



# **The Park Slope Parents Guide to Finding and Securing Daycare**

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## Finding and Securing Daycare

This step-by-step guide is designed to help parents navigate the sometimes challenging and time-consuming process of finding the right daycare for your family. Make sure to check our [Daycare Recommendations](#) based on Park Slope Parents member reviews of daycares in Brownstone Brooklyn and beyond.



### Is my child ready for daycare?

Not sure whether to take the daycare plunge or hold off? PSP members on our Dads Group shared some thoughts and experiences that may help you make a decision.

#### One parent asked in May 2021...

“Looking for some advice...our son is turning 2 in December and so far he’s mainly been with our nanny and us full-time during the week (no daycare yet). We’re considering enrolling him in a 2s and 3s program this Fall either 3 or 5 days a week. If he goes 3 days a week, he’d be with our nanny the other two days a week still. On the one hand we’re excited to have him interact with more kids on a daily basis. Right now he does have a regular group of kids he sees at the playground, but it’s only for 1-2 hours/day. On the other hand, he’d be the youngest in the group in this daycare program we’re considering (he just barely makes the cutoff to enroll). He and our nanny love spending time together and we’re wondering if maybe we should hold off on daycare for now and look at programs for January or even next Fall when he’s a little older. Any advice / thoughts from your own experience?”

#### Members advised...

**Some say start as early as possible.** “This is a highly personal, very subjective and potentially hot-button issue, but speaking only for myself, I think the earlier the better.

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I think the socialization with a range of ages is hugely important; the establishment of a routine and separation, of being somewhere other than the home and spots you visit, and needing to get out of the house at a certain time and not get picked up again until a certain time; the trust in and adapting to another set of caretakers, beyond even the current nanny, who at this point is more of an extension of family I would guess; but also, and this is where I'd argue being on the younger end is an advantage, I think the aspirational development of being surrounded by kids ahead of your own is hugely important.

*The aspirational development of being surrounded by kids ahead of your own is hugely important.*

Another big plus is curriculum and structure to the day. Most daycares have some level of a range of activities and 'classes' that likely go beyond what many nannies may do. Having that type of daily structure and the 'teaching' on a regular basis is very helpful as well at an early age.

And on the socialization and aspirational development front, it is very different from having a group you see regularly on the playground for an hour or two (which is still hugely important, not being dismissive of that at all!). Sharing the same space with a set of kids every day, all day, competing for the same toys and attention, etc., is a pretty big thing for development.

My two-cents, start as early as feasible and rip off that bandaid. And if 3 days a week is the best way to ease into it for you, that's a great option to have the best of both worlds. I think it gets harder for them to adapt the older they get, and with pre-K coming sooner than you think, I'd embrace the opportunity this fall.

*It's all very personal and subjective to your own family's situation.*

Obviously there are other considerations for not doing so that are separate from what I'm mentioning, but like I said, it's all very personal and subjective to your own family's situation.

For context around what I wrote, we sent our daughter to daycare starting at three months."

**Being on the younger end of the class doesn't mean your child won't love daycare.** "I was in the same situation when my little dude turned 2. We enrolled him at Daddy's Daycare (6th Ave in Park Slope) and he was also the youngest in his class at the time, and also one of only two boys and 7 girls. I will say it was the best thing we did during Covid, despite our unsureness with budget and careful with the pandemic, etc.

Not only does he beg us to go more often now (just turned 3) but he has gotten so much better with social skills and his learning skills... def worth the investment.

**In fact, it could be a positive.** "We have really loved having our 2.5yo be among the youngest in the class. It's fun to see the 'mature' things they learn when they come home from 'school' and I've noticed a lot of cool stuff, from cleaning up after himself without being told to asking me to write B-I-N-G-O on every Mother's Day card."

*We have really loved having our 2.5-year-old be among the youngest in the class.*

**Whatever you decide, remember...** "You're doing great no matter what you choose. This sh\*t ain't easy."

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## When should I start looking?

So you've decided to move forward with daycare. But when to start the search? Most parents polled indicated that looking three to six months in advance was ideal. This is especially important for parents seeking infant daycare, since options are more limited. No, you don't have to look for a twos program when you're pregnant, but many places do have waitlists, so you'll want to get on those lists early.

