

early years are learning years

High-Quality child care: Luxury option or standard equipment?

We may be able to forgo luxury options when buying a car, deciding against cruise control or an expensive stereo system. But what about choosing an early childhood program? Shouldn't all characteristics of high-quality care and education be standard features in every program and center?

In her article in the January 1997 issue of *Young Children*, Deborah Koshansky reminds us that "option packages" do not exist when it comes to a high-quality early childhood education.

To ensure all children receive the kind of care and education they need to thrive, early childhood programs and centers must fully meet criteria of high quality. A "stripped down" model of a car may get us safely from place to place, but a "stripped down" model of child care and education means that children's learning and development will be compromised. How can any of these options be considered a "luxury" when it comes to high-quality care?

Warranty -- License and/or accreditation for the program

Seat belts and air bags -- Health and safety guidelines to protect the child from illness and accidents

Fuel injection system -- Nutritious meals and snacks

Responsive handling -- Small groups and teacher-child ratios to allow prompt and appropriate attention to the child's needs

Shock absorbers -- Teachers' sensitive assistance as the child encounters rough places on the road to maturity

Preventive maintenance agreement -- Teachers' knowledge of child development and early childhood education for recognizing problems and addressing them early

Steering mechanism -- Developmentally appropriate curriculum to guide the child's curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills

Automatic transmission -- Teachers' ability to change gears to meet the child's changing interests

Comfortable interiors -- Teachers' smiles, hugs, and appreciation that provide a cushion for the child's self-esteem

Cruise control -- Appropriate limit setting and strategies to assist the child in learning self-control

Maneuverability -- Opportunities for children to interact with each other and develop social skills

Choice of color and style -- Environment in which each child feels special and unique

Radio, directional signals, horn, hazard lights -- Opportunities for children to learn to communicate effectively

Air conditioning -- Opportunities for outdoor play and physical development

Reliability -- Good working conditions and an equitable pay scale to reduce teacher turnover, thus ensuring greater consistency of care

Customer satisfaction -- Parents involved in their child's program and seen by teachers as partners in a child's growth.

In high-quality early childhood programs and centers, all of the above are standard features. But like all quality features, they cost money. No child's learning and development should be compromised because her parents cannot afford a high-quality early childhood program. Only by continuing our efforts to find alternate resources will we ensure that no child has to settle for a "stripped down" model of child care. When all children receive high-quality education and care, we will yield children equipped with the skills necessary for life in the 21st century. And that's an investment that won't depreciate.

Adapted from "High-quality child care: Luxury option or standard equipment?" by Deborah Koshansky. *Young Children* 52 (2).

Early Years Are Learning Years is a regular series from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and one of many NAEYC resources designed for early childhood educators, families, and others who support and nurture the development of young children. For more information from NAEYC, visit www.naeyc.org.

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