

The Family Childcare Space

The way a childcare space has been designed reflects the educational beliefs of the childcare provider. In order for your child to live and learn comfortably in their childcare home, the space needs to be designed to encourage safe exploration and needs to be one where educational material feels accessible. The look and feel of the space is the first thing you'll notice when looking for placement for your child. If the provider says she encourages free exploration but the space does not reflect that, you may need to ask more questions. If the space feels totally different from your home, so much that you feel uncomfortable, your child may also feel out of place. It does not mean the provider's home is not a good, loving environment. It just may not be the right one for your family. Matching your child's needs with the right provider, who provides the right environment is crucial and you should take your time finding a good match.

Before you venture out to look for a space in a new Family Childcare, sit down and ask yourself the following questions:

1. When you were a child, what kind of space was comfortable for you? Try to remember the size and scale of things. Think about how things felt. Were they soft and comfortable or sharp and scratchy? Was it



easier for you to ask for something or just go and retrieve it yourself? Was there space to retreat and be alone and still know that adults were around keeping you safe?

2. How do you want your child to feel in his childcare space? Should he feel like it's his space to play or someone else's house that they're regularly visiting?
3. Look around at your home. Is the space you live in extremely neat and organized or more relaxed? Is it sometimes a bit unorganized? Is it very quiet or always bursting with energy?

4. If you had to be outside your house all day with your child what would you like the environment to be like?
5. If you walked into your provider's home and the children were doing very messy artwork, what would you think? If you walked in, and there was no activity, how would you feel?
6. If you had an unlimited budget, what kind of space would you be looking for? Think of the elements included in your dream and look for those in a smaller way on your childcare search.

There are some elements you should look for in every childcare home. These are:

Construction Area

An area where blocks, Lego and other construction toys are stored with an open floor space.

Art Area

An area where art supplies are stored with tables and perhaps an easel nearby. The floor should have a washable surface.

Playhouse Area

A space that duplicates adult life in child size equipment. It should include dolls and dress up clothes.

Reading Area

A corner where a child can escape with a book by himself. It should have soft pillows and blankets for getting cozy. Books can be stored in this area on open shelving.

Table Area

A place for artwork, small tabletop block play, puzzle solving or a snack. Puzzles and games should be stored nearby.

Private Storage Area

A place where a child can keep his belongings. These places should be considered private, for that child's personal clothing and items brought to childcare that the child is not ready to share.

In a well designed childcare space, toys and books are accessible to children. They should feel free to walk in and get involved in an activity without waiting for some direction from the provider. Part of the joy of leaving your child in a small group is this possibility. Young children need as much free play as possible under the loving, gentle care of an adult. They don't need to have the adult constantly planning their play activities. Free play helps children grow into young adults that can make decisions on their own.

In family childcare, infants are often part of the group. The provider needs to modify accessibility to keep all her children safe. You don't want your infant opening Lego or fingerpaint and exploring them orally. To solve this problem, she may have higher shelving, that children can't reach but can still see. (Shelving should be securely attached to the wall.) This allows your three year old to see what's available but controls the access to the infants. Once your child is comfortable in the home he will not hesitate to ask if he needs something. The same may hold true for the book corner. You may notice board books on lower shelves with some displayed out of reach. As long as those books are displayed so children can see them, they will feel free to ask for their favorites.

Once you see these elements are in place, the way you and your child feel in the space is important. If you come from an extremely quiet orderly home, your child may not be comfortable in a wildly energetic, very busy, scattered group. If your home is a busy place where you never quite keep up with the toys, books and artwork scattered about and your child can sleep through sirens and electric guitars, then choose a more boisterous home. The one provider is not necessarily better than the other, just different. Choose the place you would feel comfortable spending time. If you're comfortable, your child will most likely be comfortable also.