## What are the different kinds of daycare centers?

Child care programs in New York State are regulated by the state Office of Children and Family Services, except New York City–based daycare centers, which are regulated by the New York City Department of Health. You can search on the [OCFS website](#) for the type of license they hold, their caregiver/child ratios, and any violations. NOTE: Most of the places you'll search will have at least one violation if they have been in operation for more than five years (e.g., sink doesn't have adequate water flow; staff immunization records not up to date.) It's important to check whether if the violations are minor or critical and ensure that they have been corrected. Feel free to ask the facility about their violations, but know that it's not uncommon for a place to have a violation.

While there are many nuances between different types of daycare, the most salient distinction is in-home vs. at a center. In-home daycare can be registered or licensed with the NYS Office of Children & Family Services, and typically would not serve more than 12 children, some of whom might be under age two. Center-based daycare, on the other hand, is likely to be more established and structured, and generally serves kids over the age of two. See this [set of descriptions](#) and explanation for more details and caregiver/child ratios.

## Where can I learn about available daycares around me?

The Park Slope Parents website has a list of reviewed [daycare sites](#) and more specifically daycare sites for [children under one](#). Our website provides names of local daycares, contact information, and reviews from PSP members who have sent their children to these facilities. These reviews were gathered with no conflict of interest on the part of the members (i.e., they weren't paid for their reviews). Remember, however, that a great daycare for one family is not necessarily the best daycare for your family.

Word of mouth is another effective way to learn about daycare. Ask other parents in your baby or toddler group to recommend daycares. Ask parents in your building, at work, and even people you see in cafes and restaurants. Keep the name of the referrer



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handy if you contact the daycare: In some cases, a referral from another parent will expedite the process of securing daycare.

Another useful resource is the [Day Care Council of New York City](#). You can reach them by calling 311 or visiting their website, through which anyone can review the licensing status of all daycares in a general area by entering a zip code. If you are thinking about enrolling your child near your workplace, you can check daycares in that zip code as well. (Also, check out the PSP article on [Commuting to Manhattan for Daycare](#).)

Parents are advised to list as many zip codes as possible—e.g., if you live in the North Slope with a zip code of 11217, include other zip codes in Park Slope such as 11215 or 11234 for Prospect Heights. And if you find that the daycare you're interested in has violations, remember to inquire about them with the director of the daycare.

**Park Slope Parents recommends that you make sure that the daycare is licensed.**

Unlicensed daycare centers can be shut down with very limited notice, and they do not have the oversight of agencies who check safety, hygiene, and a host of other important factors.

## I found some leads for daycare—now what?

The best way to start narrowing down choices is to email the daycare places that interest you and ask to set up tours. You can call or text if you don't get an immediate response. Daycares differ on their responsiveness to different types of communication, so try them all and understand that you may need to follow up a few times to get a response. Depending on their policy and whether they have/expect some openings soon, daycares might be: 1) accepting visits from prospective clients quite openly; 2) ask you to contact them later; or 3) put you on a waitlist and organize a tour only if the waitlist clears up.

Visit as many places as possible and explore a wide range of options—e.g., large daycare centers, home-based daycare centers, cooperative daycares, etc. The goal is to explore the full range of what is available so that you can make an informed decision.

## When I called to set up a visit, I was told that there is a six-month waiting list!

Waiting lists are common, especially in the case of infant care. If a daycare doesn't have an immediate spot (and most don't), some daycares have an established waitlist to put you on, while others ask you to contact them later. Don't let the waiting lists deter you from pursuing a specific daycare option. If doing so doesn't require a deposit and contract, put your name on the waitlist even if you haven't decided that the daycare is the best fit for you. Many parents place their names on numerous waiting lists and then drop off as they narrow down their choices, so there is definitely a chance that the waitlist will move. Let them know your preferred start date (it's unlikely that a daycare will make you start early, by the way). If a daycare is your number-one choice, let them know that.

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## I am scheduled to visit a daycare. What should I look for while I am there?

