



Mott Poll Report

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Childcare Choices: What's Important to Parents?

Many parents send their young children to childcare or preschool while working or attending school, or for their child's enrichment. In selecting a childcare or preschool, parents may consider a variety of health, safety, educational, or practical factors. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked about these factors in a national sample of parents of children age 1-5 years who attend childcare or preschool.

Nearly half of parents reported their child currently attends preschool (48%), while the other half reported their child attends either a childcare center (25%) or in-home childcare (27%) for at least 5 hours per week.

Overall, 62% of parents agreed that it's hard to find childcare options with the characteristics they want, and only 54% were very confident that they could tell if a childcare option is safe and healthy. Most parents (88%) felt that childcare centers and in-home childcare providers should have the same health and safety standards.

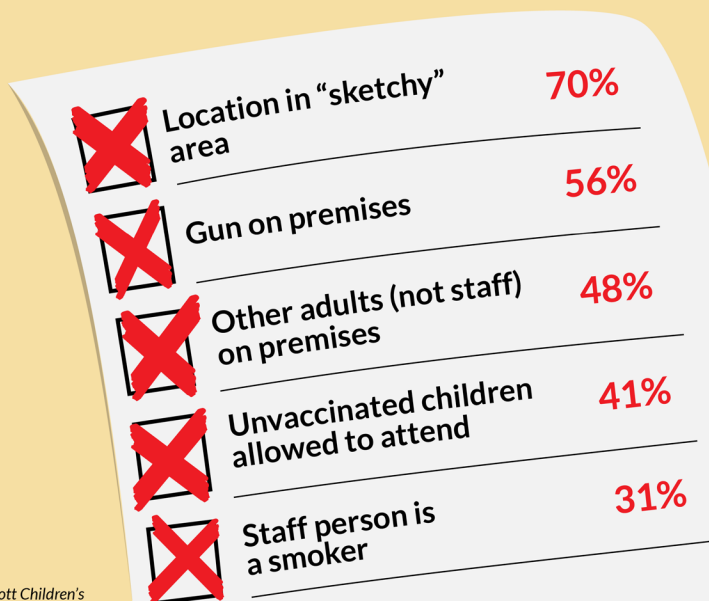
Parents selected up to 5 factors they would consider *most important* when choosing a childcare or preschool. The top 5 factors differed by the child's current setting:

- **Preschool:** staff background checks (45%), active play every day (40%), doors locked (38%), staff have early childhood training (30%), and safe outdoor play area (30%)
- **Childcare center:** staff background checks (46%), staff have early childhood training (42%), doors locked (36%), cost (33%), and location/hours (32%)
- **Home childcare:** healthy foods served (28%), active play every day (28%), books/educational toys (27%), kitchen area cleaned (26%), and staff background checks (24%)

Parents also identified deal-breakers – characteristics that would eliminate a preschool or childcare from their consideration. Over half said location in a sketchy area or a gun on the premises would be a deal-breaker; others were non-staff adults on the premises, unvaccinated children allowed to attend, and having a staff person who smoked (Figure).

Childcare deal-breakers

Percent of parents who would definitely NOT choose a childcare option based on the characteristics



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2017

Report Highlights

Among parents of children age 1-5:

Location in a sketchy area or having a gun on the premises of a childcare or preschool would be deal-breakers for most parents.

Only half of parents were confident that they could tell if a childcare or preschool is safe and healthy.

2 out of 3 parents agreed that it's hard to find childcare options with the characteristics they want.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in May 2017 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents age 18 and older (n=2,051). Adults were selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 307 parents who had at least one child age 1-5 years. The margin of error is ±5 to 6 percentage points and higher in subgroup analysis.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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Implications

When choosing a childcare or preschool, many parents try to gather information to make their decision. Findings from this Mott Poll demonstrate this challenge: only 54% of parents were very confident that they could tell if a childcare option would be safe and healthy for their child. Moreover, 2 out of 3 parents said it's hard to find childcare options with the characteristics they want.

Information about operational characteristics (such as cost, hours, and location) can be obtained easily via the web or a call to the facility. However, it typically requires more effort to learn about other factors that parents feel are important to making their decision including those that may affect children's health and safety.

Many parents make visits to potential childcare or preschool facilities, which allows them to observe some safety features (e.g., location of play area relative to traffic, security of entrance); however, parents would need to inquire about other aspects of child safety they may feel are important (e.g., whether a gun is stored on the premises). Similarly, some health-related characteristics are observable (e.g., whether active play is included in the daily schedule) while others would be difficult to determine in a visit (e.g., how often toys and kitchen area are cleaned).

Some factors rated as *most important* by Mott Poll parents may be reflected in the policies of the facility. These include whether staff undergo background checks prior to hiring, whether staff have early childhood certification or training, and whether child and staff members must be vaccinated. For many preschools and childcare centers, this type of information can be found on the facility's website; it may be more difficult to find such information for in-home childcare providers.

The factors selected as *most important* differed based on the child's current childcare or preschool setting. Parents of children attending childcare centers focused on safety (background checks, locked doors) and practical considerations (cost, location) in their top 5 factors; parents of preschoolers selected similar safety factors, as well as those related to play (active play every day in a safe outdoor play area). In contrast, the top 5 factors among parents whose children attend an in-home childcare ranged from healthy food to clean kitchens, to availability of books and educational toys.

These Mott Poll findings about what parents believe is *most important* may reflect the characteristics that parents appreciate about their child's current childcare or preschool setting – or could reflect characteristics that parents wish were available. Despite the variation, nearly 9 in 10 parents felt that childcare centers and in-home childcare providers should have the same health and safety standards. This suggests that parents want to feel confident that all childcare and preschool options meet certain standards, so they can choose their preferred option without compromising their child's health.

In addition to identifying the factors they most desire in a childcare or preschool, parents in this Mott Poll indicated which characteristics were absolutely unacceptable in a childcare or preschool option. The most common deal-breakers reflected parents' overall focus on safety. For example, a facility located in a sketchy area indicates to parents that outdoor play would be unsafe; a facility that allows non-staff adults on the premises suggests to parents that children's safety could be compromised.

Over half of parents felt that a gun on the premises would be a deal-breaker. It is likely that many parents are aware of accidents that have occurred when young children found a gun that was stored carelessly. These results indicate that many parents are not willing to put their child at the risk of a gun-related accident.

Other deal-breakers were allowing unvaccinated children to attend, and employing a staff member who is a smoker. These health-related considerations are important for all children, but would carry an increased risk for children who have special health needs such as asthma. Childcare and preschool facilities with these characteristics may find that many parents will choose not to utilize their services.