Fingerplays: Snowy Day Poems and Songs

Pudgie Snowman

A pudgie little snowman,
(Make a circle with your arms.)
Had a carrot nose.
(Touch your nose.)
Along came a bunny,
(Make bunny ears with your fingers.)
And what do you suppose?
That hungry, little bunny,
looking for some lunch,
(Rub your belly.)
Ate the little snowman's nose.
(Touch your nose.)
Nibble, Nibble, Crunch!
(Clap three times.)



Five Penguins

One royal penguin feeling very blue,
(Put up one finger.)
Called for his brother and then there were two.
(Put up two fingers.)
Two royal penguins swimming in the sea,
Called for their sister, then there were three.
(Put up a third finger.)
Three royal penguins waddle on the shore,
Call for their mother, then there were four.
(Put up a fourth finger.)
Four royal penguins learning how to dive,
Call for their father, then there were five.
(Put up all five fingers.)

Friendly Snowman

I'm a friendly snowman big and fat.
(Hold hands in front of belly.)
Here is my tummy, and here is my hat.
(Point to tummy and then top of head.)
Here are my eyes and mouth and nose.
(Point to appropriate body parts.)
I'm all snow from head to my toes.
(Point to head and then toes.)



Sledding Hill

Here's a big hill.
(Extend arms and tilt to one side.)
With snow on the side.
Let's take our sleds,
(Place one hand on your shoulder.)
And down the hill we'll slide.
(Slide hand from shoulder to hand.)

The Wonder of White

A Toddler's Snowflakes

Toddlers can't use scissors to create snowflakes out of paper, but they'll get a beautiful result from just using white paint on dark paper.

Supplies:

Navy blue or black paper
White Tempera or fingerpaint
Silver glitter in a sprinkling container

Have your child paint patterns on the dark paper with the white paint using paint brushes or their hands. Before the paint is dry sprinkle with the glitter. Allow to dry overnight.

The Ice Skating Rink

Add some spark to your child's Lego-Duplo play by making a real mini ice skating rink. Just fill two aluminum, pie or cake tins with water and freeze them. Take one out and let your child play with figures and dolls. When it gets too watery, place it back in the freezer and take out the second one. Ice inspires all kinds of games from Barbie olympics to zamboni races with mini trucks.

Shaving Cream Mountains

Purchase some inexpensive white unscented shaving cream. Squirt mounds on the table and allow your child to play, molding and manipulating the shaving cream. This is not an activity for children who are still exploring things orally. If they want to participate, make a thick vanilla pudding mix and place them in a high chair close to the other children.

Winter Clay Play

Put away the colored clay and give your child all white clay or Play-Dough to create some wonderful snowy winter scenes. Taking the colors away actually forces children to look more closely at the shapes they're forming. They can make snowmen, polar bears, snowballs and igloos. White styrofoam boards make a perfect platform for their new scenes.

Snowflakes Up Close

Don't hide inside when it begins to snow. Have some black construction paper and a magnifying glass standing by. Bundle your child and go outside to catch snowflakes on the paper. Look at their beautiful shapes through the magnifying glass.

Chalk and Paper

Give your child white chalk and dark colored paper. Let them color freely.

All About Town

Safe Sledding

Sledding is great fun, but every year between 30,000 and 35,000 children are treated in emergency rooms due to sledding accidents. Children under five suffer the most severe injuries to the head, neck, face and abdomen due to their usual face first position on the sled. Older children who ride seated and sometimes become airborne risk serious spinal injury.

The following are some recommendations from St. Louis Children's Hospital and Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh:

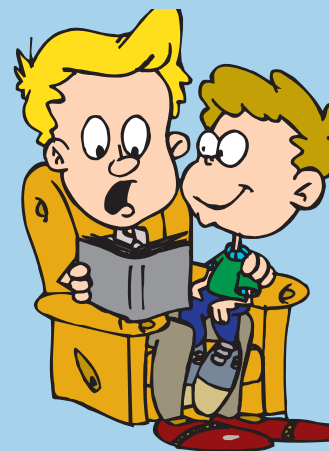
- * **WEAR A HELMET**
- * Wear heavy boots and gloves to protect hands and feet from cold and injury.
- * Use a classic sled with a steering mechanism. They are safer than toboggans or saucers.
- * Have children sit feet first.
- * Teach your child how to stop the sled.
- * Teach your child to roll off the sled in case of an impending collision. It's a safer option.
- * Do not sled on ice or in the dark.
- * Your child should only sled when an adult is present.