*“Don’t judge a daycare by how it looks on the outside. There are small spaces in Brooklyn that have really amazing teachers and programs.”*

**First and foremost, listen.** Let the coordinator talk first without asking a lot of questions. You can learn a great deal about a place by just watching and listening. Only after you let them talk and show you around should you start asking questions (see below). Be thoughtful about your inquiries, since asking too many questions could be taken as a red flag for the daycare that you are a high-need parent. Since there is so much demand for spots, daycares can afford to be a little picky. That said, daycare providers are used to parents asking lots of questions.

**Tune into your intuition and trust your gut.** Many parents say that, above all else, listening to the little voice inside your head should be the deciding factor in choosing a daycare. While you may be wary of leaving your baby with anyone (even other family members), you want to have peace of mind when you finally take that step. To that end, start by envisioning yourself leaving your child at this daycare each day. How do you feel? Are you comfortable with the idea?

**Consider the location.** Is it easy to get there from your home? Is it on the way to your workplace? Can you imagine traveling back and forth from this daycare on a regular basis in various types of weather? Schlepping baby gear back and forth to a daycare in the rain and cold makes a difference to your quality of life. There is something to be said for convenience.

*“For daycare, focus on price, location, and your gut - is it the price point you need, is it convenient for drop off and pick up, and do you get a good feeling from the care givers and the space? If your answer is yes to all, then it’s a win-win.”*

**Check out the space.** Is it clean? Is it bright, cheerful, and welcoming? Where do the kids eat, sleep, and play? Ask to see the diaper-changing area and bathroom for older kids. Are there a variety of age-appropriate toys? Are the toys within reach of the children?

*“Pinpoint your priorities and focus on the one or two things that matter most to you...Most things can be compromised on as long as you feel your child is well cared for and safe.”*

**Observe the kids at the site.** Do they seem content? Are they being closely monitored? Are they receiving warmth and love from the caretakers? How do they interact with each other? Be aware that some daycares will not allow visitors while children are present, but it is ideal if you can visit the facility while the day’s session is in action.

**Look at the staff.** Do they seem to genuinely enjoy being around the children? How do they interact with the children? Do they have a sense of professionalism about their jobs?

**Explore outdoor areas.** Is there an outdoor play space? What types of toys are available for outdoor play? Is the space secured from outsiders?

**Figure out what’s most important to you.** Sunshine and outdoor time? Opportunities to be around older children? Philosophies on discipline? Narrow down your must-haves and be sure to ask questions to illuminate the daycare’s takes on each key topic.

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**Spend as much time as you need to do your own assessment.** If necessary, make a second visit or send your significant other or someone in your support network to make their own observations. Also, if you see other parents during your visit, be sure to pull them aside and ask for their opinion. After visiting, look back at the daycare's reviews on the Park Slope Parents website and see how those reviews support or don't support what you found on your tour. Also check out the reviews for other daycares to see if other places have things you don't want to miss out on with your top choices.



## What questions should I ask?

Below is a list of different questions you can ask of the director and teachers. You do not want to use ALL of these. Pick the ones that most interest you based on your family's needs and concerns. Again, when you talk to people at the daycare, do plenty of listening without asking too many questions. Letting them talk will reveal a lot. Still, ask all the questions you need to in order to be satisfied that a daycare is the right choice for you. As we said, daycare directors are used to lots of questions.

See our article on [preparing for daycare and preschool in the time of coronavirus](#) for Covid-specific questions and considerations.



### **Philosophy/educational approach:**

- What is the provider's philosophy of care?
- Does the daycare follow a specified curriculum?
- Are there lesson plans for older children, and if so, what is the instructor's training?
- Is hands-on activity encouraged?
- Is there a daily schedule of indoor and outdoor activities, quiet time, and active time?
- Are the adults asking questions of the children and reading to them?
- Are the children taught the value of diversity through multi-racial, multicultural, non-sexist, non-stereotyping pictures, dolls, books, and materials?
- Does the school encourage non-gender-specific play and activities?

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- Do they assume that all families are binary with a mom and a dad? Do they assume that the child has two parents?
- Can the program meet any special needs your child may have?
- Ask to see their storytime reading list. Do you see books that incorporate topics such as different family structures (including single parents, adoptive parents, and LGBTQ+ parents)?



