Ten things you should know about childcare
Leaving your child in someone else’s care is never easy, especially if childcare is something new for you. At Goodstart, we understand that only too well. That’s why we’ve put together this booklet, full of practical information to help you decide what’s best for your family.

Of course, there are more than ten things you should know about childcare, but we understand how precious your time is right now. So this is just a starting point and includes useful places where you can find out more.
To be eligible for the CCB and CCR you must be using a government approved childcare provider.

Here’s a quick overview of the two most popular childcare options:

**Long day care**

Operated in a childcare centre, long day care provides professional care for children aged from 6 weeks to 5 years, and are open from as early as 6.30am to as late as 6.30pm. Many long day care centres offer meals and nappies. Most are also approved childcare services, and have an early learning component to their program.

Some long day care centres also offer kindergarten or preschool programs, which are run by qualified early childhood teachers in the two years before school. This is important later on, because it means your child will benefit from approved programs in surroundings they know and feel comfortable in. It also means you don’t have to pick them up from day care and take them to a separate kindergarten or preschool, then drop them back to their long day care centre afterwards.

**Family day care**

Family day care provides flexible home-based care for children via a network of educators, usually in the educators’ homes. These educators may provide care for the maximum number of children, including their own children, in accordance with National Regulations.

The majority of family day care services are approved childcare services. However, they do not offer kindergarten and preschool, and if parents want their child to participate in an approved kindergarten or preschool program, they must make separate arrangements.

More information about childcare options can be found at [mychild.gov.au](http://mychild.gov.au)
02 A safe, healthy environment means safe, healthy children

Your child’s wellbeing should always come first. So while getting messy playing with paint, sand and mud is an essential part of learning, it’s equally essential that their environment is hygienic and safe. When taking a centre tour, pay careful attention to the quality of equipment such as cots and toys. Ask about their policies when it comes to things like sun safety and ensure you are comfortable with their security procedures for pick-ups and drop-offs. It’s worth investing the time to take a good look around the centres you are considering and check that they take cleanliness and safety as seriously as you do.

03 Children start learning from the moment they are born

The first five years of your child’s life are so important. Over 80% of brain development happens in this time, so rich experiences and quality interactions can make a significant difference. This is why many parents prefer to leave their children in the care of someone with early childhood qualifications, and at centres that offer approved early learning and kindergarten or preschool programs.

If you want to be confident that your child is not merely being “babysat” while in care, look for a childcare provider that has adopted a nationally approved learning framework.

You can find out more about this at acecqa.gov.au

Check that staff are professionally qualified and have access to ongoing professional development too. Research and practices in childcare are changing all the time, so if you want to make sure your child is benefiting from the most up-to-date thinking in early childhood education, it makes sense to check that their teachers and educators are at the forefront of their profession.
Children function best in stable, nurturing relationships

The relationships your child shares with their teachers and educators are crucial. You want to be sure that the people who care for your child not only have the right qualifications, but have a genuine love of children as well. So visit the childcare provider you are considering and watch the staff in action. Are they engaged in activities with the children? Are the children engaged, happy and content? It’s easy to spot a teacher or educator who has a real rapport with the children in their care.

Try to take note of how they interact with families. If you are naturally comfortable with your child’s educator, it will help build trust so your child feels secure with them too.

Play is how children learn

For a young child, play is much more than fun and games. It lets them explore, identify, negotiate, take risks and learn how to problem solve. Under the direction of skilled early childhood teachers and educators, play-based learning can make an enormous difference to a child’s development. They are more likely to have better social, emotional and memory skills, language development, and behaviour control. They are also more likely to adjust well to school and later learning.

So it’s worth choosing a childcare service that offers an approved early learning program, and staff with experience and qualifications in play-based learning.

Learn more about play-based learning at earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
Children are more ready to learn when they feel comfortable and trust their environment.

