



How Parents Use Child Care Information: The Known and Unknown

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Study Specifics

- 14 Focus Groups in seven US locations
- Total of 163 parents
 - 11 groups had children under 8 years
 - 3 groups had children who were 0-24 months
 - Low-income were over-represented
 - Hispanic, African-American, Asian and American Indian specific groups
- More than 8 in 10 participants were women
- Two-thirds were full-time working parents

How Parents Define Quality

- Their OWN child care is best
- There is NO clear and consistent definition
- An environment where their children learn and develop
 - “I like my son being excited about learning”
 - “To share, to say what they think, to speak about their feelings. We want our children to be emotionally as well as physically happy.”



How Parents Define Quality

- A professional and loving caregiver
 - “Their attitude is the first thing you’ll notice when you meet them and it shows how well you can trust a person to take care of your kids 8 hours a day”
 - “One of the questions I ask all the teachers I visited – are you happy working here? I found out if there was high turnover, that’s not good for the kids.”



How Parents Define Quality

- Cleanliness and safety of the setting



- “Up-to-date in terms of cribs, beds, napping facilities. Not state-of-the-art, but I want toys to be clean and appropriate.”
- “I think that inspections need to be unscheduled. In my small community, they know before the inspectors come.”

Choosing Child Care

- Most important factors – cost, safety, learning environment
 - “I can always find child care, but then its hard to find one I would actually use.”
- Make “best” of limited options
- Listen to their “sixth sense”
- Multiple child care arrangements are needed to cover care (hours, costs, etc.)
- Most parents did not check to see if their child care program was licensed or recently inspected. They just ASSUMED it was.

Parent's Assumptions vs. Reality

Assumption	% parents who think it is true	Centers	Family Child Care
All caregivers provide learning opportunities	96	Only about 30 states address development in required activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 states require providers to read to children • 32 states require providers to plan learning activities
All caregivers must have a background check	84	9 states require state and federal checks using fingerprints	25 states require federal checks using fingerprints
All child care programs are required to be licensed	81	11 states license all child care centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 states license all family child care homes • 9 states do not conduct an inspections prior to issuing a license
All child care programs are inspected	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41 states require at least annual inspections • Only 5 states require quarterly inspections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 states require inspection before licensing • 25 states require at least annual inspections

Compromises made by parents

- More than 4 in 10 parents said they had to pay more than originally planned
 - “We didn’t have a choice whether it was expensive or inexpensive because our choices were so limited.”
- Parents had to travel further to find child care to meet their needs
 - “Distance – I have to drive hours and rearrange my schedule.”
- Personal goals (jobs, going back to school)
 - “I gave up a promotion due to the hours of care.”
- Their wish list for care
 - “Bi-lingual Day care setting.”
 - “More aggressive teaching curriculum.”

What information is needed

- A consistent use of terminology – too many communication gaps
 - Licensing, certification, star ratings, high-quality
- Knowledge of child care subsidy/fee assistance programs available in their state.
- Knowledge of providers in their area (Esp. quality-care child providers)
- Knowledge of “true” costs
- Questions to ask providers to ensure adequate care