### **Napping/resting:**

- Are there cribs for infants and cots or other rest spaces for older kids?
- Do some babies sleep in play yards or their strollers?
- What percentage of children nap during the rest hour? What do children who do not nap do during the rest hour?

Also read on PSP:  
[“Afternoon Naps and Pre-School/Daycare”](#)



### **Health/safety:**

- How do you make sure that all the equipment is safe?
- Are infants housed in a separate location from older children?
- How often are staff members trained in first aid/CPR? Are all staff trained in these areas?
- What are there policies and procedures for reporting accidents and other medical problems?
- What are the procedures for administering medication and treating illness and injuries?
- How would the center handle suspected incidents of child abuse by parents, staff, or others?
- Are children supervised by adults at all times, especially to and from bathrooms, the water fountain, and other classrooms?
- How is bathroom time addressed? Are children granted privacy when using the bathroom? Do the classrooms have their own dedicated bathrooms?
- Where would children be taken in a city-wide emergency?

[“Refusing to Nap at Daycare”](#)



### **Recreation/celebrations:**

- Do children leave the center for field trips or walks? How often? How are they transported and supervised on these outings?
- Are children allowed to watch videos? If so, how often?
- How are holidays celebrated/acknowledged?
- How are birthdays handled?



### **Parent/caregiver interactions:**

- May parents enter the facility at any time?
- Are teachers and the director regularly available for consultation?
- How are problems and concerns with a child handled? For example, if one of the children is biting other kids, what happens?
- Is there a parent board or advisory committee? If so, what is their role?
- Do parents assist in classrooms or participate in center activities such as fundraising? Is this required or voluntary?
- What kind of information do staff communicate with parents during drop-off and pick-up?
- Can parents hang out during drop-off and pick-up? Or are they encouraged to come and go quickly?

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- Do parents receive emails, photos, or other feedback during the day? Are photos kept private, or might they be publicly shared (on the daycare's website, etc.)?



### Daycare staff:

- Are staff state-certified or registered?
- What is the educational level and training of caregivers? Of the director?
- What is the ethnic and gender breakdown of staff?
- Are staff required to have physical examinations before they are hired?
- When are staff members required to get their flu shots?
- Do the caregivers share your views on discipline and praise?
- What is the annual turnover rate for caregivers? Why do caregivers leave?
- How does pay compare to that at other area centers? Are health benefits provided to staff?
- Do staff receive ongoing training?
- What is the child/staff ratio for your child's age and for age groups to which your child may move?
- Are the stated number of staff in the classroom at all times, or do they have non-classroom duties or work shifts?
- Are substitutes brought in when staff are sick or on vacation?

**NOTE:** Different types of daycares (group family daycares vs. child care centers, for instance) are regulated differently, which will affect specifics and standards when it comes to health, safety, and staff training/certification.



*I initially thought [teaching staff] would be an important criteria, but it appears that this has no bearing on the quality of care for infants according to many parents who [we talked to].*



*Ask about staff turnover. Consistency and routine are so important to babies and small children.*



### Meals/snacks:

- Are meals and snacks provided to the children as part of the fee, or are they extra?
- What are the menus like? Are the meals and snacks nutritious?
- Are special provisions made for or allowed for children with dietary restrictions?
- Are children occasionally allowed or encouraged to participate in food preparation?
- Are children required to eat all meals and snacks or to eat only when they're hungry?



### Hours/late policies/closures:

- What are the daily hours of the daycare center?
- Is there early drop-off or late coverage if parents run late? Are there penalties for picking up your child late?
- Is there a phase-in period or transition plan to ease the child into daycare?
- When will the daycare be closed, e.g., holidays, professional development days, seasonal breaks, etc.? (Typically daycares do NOT follow the Department of Education calendar, but some do. If

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you foresee needing more coverage, make sure to ask.).

- What is the closure policy for inclement weather and child/staff illness? What accommodations are available if there is a snow day or if staff are sick?
- What is the policy for bringing sick children to daycare?



