

# Checklist for Childcare Centre Tours

Deciding which childcare centre is the right fit for your little one can send your mind buzzing and your heart racing. After all, you're entrusting your most precious asset into the care of others. Which can feel scary. Questions will no doubt be racing through your mind and it's hard to stay focussed and do an accurate comparison when doing multiple tours. So we've pulled together a list of questions and things to look out for when you're doing the rounds of local centres.

## Questions to ask

**Hours** - What are the centre's operating hours? What happens if you are running late to pick up? Some centres will charge you in 5 minute increments after their official closing time.

**Daily rate** - The cost of childcare can vary hugely depending upon the area (inner City often tends to be higher) so make sure you confirm the day rate. Don't forget to factor in the Child Care Subsidy (CCS).

**Pick-up and drop-off process** - Clarify how the drop off and pick up process will work. Is there parking available on-site? Do you need to log attendance electronically? Can you nominate others to do pick up?

**Orientation** - What is their orientation process like and how will the centre help you settle your little one into a new environment? Will the first few weeks be shorter days to allow your child to adjust?

**Parent portal** - Does the centre offer a parent portal (i.e. Storypark) which provides updates about your child's activities, learning, naps, and food consumption during the day?

**Programs & Certification** - Does the centre offer a certified Pre-School or Kindergarten program? Are the Teachers certified and accredited?

**Availability of days** - Is there a minimum requirement of days (i.e. some centres prefer children to attend a minimum of two days per week). If you know your preferred days for care, ask if they have availability?

**Ratio of Educators** - Each age group will need to meet legal requirements regarding the educator to child ratio but this can vary. It's also worth asking about educator turnover and how long many of the room leaders have been there. Longevity in staff is a great reflection on a centre.

**Casual Care** - Does the centre accommodate additional days of casual care as/if required?

**Nappies / Toilet training** - Does the centre provide nappies and wipes? If your child needs assistance with toilet training will the educators help you with this process and continue progress being made at home?

**Formula / Breast Milk** - Ask any questions you may have re: sending your formula or breastmilk and bottles. Centres vary about how this process works but it's safe to say all will accommodate your needs when it comes to milk.

**Day naps** - Are naps tailored to your child's needs or do they need to fit into a set routine for their allocated room? Will an educator help your child fall asleep when/if needed? Can they bring their dummy and comforter? Are children supervised when sleeping? Do you need to send sheets and/or a sleeping bag?

**Meals** - Are all meals included in the daily care cost? Does the centre accommodate all dietary requirements? Most centres share their weekly menu so you can ask if this is something the centre does and whether parents have any input on the snacks and main meals provided.

**Allergies** - If your child has allergies then check how allergies are managed in the centre and whether staff are adequately trained in First Aid and CPR should an allergic reaction occur.

**Parental Learning Updates** - How often will you be given a report / summary on how your child is progressing at the centre? Can you meet with the staff when needed to chat about any additional concerns?

**Interaction between age groups** - Depending on space, particular learning spaces may be shared between children of different ages but segregated according to time of the day. Ask if the younger children will be playing at the same time as the older children and how this is managed.

**Missed days due to illness or holiday** - Ask whether you will be charged for missed days due to illness or holidays. Some centres provide a discounted rate for up to 10 days annually for holidays.

**Learning philosophy** - Does the centre follow a specific learning philosophy or program? i.e. Reggio Emilia

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There is no better way to get a feel for a centre than stopping by when it's full of children and the educators are busily doing their day-to-day jobs. While the facilities (and often snazzy playgrounds) will play a role in your decision making, it's the more subtle things which are important to consider. From the cleanliness of the environment to how the educators interact with the children, we've pulled together a list of things to observe when doing tours at potential centres.

## Things to observe

**First impressions** – Are you greeted warmly when you walk in? Do you and your child feel welcome and comfortable in the centre? First impressions really do count and you'll get a gut feel almost immediately when entering a new childcare environment.

**Staff** – Do the staff seem happy and engaged with the children? Are the staff attentive to the needs of the children and actively interacting with them? Is there diversity in the staff (a mix of male/female and educators of different ethnicities).

**Cleanliness** – It's important to observe whether the centre seems clean and looks to be well maintained. Are toys orderly and accessible or is everything in disarray?

**Smell** – Does the centre have good ventilation / air conditioning or is there an unpleasant smell? Is the toilet and nappy change area regularly sanitised to deal with the constant flow of children coming and going?

**Toys, books & play equipment** – Observe what is offered in terms of toys, books and play equipment and feel free to ask questions about how often these are updated.

**Outdoor area** – Is the outdoor area spacious? It's worth looking at how it's separated between different age groups and how the educators maintain variation in their outdoor activities (especially if your little one is there multiple times a week).

**Sleep areas** – Do children have a cot each or are they on mats on the floor? Observe whether this area is tranquil or chaotic and think about how this will work for your child's sleep needs.

**Security gates** – How do visitors get in and out of the centre? Note whether it's secure and whether all visitors to the premises need to register or sign in.

**Overall feel** – When you find the right centre for your little one you'll know in your gut. Follow your intuition above all else.