For a young child, every new experience is a learning experience. Exposing them to a wide variety of experiences enhances their development on all fronts – socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically. It also helps build more complex pathways and connections in the brain. These connections form the foundation for learning and development throughout life, so the stronger they are, the better.

When you take your childcare tour, look for a wide variety of play resources – equipment and toys that engage different parts of the brain. Here are some examples:

- **Musical instruments**, so children can make music, dance to it and listen to it.
- **Storytelling resources**, like books, dress-up clothes, puppet shows and items that encourage children to make-believe and role-play.
- **Outdoor equipment** that helps develop gross motor skills through activities like running, jumping, kicking balls, peddling bikes and trikes, climbing and swinging.
- **Indoor equipment** that helps develop fine motor skills like drawing, painting, threading beads, playing with blocks, creating with clay or dough.
- **Waterplay equipment** that encourages children to pour, spill, fill and splash.
- **Arts and crafts resources** that give children the opportunity to create, express themselves, work together and have fun.

Learn more about development in the first five years at raisingchildren.net.au
Every child is different, and each one has a unique personality, potential and their own family and culture. Good quality childcare helps children build confidence by valuing their individuality and encouraging them to develop in their own time. Warm, responsive, and stimulating environments promote security and development.

How do you know if a childcare service works this way? Look for displays of children’s work and involvement of families throughout the centre. Watch for genuine rapport in the way staff and children interact. Check that programs are tailored to develop each child’s interests and strengths, and to build on areas where they may need help.

Childcare is an extra expense that most households need to budget for. The good news is that, if your family is eligible, you can qualify for government assistance. The not-so-good news is that trying to understand the different benefits and rebates available can get very confusing.

It’s useful to know that these benefits are only available if your child attends an approved childcare service, and that those centres will be able to provide you with more information.

To find out what government assistance may be available to you, contact humanservices.gov.au
Questions to help you choose childcare options

- Does the centre have a happy and energetic vibe?
- Are the staff passionate, qualified and experienced?
- Do the hours suit you and your family?
- Is it conveniently located to your home or work?
- Is there an open door policy that welcomes you to drop in at any time?
- Does the centre adopt a nationally approved learning framework?
- Do they offer quality early learning programs?
- Is it a stimulating learning environment?
- Does it offer a government approved kindergarten or preschool program?
- Does the centre update you regularly about your child’s progress and daily activities?
- Do teachers and educators tailor their programs to engage each child’s individual interests?
- Are the educators responsive to the children’s needs?
- Are families entitled to government benefits and rebates?

Choose a childcare centre that ticks all the boxes

Goodstart is a not-for-profit organisation that was founded by a partnership of four leading charities with a shared vision. We believe in helping your child to get the best possible start in life, with quality early learning in a safe, stimulating and caring environment.

To experience it for yourself, find a centre near you and book a tour. Call 1800 222 543 or visit www.goodstart.org.au

Enquire early to ensure your place

Vacancies at popular childcare centres fill very quickly and many parents wait list their children before they are born. So make sure you do your research and enquire early so your child is able to attend the service of your choice.
Who is Goodstart?

Goodstart was created by a partnership of four of Australia’s leading not-for-profit organisations who wanted to address one of the key sources of many societal problems — poor early childhood experiences. The group believes that access to quality early learning has the potential to transform Australia.

“Our vision is for Australia’s children to have the best possible start in life.”

For more information about Goodstart: www.goodstart.org.au  |  Ph 1800 222 543

Please ask your Centre Director if you would like an interpreter to help you read this book.

At Goodstart, children are at the heart of everything we do. As a not-for-profit organisation, we are committed to investing our profits in improved early learning resources, facilities and staff training.

Whilst we have made every effort to ensure that the contents of this handbook are accurate and reflect current practices, Goodstart advises that policies, dates, conditions and other information detailed herein are subject to change. Please contact your Centre Director at any time during your child’s enrolment for up-to-date information.

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