

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CHILD CARE:

Questions for Parents of Preschoolers

This checklist is meant to help you assess child care programs in their ability to provide your preschooler with an environment in which he or she can thrive. Be sure to get references from parents who have had a child your child's age in the program you are considering for a different point of view.

The three main developmental characteristics of preschoolers are:

- The learning of social skills and values that help them discover where they stand with others and in the world around them;
- An interest in testing and trying new physical and social skills; and,
- An interest in the world around them, and the onset of their imaginations and development of new ideas of their own.

Questions for Any Type of Preschool Provider or Program

1. Is the play space child-safe and clean? Does it contain interesting materials and toys that challenge the mind and inspire creative play such as books, puzzles, and art supplies? Do children learn about practical life skills such as cooking? Do children have opportunities to experience settings away from child care such as field trips or walks?
2. If it is an issue for your child, how is toilet training handled? Is this acceptable to you? What happens if a child has an "accident"? Is the child reassured and helped to deal with his or her situation independently, without humiliation?
3. Is there plenty of opportunity for active physical play and free exploration indoors and outdoors?
4. Is there enough space for each child to play independently or in groups? Is there outdoor equipment to explore?
5. How much freedom and flexibility are children given in their schedules and activities? Ask what a typical day might be for a child your own child's age with this provider. Are children encouraged to play together, to practice social skills?
6. What is the provider's/program's philosophy on discipline? How clearly are limits and rules explained? Are they appropriate to your child's age?
7. Does the provider interact directly with the children, rather than just watching? Does the provider talk directly to the children down on their physical level, using real words? Does the provider really listen when a child speaks?
8. Does the provider settle disputes calmly? Are problems headed off before they start? Are these times treated as an opportunity to learn appropriate behavior or just a time to "keep the peace"?

9. Does the provider respect each child's individual strengths, weaknesses and preferences? How much academic learning is in the program? How is it presented to the children?
10. How many other children are in the class/program with your child? How old are they?
11. Who is responsible for providing food? What are the policies regarding toys and food being brought from home? What are you responsible for providing - blankets, extra changes of clothes, a car seat?

Especially for Family Child Care Programs . . .

1. Is the provider's caring style and philosophy, particularly in limit setting, similar to your own? Do you feel comfortable with her/his style and methods? Can she adapt it to different age groups, respecting your child's developmental level?
2. Is the environment arranged to be safely navigated by a preschooler? Is everything breakable out of reach? Where will the preschooler spend most of his or her time? Will your child be traveling in the car with the provider? How often? Are you comfortable with this?
3. What are the other household demands on the provider's attention? Could they be an obstacle to providing supervision and interaction with your child?
4. What is this provider's experience with preschoolers? Any special qualifications or educational experiences?
5. Is television a part of this program? How much, when, and what programs are watched? Are any other adults going to be in the house during child care hours? An assistant? A spouse? Older children?

Especially for Center-based Programs . . .

1. How many adults will be involved in the care of your child? Will the same people be caring for your child on the same schedule each day or week? What is the turnover rate for preschool teachers in this center?
2. What are the qualifications and experience of each person who will be caring for your preschooler? Do they have any special training?
3. What is this center's philosophy about child development and limit setting? Is it compatible with your parenting style?