

## The four key areas of a quality early childhood program

QUALITYstarsNY uses four key areas to judge the quality of an early childhood program. These areas fit together to form a nurturing and exciting place for children to play, learn and grow.

1

### Learning environment:

The space where children play, learn and grow. In a quality program, spaces are clean and inviting. Children look happy and busy. Equipment, materials and planned activities stimulate learning. Adults are listening to, talking with (not at), and enjoying interacting with children.

2

### Management & leadership:

The support of all parts of an early childhood program that make it possible for staff and families to focus on the children. In a quality program, the leadership sets the vision and establishes policies to make sure that the program functions properly.

3

### Staff qualifications & experience:

The educational backgrounds and previous experiences that staff bring to their work. In a quality program, staff have strong backgrounds in child development and early education and respond to children's needs to enrich their learning.

4

### Family engagement:

The way that program staff work with families to advance children's learning and development. In a quality program, families and staff work as partners. Family members feel respected, welcomed, and invited to participate in decisions

QUALITYstarsNY.ORG

Visit us online for more information:

Resources for choosing a quality early childhood program in your area

Tools and tips for working with your program to improve quality

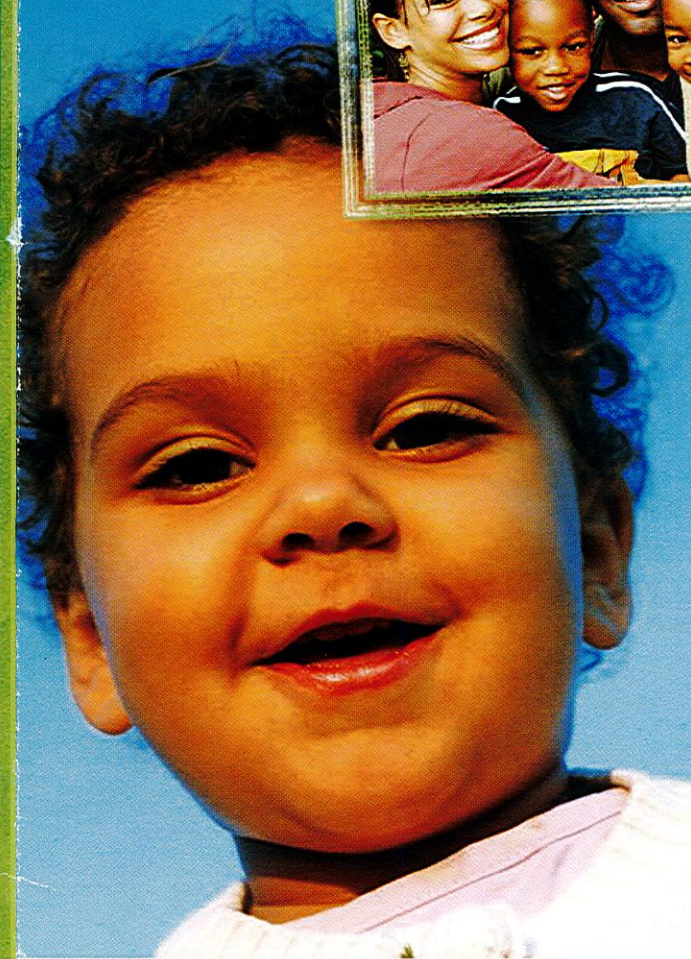
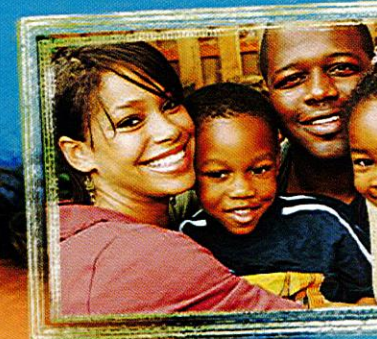
More details about QUALITYstarsNY

QUALITYstarsNY  
a winning beginning for all our children

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A Guide for Parents & Families

# Choosing a quality early care and education program



## WHY QUALITY MATTERS

A quality early care and education program goes beyond keeping children safe and healthy. It nurtures and challenges young minds to develop critical thinking, social, emotional and physical skills.

Research shows that children who attend quality programs actually do better in school and throughout life.

## WHAT IS QUALITYstarsNY?

QUALITYstarsNY is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for all types of early childhood programs. It works to improve the quality of care by assessing the program's learning environment — along with other aspects of how the program functions — and by providing supports for improvement.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FAMILIES?

Using a 5-star rating scale, QUALITYstarsNY will help families to make better informed decisions about their early education options. By choosing a QUALITYstarsNY program, families will be confident that their child's program is invested in delivering quality early learning experiences. Better yet, families will know that programs are supported with free resources, like staff training and professional development, to make sure

## Families are partners in quality

When it comes to quality, what you say and do matters. In a quality early childhood program, families and teachers work together to support the needs of the individual child. Here are some key suggestions for developing and strengthening the partnership with your child's teacher.

**Communicate** A strong partnership is based on ongoing communication. The information you can share about your child is very important, as is the information that the teacher or program will share. A quality program should offer multiple opportunities to exchange information. Use these opportunities to ask questions, share observations, and bring up any concerns about the program and your child's development.

**Connect** It's important for families to support the skills and learning that children work on during the day. It is just as important that programs take steps to incorporate each child's home culture into the school's learning environment. This creates a connection between home and school that tells children that learning happens all the time. You could ask to borrow a book your child enjoys at school so you can read it at bedtime. Or ask your child and teacher what they are doing in school so that the learning can continue at home.

**Get involved** There are many ways to get involved in your child's program. Some families can volunteer in the classroom while others need more creative options. Talk with your program to find ways to contribute that are meaningful to you. By sharing your time, talents or energy, you show that you are an invested partner in your child's learning. You also show your child that the adults in their lives can work together to support them.



## Finding the right program

First, it is important to know if the early care and education program you are considering is licensed or regulated. Then cost, location, and hours of operation are to be considered. In high quality programs, staff go beyond these basic requirements to respond positively to differences in children's interests, needs, experiences and abilities.

## Why choose a regulated program?

Regulated programs and providers:

- Are inspected regularly
- Meet ongoing professional development requirements
- Have first aid and CPR training
- Undergo criminal background checks for all program staff
- Follow city and state guidelines about: staff-to-child ratios; safe indoor and outdoor play areas; food preparation/handling; and storing medicine, cleaning supplies and other toxins.

## Families have options for choosing regulated early care and education programs.

Regulated programs and providers exist in many forms, giving families the choice to decide which type offers the best fit. The following are examples of regulated programs that serve the diverse needs and values of families.

- Licensed child care centers
- Registered family homes/group family homes
- Universal Prekindergarten in public schools and centers
- State Education Department registered nursery schools
- Head Start/Early Head Start programs
- Special education preschools/Early Intervention programs

For more information and help finding local early care and education programs, visit:

OFFICE OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

[ocfs.ny.gov](http://ocfs.ny.gov)

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE

[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)

EARLY CARE AND LEARNING COUNCIL

[earlycareandlearning.org/childcare](http://earlycareandlearning.org/childcare)