



The American Psychological Association (APA) supports initiatives to improve the affordability, availability, and safety of quality child care for all children. High quality child care involves compliance with adequate health and safety requirements, staff training in child development, low child-to-caregiver ratios, and other considerations. High quality child care is especially critical for children of low-income families.

Background

- **Increasing number of children are placed in child care.** The proportion of single mothers with jobs, after remaining steady at around 58 percent from 1986 to 1993, increased sharply to 72 percent in 1999. In two-parent households, only 23 percent of all families with children younger than six-years-old had one parent working and one parent staying home in 1999. Increasingly, financial circumstances are placing parents in the position of having to place their child in child care.
- **Families struggle to find quality child care.** Studies have found that poor quality child care exists at an alarming rate in the U.S. One four-state study found that 40 percent of the rooms serving infants in child care centers to be of such poor quality as to jeopardize children's health, safety, or development. Another national study found that over one-third of the family child care programs were rated as inadequate enough to harm children's development. Furthermore, only 12 states require child care providers to have any early childhood training prior to serving children in their homes.
- **Preferences for different types of child care providers are based on differing perceptions of child care quality and array of choices.** Survey data suggest that working women prefer center-based care to home-based care because of greater parental control, perceived child safety, and dependability. Family, friend and neighbor care (home-based license-exempt nonparental caregiving) may be preferred due to trust, familiarity, flexibility, and cultural and language congruity. However, low income parents typically have fewer child care choices.
- **Investment in early childhood proves to be effective for children.** Investment in activities that promote children's skills and abilities early on makes it more likely that they will be motivated and successful later in life. Waiting longer to intervene makes intervention more costly. Early intervention can affect cognitive and socio-emotional skills, thereby affecting later success.

Research Findings on Quality Child Care

- **What constitutes quality child care?** Experts agree that health and safety requirements, developmentally and culturally appropriate activities, limited group size, adequate staff training in child development and early childhood education, warm staff-child interactions, adequate provider salaries, and adequate indoor and outdoor space are key components of quality child care. Appropriate child-to-caregiver ratios, group sizes, and provider qualifications are among the most critical.
- **The quality of child care has significant impact on child development.** Many studies have shown a relationship between quality of child care and later language and cognitive development, school readiness, social competence, peer interactions, and overall adjustment. Research indicates that children in poor-quality child care are delayed in reading skills and display more aggression toward other children and adults. While a recent study by the National Institutes of Health indicated that time spent in center-based child care predicted more problem behavior several years later, the most critical predictors of children's outcomes were *quality* of daycare and overall parenting.

Child Care

- **Successful family functioning is significantly influenced by access to quality child care.** Many studies demonstrate that access to quality child care can make a real difference in families' ability to work and succeed. For parents to be able to obtain and maintain a job, they must have easy access to supportive and stable child care. Single mothers who receive child care assistance are 40 percent more likely to remain employed after two years than those who do not receive assistance. In addition, having their child in quality child care often alleviates some parental stress, which subsequently improves the quality of parent-child interactions and family dynamics as a whole.
- **Compared to other options, quality child care yields more positive benefits for low-income children.** Several research studies have shown that low-income children in high-quality child care show better school achievement and social behavior in later years than similar children who were not in child care or who were in low quality care.
- **Low-income families often must choose lower quality care, because their options are more limited.** Low-income families frequently must choose child care based on cost and availability, rather than quality. This increases the likelihood that their children will be placed in lower quality child care settings. Children of immigrants are the fastest growing component of the child population. As such, it is critical that parents have child care providers that can provide cultural and language congruity.
- **Appropriate care for children with special needs is lacking.** Parents of children with special needs (e.g., oral motor development) frequently report lack of appropriate child care for their children, especially as their children grow older. The availability of mental health consultation can significantly reduce expulsion of children with behavioral problems.

Recommendations

- **Child care must be affordable, available, safe, and accessible for all children, including children with special needs & those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**
- **The quality of child care can be improved by addressing key issues in staff training (e.g., skills in caring for children with disabilities, cultural and language sensitivity), group size, and child-to-caregiver ratios.**
- **Investment in child care should include a focus on early childhood (ages 0-3).**
- **Continued research and evaluation of all types of child care is needed to help state and local agencies improve both the quality of child care and long-term outcomes for children in child care.**



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