

STEPS In Choosing Quality Childcare

Step 1: TALK with Kid's First or your friends, check the newspapers or the yellow pages and come up with three to five options of providers to care for your child.

Step 2: MAKE an appointment with the provider or center director and tour the facility.

Step 3: OBSERVE. This is the single most important guide to choosing good childcare. Try to visit the facility mid-morning, so you can see children busy with activities.

What to look for

LOOK

- Is the provider's license posted and current?
- Does the environment appear safe for children?
- Is the interaction between child and caregiver one of mutual respect and enjoyable for all?
- Do the teachers get down to the children's eye level when talking?
- Are teachers sitting with the children, rather than at desks away from the children?
- Is there sufficient equipment for all children to play with?
- Is there an adult within eyesight of all the children?
- Does the group reflect the community's diversity?
- Is a schedule of daily activities posted or available?
- Are the activities varied to include outdoor playtime and indoor quiet time?
- Are there smoke alarms and an emergency route posted?
- Are menus posted? If children bring their lunch, are there suggestions for lunches?

LISTEN

- Do the children sound happy and involved?
- Is the sound level appropriate for the number of children in the room - not too loud or too soft?
- Does the caregiver listen closely to each child and use positive language when speaking with the children?

ASK

- Is the facility accredited by one of the national accreditation services?
- What is the training and experience of the caregiver and the entire staff?
- Does the training include First Aid and CPR?
- Are copies of licensing inspection reports available from previous years, including fire and health department reports?
- What additional fees are requested of you?
- What communication about your child can you expect from the caregiver on an ongoing basis?
- Does the caregiver inform you of both positive and negative happenings with your child?
- Will the facility provide you with a list of current parents you can contact for references?
- What opportunities are there for parents to participate in the program?
- On what dates is the site closed, i.e., for holidays or staff training?
- Does the caregiver offer alternative care for times when the program is closed?
- Do children go on field trips? If so, who drives and what vehicles are used?
- How does the caregiver deal with behavior problems?
- What happens in the case of a medical emergency with your child?
- How does the caregiver handle medicine prescribed for children?
- How much time, if any, do children spend watching television or playing video games?

COUNT

- Does the number of children fall within the licensing guidelines?
- Is staff: child ratios met or exceeded?
- Are you comfortable with the group size?
- Will your child work well with this number of children?

TEACHERS

- Does staff have formalized training in child growth and development? (Experience is not enough.)
- Are caregivers are involved in continuing education programs?
- Do caregivers feel committed to the work or do they view it as “babysitting” or “just something to do?”

ENVIRONMENT

- Is there stability among the staff?
- Do children have a choice of activities? Do teachers follow the children’s lead in directed activities?
- Is the room set-up warm and inviting? Is furniture child-sized and are materials at a child’s level.
- Is outdoor play space fenced with a safe surface, play equipment, ample room and sunny and shaded areas?
- Are health & safety issues a priority?
- Are supplies adequate so children may play alone or share, as they desire?
- Are age-appropriate materials evident and in good repair?
- Are children active and involved in activities?

CAUTION!!!

These are things you shouldn't see-:

- Parents are limited to visiting hours and are not encouraged to drop in unannounced.
- Teachers are unwilling or unable to tell you about your child's day.
- The children are unsupervised or the posted adult: child ratios are not being met.
- The teachers/providers do not act as if they enjoy their work.
- Staff turnover is ongoing and excessive.
- Health and safety concerns are not attended to. (Example: 1. Hands are not washed after diapering and before meal times. 2. Cleaning supplies are not in locked cabinets. 3. Playground equipment is not safe.
- The license is expired or no license is posted.
- References from current consumers are not available.

Remain alert to your child's environment each and every day.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Step 1: Call Division of childcare to obtain a request form for the files you want to review. The documents will be sent to you within approximately two weeks. The charge is \$.50 per page and include past inspection records, investigation reports (if exist), copies and dates of any complaints, letters of recommendation from other consumers. Contact your local childcare resource and referral agency if you have ANY questions about practices or policies.

Step 2: Review documents from providers' licensing files either in person or by mail. Call Division of Childcare at 1-800-799-5876 at least 72 hours in advance to make appointment.

Step 3: File formal complaints about a childcare provider with the Division of Childcare. Provide name and daytime phone to file a complaint, but during the complaint investigation your name will not be revealed to the caregiver.

CHANGING CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

WHEN? Consistency in a childcare setting is important to a child's sense of security. However, there are times when the current childcare situation must be changed for the child's health, safety or development. Change will be an inevitable part of your childcare experience as your child grows from infancy through the school-age years. Whenever change occurs you will have both practical and emotional issues to handle. Remember; listen to your child regarding their care setting.

HOW? Talk with your child about the change before it happens, but not too far in advance. Let your child know when the change is necessary. If appropriate, inform the caregiver of the upcoming change. If the parting is on a positive note, plan a get-together with the caregiver, you and your child. Give your child an opportunity to express his/her feelings about the change.

IF YOU CANNOT ANSWER YES TO MOST OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING, A CHANGE MAY BE IN ORDER:

CHECKLIST FROM A CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW:

- There are lots of fun things to play with.
- My teacher reads stories to us and there are books for me to look at on my own.
- I make new friends at childcare.
- My teacher is nice to me.
- We have good things to eat for snacks and lunch.
- My teacher helps me feel better when I am sad.
- I get to play outside.
- I learn new things all the time.
- I feel safe here.
- I have opportunities to play with others and by myself.

CHECKLIST FROM AN ADULT'S POINT OF VIEW

- My child looks forward to going to childcare.
- My child has friends at childcare.
- I feel welcome at all times.
- My participation is encouraged.
- My child talks favorably about the provider.
- My family's values are reflected in the program.
- My family's cultural background is honored.