based on licensing requirements, Maryland EXCELS standards for quality, and advice from Child Care Aware.

For more resources and additional information about choosing child care, please visit: childcareaware.org/families/.

Child Care Program Interview Checklist

Basic requirements:

- Does the program offer hours that meet my family's needs?
- What is the cost?
- Does the program offer meals and snacks?
- If it is relevant: What experience do they have with children with disabilities?

Business practices:

- How do you charge? Weekly? Monthly?
- Are your services and fees written in a contract or service agreement?
- How much notice do you require for ending enrollment?
- Do you have a schedule for when your program will be closed (holidays, staff vacations, etc.)?
- What are your policies for unexpected closures (illness, severe weather, etc.)?
- Will I be charged for those days?

Quality of learning and care:

- What is your program's philosophy or approach to learning?
- What kind of education and experience will my child's teacher or provider have?
- What kinds of daily activities will my child do?
- How will you give my child individual attention and care?
- How will you encourage and measure my child's development?

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Child Care Program Visit Checklist

Examine the space:

- Is the program's child care license or registration displayed?
- Does the program area look clean, safe, and organized?
- Is there enough space indoors and outdoors so all the children have room to play?
- Are toys and learning materials age-appropriate and in good condition?
- Are there bulletin boards or displays for program updates?
- How are the children enrolled reflected in the program's space?
- Are there art displays or photos of children and families?
- Are books easy to access and diverse in languages and character representations?

Observe the children and provider interactions:

- Are interactions warm, engaging, and respectful?
- Are children provided with choices and guidance to make safe and positive choices?
- Are they encouraged to problem solve?
- Are children's individual needs being met?
- Is there time for children to explore on their own?
- Do children seem happy and confident?
- Does their teacher or provider seem happy and engaged?

Speak with your child's teacher or provider:

- Can they describe their program's philosophy and do you agree with it?
- How do they communicate with families and how often?
- How would they communicate about any concerns?
- How would they plan to include your family's culture and home language?
- Do they describe using positive guidance to address problem behaviors? Be aware that Maryland law forbids corporal punishment and restraint.
- Does the program have written policies and procedures? If so, do families receive copies?
- If it is relevant: How would they support your child's disability?

