

Childcare Availability Checklist

A simple guide for what to look for when exploring childcare capacity and access.

1. Understanding Capacity

- Check the total licensed capacity for each provider.
- Compare capacity to the number of enrolled children.
- Identify providers operating at or near full capacity.
- Look for differences between age groups (infant, toddler, preschool).

2. Availability of Open Spots

- Identify how many open spots are available in your county.
- Compare availability across nearby counties or regions.
- Look for shortages in specific age groups.
- Note areas with long waitlists or limited openings.

3. Types of Providers

- Check the mix of provider types (centers, home-based, preschools).
- Identify which types have the most or fewest openings.
- Look for specialized programs (Early Head Start, special needs services).

4. Geographic Access

- Look for childcare deserts (areas with few or no providers).
- Compare access in rural vs. urban areas.
- Check travel distance or commute patterns for families.
- Identify clusters of providers and underserved neighborhoods.

5. Quality Indicators

- Look for quality ratings (if available in your state).
- Identify providers with accreditation or specialized training.
- Compare quality indicators across regions.

6. Affordability & Funding

- Check average tuition costs (if available).
- Identify providers accepting subsidies or state assistance.
- Look for gaps between subsidy availability and actual capacity.

7. Trends Over Time

- Compare current capacity to previous years.
- Identify increases or decreases in provider numbers.
- Look for long-term patterns in availability.

8. Equity & Access

- Look for differences in access across demographic groups.
- Identify areas with limited access for infants or toddlers.
- Check whether high-need areas have fewer providers.

9. Additional Notes

- Record questions to follow up on.
- Note providers to contact for more information.
- List areas needing deeper exploration.