### Fees:

- What are the fees for daycare?
- When are the fees due?
- Can you use pre-tax dollars at the daycare?
- How are parents billed?
- Are there “sibling” discounts for enrolling more than one child in the daycare center?

Check out these PSP articles:  
[“Can working parents realistically pick up their children from daycare/preschool at 6pm?”](#)

[“Daycare for Parents Who Work Late”](#)



**In addition to the above questions, we recommend that you request the following:**

- Parent handbook
- Daily schedule
- Food menus
- Newsletters
- Rules and regulations
- Contract with parents
- Fees and payment policies
- Disciplinary policy
- Scrapbook illustrating daily activities/special occasions
- References from past and current parents

It’s also worth double-checking whether the daycare will remain in its current location or whether the facility has plans to move.

## I’ve visited some daycares and narrowed down my choices. What are my next steps?

Once you develop a short list of daycares, it is time to place your name on the waiting list. It is best to make this request in writing, either by sending an email or a letter. This way, your placement on the waiting list is well-documented. Follow up on your placement on a regular basis. It is possible that you will be #10 on the list one month and move up to #1 the following month due to children being placed at that site or opting for another daycare.

Ask the director to give you an anticipated start date or propose a start date, and ask if your child can enroll at that time. If there is a slot available at that time, you may need to pay a deposit to hold that slot for your child. These deposits range from a one-time fee of \$100 to a full month’s fee. All deposits should be refundable with notice, although given the high demand placed on daycares, they could potentially be non-refundable. Make sure you are clear about any refund policies: e.g., if a daycare center requires 60 days’ notice for a refund, it is advisable to make a note of this on your calendar.

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## Is part-time daycare available?

This varies depending on the daycare. It is important to ask about the availability of part-time and flexible daycare schedules up front.

## Cost considerations

### How much does daycare cost?

Although daycare costs less than hiring a babysitter or nanny, many parents experience sticker shock when they hear the fees. Most centers charge less per hour as the weekly hours increase. It can be hard to get a handle on actual pricing from a daycare's website, but in general, part-time daycare costs more per hour than full-time. Hourly rates range from \$10.00–\$12.00 per hour. The average full-time daycare (i.e. 40–50 hours per week) will likely cost around \$1800–\$2200 per month (this price is updated as of 2019), but there will be variances, and it is best to request information about fees in writing.

### Are there other fees associated with daycare?

Most daycares require that parents provide diapers and wipes, as well as food for babies who do not yet eat table food.



### Will I get a deduction on my tuition for things like absences, holidays, and snow days?

Check with your facility, as deductions for incidentals such as these may already be built into the tuition structure.

### How can I save money on daycare costs?

The best way to lower daycare fees is to send your child part-time or opt for a nanny share. Although part-time daycare is harder to secure than full-time, you may be able to secure a part-time slot if you start researching early. Some parents decrease time in daycare by staggering their work schedules, so that one parent drops off the child and the other handles pick-up. For example, one parent could drop off the child at 9:00 am and then work from 10:00 am–6:00 pm; the other parent could work from 8:00 am–4:00 pm and pick up the child at 5:00 pm. Schedules can be even more staggered based on the commuting distance for each parent and on whether one or both parents can work from home.

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## The transition to daycare

Once you've found a place for your child and have committed to enrolling them, you now have to prepare yourself physically and mentally. The nuts and bolts of the transition, from travel time to having all the gear in order, make up the physical side. If you are going to need to get out the door at a designated time, do some dry runs before you start daycare so you know how long it takes you to get everything prepared. Have a checklist of things you need to do to get out the door in the morning to make it easier. If you can pack the diaper bag the night before (except for any refrigerated items), that will make a big difference.

Also on the logistical side, find out what the daycare provides vs. what you need to supply for your child. Every daycare has their own list, but things you may need to bring include:

- Diapers / wipes / ointment
- Extra sets of clothing
- Cot sheet and blanket
- Stuffed / snuggle toys
- Painting smocks

Mentally, the transition may be less straightforward. PSP has a great article with [Eight Tips to Help With Separation Anxiety](#). You may be feeling a lot of anxiety around leaving your child with someone you don't know. It's perfectly normal for parents to have doubts and fears. Your child will pick up on your anxiety, so rest assured that you have done your homework and made the right decision for your child, as this sense of security will help with the transition.

