

There are several elements which are considered when measuring quality child care. Essential elements include the child care provider, the environment, safety, relationships, services, and staff: child ratio.

THE CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Research statistics has long-established that the child care provider is one of the most vital elements in quality child care. Childcare providers need to be affectionate and caring, and be considerate to and respectful of children's individual needs. Providers need to be culturally sensitive and accepting of differences in ethnic backgrounds, beliefs and customs. The provider should also practice positive discipline techniques that are encouraging, and fosters social skills, rather than punishing, criticizing or blaming.

ENVIRONMENT

A quality environment is well planned and invites children to learn and grow. There should be enough materials and equipment accessible that are developmentally appropriate for the children in care. Activities planned by the caregivers must also be developmentally appropriate and allow for creative and imaginative play. Play opportunities that enhance children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development are another indicator of *high quality programs*. Children need to be allowed time to play and explore using tangible materials in order to enhance their natural inquisitiveness and intellectual development.

SAFETY

Safety is a major aspect of providing a good environment for children. Adults must be vigilant in their supervision of the children at all times. The child care provider needs to know emergency protocol and know how to reach the parents or guardians when necessary. Hygienic procedures for example, hand washing and local licensing standards must be followed. Adequate lighting, temperature, and noise control are also factors that contribute to a safe environment and *high quality programs*.

SERVICES

Quality child care programs can provide a variety of services which contribute to the overall welfare of the children and their families. These services include but are not limited to: (a) Healthy nutrition, (b) preventative health care, (c) monitoring of child development, (d) consultation with outside specialists for individual child and family needs, (e) advocacy, (f) provision of services to children with disabilities, (g) parent involvement programs, and (h) continual staff growth and development (Gotts, 1988). These services will help to provide the enriched environment each child needs for

positive growth and development. They will also lead to beneficial relationships, another component in *high quality program*.

RELATIONSHIPS

Quality child care has the aptitude of promoting trust, autonomy, and a true sense of happiness and well being in children. It can lead to positive physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development.

STAFFING

Good staffing ratios are another essential ingredient in quality child care settings. There must be a sufficient number of adults for the number of children. Galinsky and Phillips (1989) recommend a ratio of at least one adult for every three to four infants and an adult for every four to six children under three. The recommended ratio for three to five year old children is one adult for every ten children and one to twelve for school-age children (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1993). The study **Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers** found that centers with low child-staff ratios were seen as providing higher quality care. This study also found that centers rated as higher quality had teachers with more specialized training and education in early childhood (Whitebook, 1995).

Quality child care can make a significant difference in children's development.