

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA

Child Care Resource and Referral

The **Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCR&R)** is a statewide and local program that helps families

- Identify and select quality early learning programs.
- Connect to local community agencies and resources.
- Engage in their children's education and learning.
- Locate financial resource options.

School Readiness Program

Florida's **School Readiness Program** offers financial assistance for early education programs and child care to low-income families. The program encourages and supports families to become financially self-sufficient and to prepare their young children to be successful in school.

Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program

The **Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK)** is a free prekindergarten program for 4- and 5-year-olds who reside in Florida. Parents can enroll their child in the state's free VPK program if their child is 4 years old on or before Sept. 1 of the current school year. If the child's birthday is between Feb. 2 and Sept. 1, parents may choose to wait and enroll their child the following year at age 5.

Head Start and Early Head Start

The **Head Start and Early Head Start (HS/EHS)** program provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income families and their children ages birth through age 5. HS/EHS provides child care and education for children in a classroom setting.

Contact Us

For more information, please contact your local early learning coalition. Find their contact information at www.floridaearlylearning.com/coalitions. The CCR&R State Network can also help connect you with your local early learning coalition's CCR&R program.

Toll free: 1-866-357-3239

Email: crrhelp@oel.myflorida.com



Florida Department of Education
Florida Office of Early Learning
Child Care Resource and Referral State Network
250 Marriott Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32399

QUALITY CHECKLIST



*For Child Care Centers
and Preschools*



OFFICE OF
Early Learning
LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE

OBSERVATION TIPS

Look and Listen

You learn a great deal by watching and listening to what is going on in a classroom. Children should seem happy and engaged in age-appropriate activities. Teachers should seem kind, nurturing and responsive to all children in their care. Listen to the words teachers use when talking to the children. Children need to hear a wide variety of words to promote their language development.

Ask Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, **write them down as they occur to you.** Ask for a time to discuss them with the director or teacher. The center's director and teachers should be willing to answer your questions and address any concerns you may have.

Pay Attention to Your Instincts

Take note of any uneasy feelings you may have during your visit. **You know your child best.** If possible, take your child with you and see how they react. Children respond in their own unique ways to new situations. Be careful not to rule out other factors that could influence your child's reaction such as being hungry or tired. **Trust your instincts and your ability to make wise decisions for your child.** You want to feel good about your child spending many hours each day in a child care center or preschool.

Consider Costs

Take into consideration any additional fees. Carefully weigh the "pros" and "cons" of each center, director and teacher you visit. Decide which one meets the greatest number of your priorities at a rate you can afford. Keep in mind that the highest cost does not always guarantee the best quality. Likewise, the least expensive rates do not always suggest poor quality.

Make an Informed Decision

Your first concern is your child's safety, health and welfare. Every center will have positive features, but **only you can decide what is most important.** Now that you have done your homework and some careful thinking, you are ready to make your choice. Remember, selecting and placing your child in an early learning program is just the beginning. **Talk to your child's teacher often and visit occasionally** to ensure your child is safe and happy and your decision was the right one.

Select centers you plan to visit and write their information here.

Center 1	
Center 2	
Center 3	

Family Engagement

Questions To Ask/Things to Consider	Center 1	Center 2	Center 3
Can parents stop by at any time?			
Are parents encouraged to volunteer or participate in activities?			
Is there a daily method of communication between the teachers and parents?			
Is there a current weekly schedule posted in a visible location?			
Is your initial reaction upon entering the child care center a positive one?			

Family engagement is important because it

- Supports children's kindergarten readiness skills.
- Increases children's motivation and reduces challenging behavior.
- Improves children's social and emotional development such as impulse control, attention span, memory and planning skills.
- Supports the healthy development of all children.

How can families get involved?

- Communicate with the director or teacher on a regular basis.
- Create a positive learning environment at home.
- Read to your child daily.
- Participate in community events for families.
- Volunteer at the center or in a classroom if you have time in your schedule.
- Participate in family meetings, parent-teacher conferences and parenting classes.
- Join the center's advisory board or groups that help make decisions for the center.

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See how Vroom tips align with Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards at <http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/families.html>

Environments for Learning			
Questions To Ask/Things to Consider	Center 1	Center 2	Center 3
Is there a primary teacher for each age group?			
What are the ratios? <i>Look for small groups and ratios (ex. 1 adult for 4 infants).</i>			
Are teachers responsive to children's needs?			
Are toys, books and furniture clean and in good shape? <i>There should be enough for all children in the classroom.</i>			
Is the classroom arranged in a way that toys and materials are accessible to children?			
Are the children and teachers happy?			
Are the children engaged in activities? <i>Activities should be age-appropriate.</i>			
Does the center appear to be culturally responsive? <i>Are translated materials or other accommodations made available for families and children as needed?</i>			
Do teachers read daily to children and are books provided for children to use independently?			
Are songs, finger plays and interactive nursery rhymes part of daily routines?			
Is there space for active and quiet play?			
How does the center use technology to support learning? How often is technology used?			

