

“What a Wonderful Place for Children”

by Celia Martin Boykin

Pretend you are a prospective parent seeking child care the next time you enter your center. Then take a walk throughout the center, looking into each classroom for a few minutes, peeping into the kitchen, and visiting the playground. What is your first impression? Do you like what you see and hear? Whether we think about it or not, first impressions weigh heavily upon whether a parent chooses to enroll his/her child in a program and what will be said to others about your center. How our house looks says a lot about our lifestyle and values; how our workplace looks reflects how we feel about what we do.

The center should be a happy place where children feel comfortable, secure and independent, and where parents and other family members feel welcome. It is a child's place and should look like it, but this doesn't mean there has to be clutter and disorganization.

Prospective parents are more likely to visit a facility that is attractive from the outside. If the lobby is inviting and “family friendly,” parents immediately feel welcome. Are there comfortable

adult and children's chairs in the waiting area? Are children's books and parenting magazines available to keep the family busy while waiting? Marketing materials about the center and perhaps a scrapbook showing pictures of activities and copies of letters from satisfied parents help visitors get a “flavor” of your program.

Happy sounds of children and staff should fill the center. Adult voices speaking acceptable language in

moderate tones tell parents what attitudes and language they can expect their children to emulate. More than anything, the message that says “we care” is shown when staff are relaxed, alert, and attentive, and when there is appropriate interaction with children. The interaction among staff should also be positive and respectful. As visitors go through the center, it is okay to pleasantly acknowledge parents with a nod or, if appropriate, a simple explanation of what the children are engaged in at the time. Doing so lets parents know they are important, but that children are first.

A center that shows well markets itself. Parents who visit should leave feeling good about your program whether they choose to enroll their child or not.

Take a few minutes to see how your center measures up.

Celia Martin Boykin, MA, preschool administration, is a child care consultant and trainer with over 25 years of experience in ECE administration. She does extensive training of child care staff, parents, administrators, and boards of directors. Celia is a former center director and has taught as adjunct professor at several colleges in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.



Facility Checklist

What do you see? . . .

- | Yes | No | Building and Landscape |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Building is without peeling paint, loose shingles, or graffiti |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Shutters or other building adornments are in place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Window panes are without cracks or holes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Blinds and other window treatments are even, show no tears or slats missing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Landscape is attractive and well kept |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Gates are operable, easily opened by adults, but prevent children from leaving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The area for drop-off and pick-up of children is safe |

Entrance

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Entrance door is attractive and without dirt and fingerprints |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Doors or alarm prevent children from wandering out of the center unnoticed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Intercom or other security system allows visitors to be screened before entering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lobby is clean, attractively decorated, and welcoming for adults and children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lobby furniture is in good shape, unstained, and attractive |

Hallways and Common Space

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carpet is clean, secured to floor, and without buckling or tears |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tiles are clean, secured to floor, and without chips or missing pieces |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Waxed floors are clean and show no buildup in corners or around molding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Items on bulletin boards are current and placed so as to be easily read |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Names and/or information about classroom staff are posted outside of room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Walls are clean and without lots of tack holes or tape residue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | There is no evidence of vermin |

Yes No

Classrooms

- Furniture is clean, in good shape, stable, and child-sized
- Classes are attractively arranged and inviting to children
- Toys and materials are in good shape and have all parts and pieces
- There is labeled space for children's belongings
- Teacher supplies not in use are out of sight or neatly stored
- Children's work is displayed and looks original
- Pet cages are clean and do not smell
- Dangerous substances are out of reach
- There is minimal clutter

Playground

- A variety of equipment and/or activities are available for all ages of children
- Equipment is age-appropriate and in good condition
- Areas beneath equipment provide cushioning for falls
- Separate play areas are designated for toddlers and older children
- The playground is enclosed with an exit of egress
- The area is free of debris, animal waste, thorny plants, or trees with fruit to ingest

What do you hear? . . .

Yes No

From Children

- Children laugh and appear to be relaxed and happy
- Children ask adults for help without fear
- Children are not afraid to approach staff

From Staff

- Voices are pleasant and in moderate tones
- Language is correct and spoken clearly
- Staff encourage children to express themselves
- Children are called by name
- There are no adult conversations held in front of the children
- Children's accomplishments and efforts are acknowledged with words of encouragement
- Laughter and "happy" talk are spontaneous