

CHOOSING A CHILD CARE PROVIDER - CHECKLIST

Questions to Ask and Things to Look for

After you decide what type of care you need and have names of potential providers, you can begin the interview and selection process. You may choose to look at several places in your community, or near your work. Call each program and ask some questions over the phone before you decide which to visit. The most important step in selecting child care is a personal visit to the program or home. Don't consider making a decision without meeting the people who will be caring for your child. Ask for names of other parents as references. Listed below are sample questions to ask over the phone, and things to look for when you visit

Questions to ask by phone before you decide which programs to visit:

- ◇ Does the program have an opening in my child's age group? If not, when does the provider expect an opening? Is there a waiting list?
- ◇ Is the program licensed? For how many children? What are the ages of the children my child will be with?
- ◇ What is the daily program for the children: schedule, goals of the program, indoor and outdoor activities?
- ◇ What are the program hours? What happens if I am late for pick-up or early for drop-off? Is there a fee?
- ◇ What is the cost of care? Does the fee include meals, snacks, diapers, etc?
- ◇ Does the provider accept vouchers, or are there contracted slots, or sliding scale fees? Are there any scholarship programs or a sibling discount?
- ◇ Is the location convenient? If necessary, is a subway or bus stop nearby?
- ◇ Is it a nine-month or a year-round program? Are there vacation weeks, holidays or other times when the program will be closed? Is tuition payment required when a child is on vacation?
- ◇ How many teachers and assistants are in your program? What are their qualifications? What languages do the staff members speak? How long have teachers been on staff?
- ◇ What is the policy for sick children? Do I pay tuition if the child is sick?
- ◇ Are there any transportation arrangements? If transportation is provided, what does it cost?
- ◇ If your child has special needs, you should ask about any special services that will be provided.

When you visit a program, observe . . .

The caregivers or teachers

- ◇ Do they seem friendly and caring?
- ◇ How do they interact with children? Do you like what you see?
- ◇ Do they respect the children and appreciate their abilities and cultures?
- ◇ Does anyone speak your child's language?
- ◇ How do they respond when children seem unhappy? How do they respond when children have disputes?
- ◇ Are there enough adults to care for the number of children present?
- ◇ Will they have time to answer my questions?
- ◇ Will they tell me about my child's day?
- ◇ Will they keep up with my child's changing interests?

The Children

- ◇ Do the children seem happy and involved in the activities and with other children?
- ◇ Can they choose their own activities?
- ◇ Are they able to do both quiet activities and physical activities?
- ◇ Do the children all sleep at the same time or can they sleep on their own schedule?

Setting and Activities

- ◇ Is the space safe, clean and comfortable, inside and out?
- ◇ Is there a balanced schedule including: play time, nap time, story time and activity time?
- ◇ Are the activities right for each age group?
- ◇ Is the space organized so children can do different things in groups, pairs or by themselves?
- ◇ Are there different areas for resting, quiet and active play?
- ◇ What games, toys and other equipment are here? Are they in good condition?
- ◇ Is there a fenced-in, outdoor play area with a variety of equipment?

Other questions to keep in mind

- ◇ Are parents invited to participate in daily activities?
- ◇ Are there other opportunities for parents to be involved?
- ◇ Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- ◇ What is the policy on discipline? Do I agree with it?
- ◇ Do I think my child will be happy here?

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