

Do you know who is watching your child? Quality Matters!

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Imagine that your child, Johnny, needs to attend child care while you work or go to school. It is important to know the difference between registered and non-registered child care options. If you choose a registered child care home setting, you may be comforted to know that the home where Johnny will be spending his time is equipped with safety items like smoke detectors, first aid kits, and fire extinguishers. The provider has also been trained in first aid and other topics. Registered homes are visited by the Department of Human Services (DHS) once a year. They check on training hours, number of children, and safety in the environment. As a parent, you know that your child's safety is important. With safe equipment, Johnny's exposure to and the risk of dangers are decreased. With training, your child care provider knows how to respond in an emergency. Non-registered child care home providers can legally care for 5 children at one time, are not visited by DHS, and are not required to attend training.

There are many other things to consider when looking for a program to care for your child. There are measures of quality for the air we breathe, hotels where we stay, cars we buy, and restaurants we visit. When choosing a hotel or a restaurant, many will look for star ratings and/or written comments and recommendations. What about the quality of child care? Considering that a child will go to a child care every day for six to eight hours (and sometimes more), we suggest that parents ask about child care quality too!

The most common questions asked by parents are about openings, hours, location, and cost. While it is important to consider cost, families also need to know if the program is registered and ask about provider qualifications, the number of children being cared for, and family involvement. Don't forget to ask: "Are you a quality rated program?" Iowa, along with many other states, has a quality rating system (QRS) in place for child care programs. QRS is a voluntary program that offers child care providers a guided way to improve the quality of child care they provide. This system includes professional development, health and safety checklists, the set-up of environment, family and community partnerships, and leadership. As steps are completed, the provider is able to move up in levels. Achieving a star rating, level 2-5, on the QRS scale means the provider has gone above and beyond what the state requires of them. A rating shows that the provider is committed to providing quality child care. Jackson and Clinton county providers have access to the Child Care Resource & Referral Consultant for help with understanding the registration and QRS process in Iowa.

There are checklists to help you remember all the things to ask and look for when trying to find child care. For more information about choosing quality child care and Iowa's Quality Rating System, call Child Care Resource & Referral at 1-855-CHILD-01 (855-244-5301) or visit these websites: www.iowaccrr.org and <http://dhs.iowa.gov/iqrs>.