



## Choosing Quality Child Care

The room was abuzz with conversation at the Ngala Parenting & Play Time. Words like *teacher, fees, curriculum, TEE score* all blended into one. Children were told that they are 'big people' now and going to school was a very important stage. Parents were very concerned with choosing the 'best' or 'right' school and to be accepted by the school was a cause for celebration!

Does the same amount of interest, energy and concern go into choosing the 'best' or 'right' childcare? Is play seen as important 'curriculum' to the child's development?

Is the carer-child relationship seen as vital to social and emotional development?

Before passing through the hallowed school gates, we know that some children can spend up to twelve hours a day, five days a week in care. Many parents have to travel long distances to work so the child may be in care from 6.30am to 6.00pm - a long day in anyone's language.

If a child spends 12,500 hours in care before starting school, that is only 500 hours less that he/she will spend in the classroom during their 13 years of formal schooling. Stop for a moment and consider.... children may spend more time in childcare than they will at both primary and high school combined.

(Census of Child Care Services Dept. of Family and Community Services. QIAS Handbook, 2005)

### Early Brain Development

We now have hard scientific evidence that what happens in a child's world in the first few years will have life long effects on their long term health and wellbeing.

By the time a child is three years of age their brain will have almost tripled since birth to being 80% of his/her adult brain weight (Acredolo & Goodwyn "Baby and Minds" 2000). This rapid growth is a result of all the information a child takes in through his/her senses.

It is the everyday moments found through positive play experiences that literally build a child's brain.

### So Why Do Families Use Care for their Children

The reasons given by parents for using childcare varies with the type of care used. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) 65% of children are in care for 'work related' reasons, while 34% of children are in care for 'personal reasons'.

Childcare usage also varies with age. The use of formal care for very young children is low with only 7% of children under one year of age in care. The rate jumps to 31% of 1-2 year olds and up to 53% of 2-3 year olds are in formal care. The proportion of 4 year olds in care drops away to 38% expectedly due to attending a preschool programme. Only 22% of 5 year olds are in care as most have started schooling. ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au). *Child Care, Australia. June 2005*)

So we can see that the peak age period for using childcare is from one to three years - a crucial time in a child's development.



## So How Do We Choose “Quality Care” for Children...and what do we mean by “Quality”

Quality can mean different things to different families. Some parents assess quality as it relates to them; a centre that is conveniently located close to home or work, the cost of care or the hours of operation. Other families may look at toys, equipment, room settings and the outdoor environment. Nutrition, hygiene and safety are factors that are also considered in the decision process.

The centre staff and how they relate with your child and family members is an important consideration in choosing care. Do they understand where your child is at and respond in a warm and sensitive way? The ratio of staff to children in various age group settings and the qualifications and training the staff have acquired are vital factors to take into account. What about the physical environment? Take a look at the environment from your child’s perspective; what can you see, hear, smell, touch and taste?

Try not to rush in and accept the first place offered to you. Visit a variety of places including long day care and family day care and give yourself permission to ask lots of questions. Take notes and write them down so you can compare, then take time to reflect and discuss the decision as a family.

In 2000, the Department for Community Development released a publication ‘Choosing quality care for your children’. This booklet includes information about childcare and provides a parent checklist to assist you with asking questions. This publication is currently being revised and an updated version will soon be released. More information can be found at: [www.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au](http://www.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au)

## What About Accreditation

In 1993 the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) was formed and began administering the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). The Council’s aim is to monitor centre-based care, to ensure that children were provided age-appropriate, high quality care that promoted learning and development in the early years. The QIAS is unique as it is the first childcare system in the world to be linked to funding through legislation and to be funded and supported by a Federal Government.

Feel welcome to ask the child care staff to show you the standards the centre achieved in the QIAS process.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council is responsible for maintaining a public register of the accreditation status and contact details for each centre registered to participate in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. More information can be found at [www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)

So take time when choosing childcare, talk about the values that are important to your family and the vision you hold for your child’s future. Ask questions and if possible check out the web sites for more information on choosing care.

There is no task, no endeavour, no profession and no vocation more crucial and more vital to our society than the care and education of children.

(Quentin Bryce, Lawyer,  
NCAC Chairman and CEO 1996)