What are Positive Teacher-Child Relationships?

In early childhood settings, each moment that teachers and children interact with one another is an opportunity to develop positive relationships.

To build positive relationships, teachers should

- Engage in one-to-one interactions with children.
- Get on the child's level for face-to-face interactions.
- Use a pleasant, calm voice and simple language.
- Provide warm, responsive physical contact.
- Follow the child's lead and interest during play.
- Help children understand classroom expectations.
- Redirect children when they engage in challenging behavior.
- Listen to children and encourage them to listen to others.
- Acknowledge children for their accomplishments and effort.

Center Information			
Questions To Ask/Things to Consider	Center 1	Center 2	Center 3
How far is it from home/work?			
Do the hours of operation and holiday schedule accommodate your work schedule?			
What is the rate or cost of care? <i>For infants, toddlers, preschool, school-age</i>			
Are there discounts or priority for siblings?			
Are there any additional fees and how often are they due? <i>Weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.</i>			
<i>supplies/materials</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>meals/snacks</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>registration/application</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>early drop-off/late pick-up</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>field trips or special activities</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>late payment</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>other</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are the drop-off and pick-up times? <i>You can also ask about their check in/check out procedures.</i>			
Does the center charge when a child is out sick or on vacation?			
Does the center offer safe and reliable transportation? <i>Drivers should be licensed and the vehicles must be insured. Children should be properly restrained in appropriate car safety seats.</i>			
Are there staff with specialized training for children with a variety of special needs?			
Does the center participate in the subsidized child care program? <i>School Readiness Program</i>			
Does the center participate in the state's VPK program? <i>For 4- and 5-year-olds</i>			
Does the center offer Head Start or Early Head Start? <i>For children under 5 years old</i>			

Notes:

Health and Safety			
Questions To Ask/Things to Consider	Center 1	Center 2	Center 3
Is the center licensed or accredited?			
Can they provide their state inspection history?			
Does the center have complete background checks on all staff? <i>Required</i>			
What is the discipline policy? <i>Required</i>			
Is the center safe, clean and welcoming?			
Are strict emergency and security plans in place? <i>Required</i>			
How are children accounted for throughout the day? <i>Required</i>			
Is the front entry always locked and staffed for security?			
Is there a safe, fenced outdoor area? <i>Required</i>			
What is the center's policy for administering medications?			
Are healthy and nutritious snacks/meals provided? <i>Centers should have planned weekly menus available.</i>			
How often does diapering/toileting occur?			
Is handwashing done frequently?			
Do the children have an opportunity to play outside each day? <i>Required</i>			
Is there a variety of outside equipment/toys available and appropriate for various ages?			
Is there shade available outside where the children play? <i>Required</i>			
Do children 2 years and younger play separately from the older children?			
Are fire extinguishers on site? <i>Required</i>			

Did you know?

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) and local licensing agencies monitor and inspect licensed child care programs and licensed-exempt School Readiness programs to ensure their health and safety, background screening and training requirements are in compliance with state and federal laws.

You can find child care inspection reports and other valuable resources on their website at <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/child-care/parent-resources>.



Well-Trained Staff			
Questions To Ask/Things to Consider	Center 1	Center 2	Center 3
Are the staff well-trained? <i>May include a degree in early childhood, required teacher/director certifications, ongoing professional development and trainings, etc.</i>			
How long have the teachers and director been there? <i>Longer employed staff reflects well on teacher retention and is good for continuity of care.</i>			
How is teacher turnover handled? <i>Look for centers with a plan to support children during teacher transitions.</i>			
How are teacher absences handled? <i>Look for centers with qualified substitutes or floating staff who are able to fill in.</i>			
Are teachers or the director trained to administer developmental screenings and identify children who may need additional services? <i>If not, ask where developmental screenings take place.</i>			
Does the center participate in a local quality rating and improvement system or has there been a program assessment completed recently?			
Does the center have a Gold Seal designation?			

QRIS

A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is designed to assess and improve the quality of early learning programs. Florida does not have a statewide QRIS program; however, some counties have implemented a local QRIS. Check with your local early learning coalition to see if they have a QRIS and what information they can give you about your potential center.

Program Assessment

Child care centers in Florida participating in the School Readiness Program may receive an assessment using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) tool. CLASS is an observation-based program assessment that measures the quality of interactions between teachers and children. CLASS is recognized internationally for capturing elements within a classroom that improve child outcomes including increased math achievement, stronger vocabulary and reading outcomes and better classroom behavior. **If a center participates in the School Readiness Program, ask about their CLASS score.**