If you can get the daycare's schedule (e.g., naps, food) in advance (maybe a month) you can try to get your child on that schedule to minimize hiccups in the transition process. Expect it to take at least a few weeks for the new routine to settle in and for things to settle down. Remember some of the upsides—daycares can help kids get on nap schedules, socialize your child, help with language, and even aid in potty training.

It's natural for your child to be anxious too. Older children can have a harder time with the transition to daycare than younger children. Crying at the beginning is not a sign that the daycare is a bad fit or that your child won't eventually be happy. Adjustments can take time, and it's not uncommon for a few weeks to go by before a child is comfortable with the new situation. This is where your behavior is key. Being calm and reassuring your child that everything will be okay is important.



### More advice on Park Slope Parents:

[“Transitioning to Daycare”](#)

[“Adjusting to Daycare: Dealing With Acclimatization Problems”](#)

[The PSP Guide to Transitions](#)

[Hiring a Nanny](#)

[Guide to a Successful Nanny Share](#)

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Once your child adjusts to this new situation, events like getting sick or going on vacation can restart the adjustment clock. It will be okay—really. Having multiple people to take care of your child is a GOOD thing. The adjustment can be hard, but know that it will get easier. If, after some time (maybe a month), you still feel like the choice wasn't a good one, look for other options. It may also be the case that your child would be better off with a nanny or nanny share.

### Adjustments to keep in mind

**Have your child start midweek.** When you do the initial drop-off, try a half-day, midweek, and don't go into work. If something goes awry—which it most likely won't—you can be close by, but you might not get as much done at work due to worry. Do something fun just for you that will help you adjust to not being around your child.

**Naptimes.** Your schedules around nap times may get wonky once your child starts daycare. They may nap better at daycare than at home, or vice versa. You may find that, if they don't nap enough at daycare, you come home with your child and get through dinner but then need to put them down for bed right away because they are overtired. These adjustments are normal; just stay on a steady course and try different things (e.g., adjusting their wake-up time, bedtime, weekend nap times) and you'll get it figured out. You may need to adjust things slowly (15 minutes a day) in order to find a rhythm that works both for your family and for the daycare's schedule. Some daycares are more strict about getting your child on a schedule, while others are more fluid in their approach and let the baby take the lead. The goal is to have your child sleep the recommended amount of time throughout the course of the day. Kids will learn that home and daycare have different rules, so don't worry too much about it; they will adapt.

**Feeding/eating.** It can also take some time for your baby to get used to being fed by other people (or via a bottle). This can be a stressful adjustment as well, but try not to worry too much. They may not eat much at daycare but make up for it at home. If you're worried, talk to your pediatrician. Added bonus: If they are old enough to start eating, you may find that they are open to trying a wider variety of foods because they see other kids eating.

Check out this PSP article on [Bottle Acceptance / Refusing to Take the Bottle.](#)

**Getting sick at daycare.** Be prepared that your child may get sick at daycare. You may need to leave work early to pick them up, and you may need to stay home with them, as most daycares want your child fever-free for 24 hours before returning. Even if you can work from home, don't expect to get a lot done.

**Milestones.** Discuss with the daycare if they tell parents about milestones (e.g., “your child walked today”) or not. Some parents have said, “It's the first time when I see it,” so being told about milestones is not something they worry about. Other people would rather not know.

### Some words of encouragement

“The transition is so hard for babies and parents. My son really struggled for the first month—no naps, no eating, not even the bottle—but by that second month he was fine. Now, he loves it, and I truly think it has been so great for his development. Good luck and with time this new routine will become old hat.”

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“Going back to work was so hard for me but give it time—honestly I’d give it a few weeks before I’d really worry. Talk to your ped if it will help you relax! If baby’s making up for [eating and sleeping] at home, still having enough wet diapers, still alert and her usual self—she’s just working through the adjustment.”

