

The four factors to consider.

When looking for a Daycare, Kindergarten, or Preschool, consider four factors – environment, learning, fun, and values & nurture.

First, think about what your child needs.

You know your child better than anyone so, think about what your child needs. About the type of environment they respond best in and feel most comfortable in. About how easily they learn and about how they have fun. About the values you want them to hear and take a hold of and the degree of nurture and individual attention they require.

When you've done that, you're ready to visit some childcare centres and check them out.

Environment:

Where is the childcare provider and what is the centre like?

First, consider the logistical issues that affect you. You want a centre that you can get to easily, especially if you are dropping your child off on the way to or from work. Ask yourself:

- How close is the centre to home?
- How easy is it to get to?
- Does it have ample parking?
- What days and hours is the centre is open?

Now think about your child.

- How many children attend the centre at any one time? Will your child cope with that many children?
- Is the centre safe?

Learning:

We all hope our children will learn something at Kindergarten. After all, it's a precursor to school life. Some centres put a greater emphasis on this than others. Determine what level of learning you would like for your child and, when you visit a potential centre, observe and ask questions.

- What is the typical daily schedule?
- Is there a set curriculum?
- What sort of activities will your child do alone? One-on-one with a teacher? In a group?
- Are there toys, books, and educational games for your child's age group?
- Does the provider read to the children?
- Will your child go on educational field trips?

Remember, you're a potential paying client of this centre. In the same way as you'd weigh up any service you were spending money on, you have a right to ask questions and to make the call as to whether a centre is the right place for your child.

Fun:

Amongst all the young children in New Zealand, there is not one that doesn't like to have fun. It's important that your child enjoys their daycare experience or they'll not want to return.

The questions relating to the daily schedule and activities available apply here also. As you visit the centre ask:

- Is there a safe play area that your child would find stimulating and enjoy?
- Is there a place for the children to nap or rest?
- Does the centre seem safe and what is the centre's policy on safety?

Values and nurture:

Daycare is more than just education and fun. Your childcare provider plays a vital role in preparing your child for life. Only you can say what values you want your child to adhere to. Whatever they are, ensure the centre your child attends promotes those values.

Ask yourself or the staff these questions:

- Does the facility cater for any particular needs that your child has?
- Do you have any values (e.g. religious or learning style) that you want taught to your child?
- Are the teachers caring?
- When you visit the centre did the teachers engage with your child and did your child relate to them?

Two more things:

Before enrolling in any daycare, kindergarten or pre-school, ask around and check out the Childcare Advisor ratings to find out if any of your friends or their friends have had children attend this particular childcare provider. Ask them what they thought of the centre.

Second, check out the centre's Education Review Office (ERO) report. These are all available for searching at the ERO website.

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(LINK TO <http://www.ero.govt.nz/>).