Reading Chapter Books to Children

When should you stop reading to your child? When she refuses to listen. There are many benefits to continuing to read aloud to older children. By doing so, you are constantly enticing them to improve their reading skills by introducing them to material above

their reading level. You're able to introduce more complicated plot lines and themes that older children are interested in. It also provides a time to slow down and just be together.

When choosing a chapter book to read-aloud, look for stories that have themes your child is interested in, that have fun characters they can relate to. Make sure chapters are not too long. The following books are a good place to start.



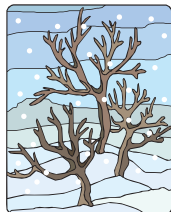
Frog and Toad Books by Arnold Lobel

Frog and Toad books are very short chapter books that are supported by an illustration on almost every page. They're a nice connection between the world of picture books and chapter books. Read a part in the morning and a part in the afternoon to get your child used to listening to one story in two sessions.

Winnie the Pooh Books by A.A. Milne

Great books never go out of style. Written 70 years ago, these stories and poems of Pooh Bear and his friends continue to delight children and adults everywhere. Just enough illustrations to keep those who still want to see pictures satisfied.

Stories from Snowy Lands



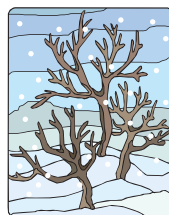
Bear Snores On by Karma Wilson

A big brown bear sleeps, comfy and cozy, in his cave on a cold, snowy day. A mouse happens upon his warm hibernation spot and decides it's a great place to build a fire, but "The bear snores on." A hare drops by with tea and popcorn, but "The bear snores on." A number of other forest friends drop by and soon the bear's cave becomes the latest party spot. Finally a pepper speck from a fragrant stew reaches the bear's nose and he sneezes. The author keeps children on the edge until she resolves the story with a happy ending. Toddlers love books with expected repetition. In board book form, *The Bear Snores On* provides repetition, beautifully drawn friendly animal friends, rhythmic rhyme and a surprise ending. (ages 1½ - 4)



The Girl From the Snow Country by Masako Hidaka

Mi-Chan is just like other little girls. On a snowy day she goes out to play. She discovers she can make snow bunnies by placing two camellia leaves in small mounds of snow, but she's missing something for the eyes. It's time for her mother to shop, so Mi-Chan goes along and brushes the snow off the Jizo statue on the way. (Jizo is the protector of children and travelers.) They shop at the market and a vendor, hearing of the girl's need for bunny eyes, gives her a small branch of red berries. On the way home her mother explains that her care of Jizo is what gave her the luck to obtain her berries. The beautiful pictures of the snowy Asian countryside enhance the author's description of the magic and wonder of an ordinary winter's day. The magic of Jizo will spark conversations about luck and spirit that translate to any culture or religion. (ages 3 - 8)



Snow by Uri Shulevitz

Adults just have no imagination. But not this little boy. One snowflake falls and he rejoices as his stiff grandfather tells him, "It's only a snowflake." He runs outside to report it's snowing, only to have a tall man say, "It's nothing." More and more snow falls but the expressionless, non-exuberant adults insist nothing is happening. The little boy's excitement lights up the pages as the city turns from gray to white. These illustrations are genius. You can feel the cool arrogance as the adults toss off this little boy's snow fantasies. As the city grows whiter and lighter the boy and a few excited friends dominate the pages, while the stiff, gray adults become invisible. This picture book is well deserving of its Caldecott Honor. (ages 3 - 7)

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