

Strong Starts Begin Here.

What Quality Child Care Looks Like.

Every child deserves a strong start.

The first five years shape how your child learns, builds relationships, and grows in confidence. Whether you are expecting a baby or preparing your preschooler for kindergarten, the right early learning environment lays the foundation for what comes next.

This guide helps you recognize quality as you visit and evaluate programs so you can choose a place where your child can thrive.

1

Warm, Respectful, and Welcoming Environments

Quality begins with relationships. When children feel secure and respected, they build confidence and self-control.

- Were you greeted with kindness? What is the tone adults use with children?
- Were you asked what would help you and your child feel welcomed?
- How do adults interact with the children in their care? Do they respond quickly and speak gently? Do they guide big emotions calmly? Do they get down to a child's level?
- Ask how long teachers have worked there and how often staff changes. Consistent educators help children build trust, especially in the early years.

2

Safe and Supportive Learning Spaces

A strong program protects your child's physical safety while creating an environment where learning and comfort can happen together.

- Look closely at classrooms, bathrooms, and playgrounds. Are they clean and well-maintained? Are entrances secure?
- Are adults positioned so they can see and hear all children, both indoors and outdoors?
- Do the spaces support learning, playing, and comfort?
- Are schedules and consistent routines present? How are transitions managed?

3

Clear and Consistent Two-Way Communication

You are your child's first teacher. A strong program treats you that way.

- Do staff answer your questions clearly? Do they invite you to share information about your child's routines, culture, and needs?
- How will you receive updates and be included in your child's learning?
- How do educators listen to your concerns and your child's needs? How is that information used to support your child?

4

Family Support and Guidance

Choosing an early childhood education provider is a big decision. Clear information builds trust and helps you plan.

- Ask about tuition, what is included, and whether there are additional fees. It is completely appropriate to have a direct conversation about cost.
- Ask about waitlists and enrollment timelines, especially for infants.
- What support is available to help with enrollment, applying for Kentucky's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) if applicable, and understanding routines and expectations? Who do you contact for questions or assistance?



5

Social and Emotional Growth Is a Priority

Watch how teachers respond when children are frustrated, upset, or in conflict. Children who learn to manage emotions, follow directions, and cooperate with peers are better prepared for kindergarten.

- Do they stay calm? Do they help children name feelings and work through problems?
- Is the daily schedule predictable? Young children thrive when routines are consistent.
- Ask how families receive guidance to help understand and support your child's emotional development and behavior.
- Do educators offer calming techniques and routines for families to try at home?

6

Family Partnership in Learning and Development

You may hear programs described as "child care," "daycare," or "preschool." The label matters less than whether learning is intentional, age-appropriate, and guided by trained educators. Look at the classroom environments for multiple ages, not just your child's current age.

- For babies, are caregivers talking, holding, and responding throughout the day?
- For toddlers, do you see hands-on play, movement, and language-rich conversations that are developmentally appropriate?
- For preschoolers, do you see books, counting activities, play-based learning, art, and teachers asking thoughtful questions?
- Ask what curriculum they use and how they prepare children for kindergarten.

7

Consistent Routines

Consistency helps children feel secure and helps families build trust. Structured routines support children's confidence and behavior, and they reflect a program that is organized and intentional.

- As you visit, ask about the daily schedule and how activities are shared with families.
- Watch how educators guide children through the day. How do they prepare children for what comes next, like moving from play to nap time? Do they support transitions in a calm and reassuring way?

Investing in Quality

Many child care programs participate in Kentucky All STARS, the state's quality rating and improvement system. Kentucky All STARS looks at teacher training, classroom environments, family engagement, and how programs continue to improve over time.

Thrive By 5 Louisville's Family Quality Standards build on that foundation by focusing on what families experience every day: strong relationships, clear communication, and meaningful partnership in their child's early learning. Quality grows through consistent effort, strong relationships, and a commitment to doing better for children every day.

When You Visit a Program

Notice the relationships. Notice the environment. Notice how children respond to adults. Then ask yourself:

- Would my child feel safe here?
- Would my child be encouraged to grow here?
- Can I picture my child walking into kindergarten confident and ready to learn because of this experience?

Trust what you see and feel. Thrive By 5 Louisville is strengthening early childhood education across our city so every child can enter kindergarten confident, prepared, and ready to thrive.

Strong Beginnings. Strong Futures.