“The last thing I’ll say is that the beginning of daycare was a bit tough, but our daughter now LOVES daycare and playing with all the kids. I picked her up yesterday and after holding her for 2 minutes she started reaching out to go back to her caretaker at daycare!! All the kids get excited when she shows up, which is adorable (she’s the youngest). Hoping this puts you at ease at least a little.”

“We switched daycares in order to be at a location closer to our home, and worried that the change would cause all kinds of disruption for our 10-month-old, but he adapted in a few days—napping fine, happy at drop-off. In our experience, that kind of change doesn’t have to be a cause for concern.”

**Finally, EXHALE.** Having many caregivers is a good thing. It feeds into the “it takes a village” approach to childrearing. The adjustment to daycare can be a bit tough on parents as well as kids, but be confident in the choices you make.

Daycare can be a great way to help your child socialize. Being around other kids—some older, some younger—is a wonderful way to help them adapt to their environment, learn from others, and teach others. If they are in a caring environment, it means they will grow up learning from other people beyond just family caregivers.

If your gut tells you that you should reevaluate your choices, you can always change your caregiving situation.



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## TOP TIPS from Park Slope Parents members

### Trust your gut

“Go with your gut! Visit places ahead of time, and see how they make you feel. You want to find somewhere where you’re not questioning whether or not your child is completely happy.”

“Gut instinct matters, and with little ones inconveniences (distance from home, making your own food, schedules) are absolutely minimized by the peace of trusting providers completely.”

“Go with a program that feels right for you and your family.”

“Go with your gut, not every parent is going to feel comfortable with every place and not every place is for every kid.”

“Also, go with your gut—we were on the fence with the others we toured until we went here. We knew immediately it’s where we wanted to be.”

“Find a place where you feel at home and comfortable with staff/owner as you will have lots of questions /concerns—especially if it is your first child.”

“Go with your gut. Space and programs are important, but finding a loving group of teachers is more important.”

“Go with what seems right to you, there are different vibes for different folks.”

“No matter what you choose it will always be hard to give your child to another adult to care for them all day when they are an infant! Try to find a place where you feel you can trust and communicate with the leaders and you have a rapport with the teachers.”

*You want to find somewhere where you’re not questioning whether or not your child is completely happy.*

*It really has to be a fit for your family, and only you know what that will be.*

### Start researching early

“Look before you need care. Had we tried to secure a spot when needed, we would have missed out.”

“Though it’s crazy, really check them out early, as space in so many can be tough.”

### Don’t discount location and convenience

“If all things are equal, location and ease of commute is definitely worth a top consideration.”

“Choose something that works for the whole family. Convenience is key.”

“Go with your gut and if all things are equal, pick the commute that is easiest for you and your family.”

“For daycare, focus on price, location, and your gut—is it the price point you need, is it convenient

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for drop-off and pick-up, and do you get a good feeling from the caregivers and the space? If your answer is yes to all, then it's a win-win."

"Decide how far you'd like to travel from your home, especially if you are still WFH, we picked a place that was near our home and transit so it's lucky that we didn't have to think about changing daycares whenever we knew that we'd be WFH for an extended period of time."

### You know your child best. Think about what kind of environment will help them thrive.

"Think what kind of program your child might excel best in, it was important that our child went to a family type center that was in a home environment with loving teachers with a smaller class size. Also think about asking what kind of enrichment they offer, even though our child started at 8 months, when they grew older the addition of visiting teachers really made the daycare a special place for our child to attend."

### Look for the love

"Look for loving caretakers who you know are enthusiastic about your child."

"Does it seem like a place your child will feel loved?"

### Focus on what's important to your family



"Figure out what you need most—longer hours, on the way of your commute, close to the house, etc. The first few weeks will be rough as they transition."

"Pinpoint your priorities and focus on the one or two things that matter most to you (e.g.: location, food provided, music/art programs, cost, number of caregivers, hours, etc). Most things can be compromised on as long as you feel your child is well cared for and safe."

"Best question I asked is, 'If a kid starts biting another kid, how will you discipline her?' This really helped us find a center that aligns with our values."

"I value the outdoor space and the fact that my child's daycare divides food. But mostly just observe and ask to meet some of the teachers. If they are loving and warm, you are good."

