

DAYCARE FOR YOUR CHILD

To help you choose a daycare provider for your child, ask the following questions:

General:

- Is the day care home or center licensed? Is the licensing permit current?
- What are the payments? When are they due?
- Is an initial registration fee required?
- Are there extra charges for such things as meals or transportation?
- Are fees reduced if more than one child enrolls?
- Are deductions offered for periods of absence?
- Is financial assistance available?
- Is the center or home convenient?
- Is safe transportation provided?
- What are admission requirements?
- Do the children seem happy, busy, and relaxed?
- What is the caregiver-to-child ratio?
 - Federal guidelines for centers suggest no more than 1:3 for infants; 1:4 for toddlers; 1:8 for children aged 3 to 6 years.
 - Federal guidelines for family day care homes suggest 1:5 for children under 2 years (3 children or less is better); 1:6 for children aged 2 to 6 years.
- Can you visit unannounced?
- Is there a smoking policy?
- Is there a written plan for activities?
- Is one caregiver assigned to your child on a regular basis?

Facility:

Does the facility have:

- carpeting, pads, and drapery to absorb extraneous noise?
- child-sized furniture?
- a cheerful, colorful atmosphere with ample toys and materials?
- plenty of indoor and outdoor space?
- special areas for quiet and active play?

Health and Safety:

- What is the procedure for medical emergencies?
- What are the policies regarding illness? (e.g.: Are parents contacted if another child has a contagious disease? Does caregiver have someone to substitute in case she gets sick?)
- Are medical records maintained?
- Is the caregiver trained in first aid/pediatric CPR?
- Does the center or home have smoke detectors and fire extinguishers? Regular fire drills? Alternate exits?

- Are important phone numbers posted near the phone? (Examples include police, fire, poison control center, hospital, children's physician, ambulance).
- Does my caregiver always know how to get in touch with both parents?
- Does my child receive constant supervision, indoors and out?
- Is my baby checked often when in a crib or playpen?
- Is all baby equipment strong, stable, and in good repair?
- Are the crib slats no more than 2 and 3/8 inches apart?
- Are babies *always* placed on their backs for sleep with no loose items in crib?
- Does the mattress firmly abut the side of the crib, with no bumper pads?
- Does the home or center have separate cribs and crib sheets for each infant? (Three feet between cribs is recommended).
- Is the crib mattress covered with heavy plastic with no fluffy bedding?
- Do strollers or infant seats have safety harnesses?
- Are the crib and playpen free of toys that could be used to climb out?
- Can all doors inside the home or center be opened from the inside at all times?
- Are the outside doors and windows locked?
- Do strong screens or metal bars cover the windows (especially important above ground level)?
- Do all glass doors have decals?
- Are the rooms well ventilated and comfortable year-round?
- Are the bathroom facilities clean and easily accessible to children?
- Are latched safety gates placed at the top and/or bottom of stairways?
- Are stairways and walkways free from clutter?
- Are floors free from spills, slippery surfaces, or small throw rugs?
- Are small, sharp, or otherwise dangerous items out of reach or locked in a cupboard, drawer, or cabinet?
- Are poisonous items stored out of reach or locked?
- Are the facilities free from poisonous plants, indoors and out?
- Are all foods or drinks within reach safe for your child?
- Are hot radiators covered?
- Is my child kept away from dangerous places like the stove or hot water faucets?
- Have furniture and other household objects with sharp corners been padded or removed?
- Do all electrical sockets have protective covers?
- Has attention been paid to objects that could be pulled or knocked over? (Examples include tablecloths, electrical cords, lamps, furniture).
- Is my child safe around pets?
- Are pet dishes out of reach?
- Are toys safe, clean, and in good repair?
- Are play surfaces, indoors and out, softened with carpeting or wood chips?
- Do children get a daily dose of fresh air and sunshine, weather permitting?
- Is the outdoor area fenced and free of hazards?
- Is the play equipment safe and appropriate for your child's level of development?
- Are diaper changing areas clean with a nearby sink for hand-washing?
- Will the caregiver administer medications if necessary?

Meals:

- Is my caregiver knowledgeable about my baby's food requirements and feeding schedule?

- Are snacks and meals tasty, attractive, and well balanced?
- Are menus varied and posted for my review?
- Are special diets and ethnic preferences given consideration?
- Is food served in a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere?
- Does the center serve food I want my child to eat? (A child should never be forced to eat).
- Are portions small and second helpings available?
- Who plans the menus (dietitian or other staff)?
- Is the kitchen clean?
- Are babies held for bottle feedings?
- Are children seated while eating?

Staff or Caregiver:

Does the staff or caregiver:

- Genuinely seem to enjoy cuddling, holding, and talking to my baby?
- Welcome my questions and suggestions?
- Hold regular parent conferences?
- Share my childrearing philosophy?
- Take time to share my child's experiences with me?
- Remain gentle, yet firm? Consistent, yet flexible?
- Have low turnover?
- Sensitively handle feelings of fear, shyness, upset, and anger?
- Guide rather than direct behavior?
- Really listen and talk to the children?
- Have training and experience in early child education?
- Participate in continuing education programs?
- Kneel or sit at child's eye level?
- Spend individual time with each child?
- Emphasize children's strengths and accomplishments?
- Cultivate children's natural curiosity?
- Handle discipline positively? (written discipline policy is desirable)
- Establish and consistently maintain limits?
- Have a sense of humor and acceptance?
- Seem to be able to give all children quality attention and supervision?
- Provide consistent care so my child has a stable, predictable daily routine?

Web Sites with Early Education and Child Care Resources for Parents and Pediatricians

General Information:

- Child Care Aware
 - <http://www.childcareaware.org/>

- National Association for the Education of Young Children
 - <http://www.naeyc.org>
- Healthy Child Care America
 - <http://www.healthychildcare.org>

Children Who Have Special Health Care Needs

- Commonly Asked Questions about Child Care Centers and the ADA
 - <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/chcaflyr.htm>