

Many states have rules for family child care homes and child care centers. These rules are set and monitored by local agencies. Licensing rules may help parents judge the quality of local child care. To find out your state's rules, visit our Licensing page.

"Accreditation" is another way to judge the quality of a child care program. Family child care homes and child care centers can choose to get accredited by a child care accrediting organization. But, they have to meet higher standards than licensing rules. The program must offer the kind of care, attention, and educational activities parents look for in high-quality child care programs. It must offer activities and experiences that will aid in a child's growth and development, and that will help them prepare for school.

To get accredited, program staff rate the program's strengths and weaknesses. Then, a professional child care expert observes the program, and finally, the program is reviewed. Input from parents is often included. Some of the items reviewed are: relationships between staff and parents; curriculum offered; staff training; health and safety standards followed; and the environment of the program. After review of these items, the child care program gets feedback on how they match up to the accrediting organization's expectations and standards.

Caregivers in many of these programs take part in on-going child development trainings. These trainings help caregivers understand children's needs at different ages. Trained providers are likely to plan the right activities and care for children in warm and educational ways. These caregivers are also more likely to provide positive guidance for children, rather than harsh discipline.

Any child care program can get accredited. Child care centers, family child care homes, and after school programs all have different organizations that conduct the accreditation process. Below is a list of some of the organizations and their websites:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children – [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- National After School Association – [naaweb.org](http://naaweb.org)
- National Association for Family Child Care – [nafcc.org](http://nafcc.org)

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