"Figure out what is most important for you to have in a caretaker or facility and go with your gut. Our first daycare didn't work out for us, but I know others who still love that daycare. It really has to be a fit for your family, and only you know what that will be."

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“Decide what is important to you and your child and look for that. There is no perfect program that checks all the boxes that has a space for you waiting.”

### Tour as many places as you can

“Take a ton of tours, see who/where gives you a good feeling.”

“Do your due diligence to check out facilities with city records/reports, and give yourself a break!”

“Tour a number of locations and follow your instinct. We changed daycares when our daughter turned one because we fell out of love with the first location and I’m so thankful we did. Not all programs work for all kids/families.”

“Tour as many as you can! We toured 5 daycares and knew instantly that this daycare was for us!”

“Visit the facilities and do not hesitate to ask questions! If a daycare seems uncomfortable or unhappy about answering your questions, that should be a red flag, or at the very least a sign that it’s a bad fit.”

“Do your due diligence and take tours at all the daycares in your area, as far as you’re willing to walk everyday to drop off and pick up. Price compare and see what you’re getting (lunch or milk included? Outdoor space? Easy way to talk to caregivers throughout the day? Photo/video updates throughout the day?) If you get a good feeling about a place, reach out via email/phone and see how long it takes them to get back to you -- responsiveness is important.”

*“ Listen to what the coordinator talks about first, as this is telling to their priorities and how they view their own program.”*

### Talk to teachers and directors

“Meet with the teachers! It’s hard to get a sense of your child’s future environment from daycare owners. The teachers set the tone for the classroom and are the people your child will see every day. If you feel comfortable with them, it’s probably a good fit!”

“Definitely try to schedule a visit. Our son beamed at the center director during our tour (and he was not a fan of most people) and that really helped seal the deal.”

### Talk to other parents and tour when kids are there

“Make sure to visit the space during operating hours so you can see the children and teachers interact.”

“Ask about daily routines to get a sense of what the kids do all day. We knew we wanted outdoor time and lots of tummy time/unassisted sitting versus being confined in a chair all day (which some daycares we toured did do).”

“See if you can talk to current parents at the daycare. They should be willing to give you references.”

“Visit several, talk to other parents.”

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### Look beyond a shiny coating

“Is the director responsive to calls and emails? Are they flexible with their schedule if you need to add hours or days on an emergency basis? Are meals included, and what do they consist of?”

“Don’t judge a daycare by how it looks on the outside, there are small spaces in Brooklyn that have really amazing teachers and programs.”

“Listen to what the coordinator talks about first (i.e. what is important to them), as this is telling to their priorities and how they view their own program. Do they start with going through drop-off times, eating regimen, etc? Or is there another aspect to their program that they think is unique? What is their philosophy?”

“Look for loving caregivers, good and bright space, time for activities (music class, yoga class, art class, learning...) and free play, good with your lunch/nap schedule.”

### Don’t stress. It’s going to be okay

“It’s going to be ok. There’s not just one right answer. We’re lucky to have so many great options, even if your first choice doesn’t work out.”

“A space that looks inviting and fun, where you’d want to hang out all day if you were a toddler!”

“Don’t worry about lots of structure or bells and whistles for babies and toddlers—it’s all about finding a place with loving caregivers and that you feel like is a nice, warm environment.”

“There are so many more programs in Park Slope than I realized. Definitely talk to people, ask for recommendations. If someone likes their program they will tell you all about it!”

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“Recognize that daycares are highly regulated and your child will be safe. I don’t think that the most expensive are always the best, but I would be wary of very low-priced providers, it makes you wonder what the caretakers are getting paid. With any provider, I’m pretty sure it’s standard to pay less per hour the more hours you contract to.”

“At an early age just consider where you think your child will be happy. At this age it’s a matter of just making sure they are comfortable being left with other adults.”

“There is no right or wrong answer on which daycare to choose. Especially during COVID, with restrictions on visits, it can be hard to feel you’ve done enough research to be sure you’re making the right choice. Work with the information you have and choose something that works for you, and try not to stress out about it too much.”

*There’s not just one right answer. We’re lucky to have so many great options, even if your first choice doesn’t work out.*

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