

Selecting Quality Childcare

This job aid contains 3 sections: a checklist for selecting childcare, expectations parents should have of their childcare provider, and expectations childcare providers should have of parents.

Directions: The checklist below is helpful to parents as they select and evaluate a childcare setting. Unless the answer to most of the questions is YES, parents should continue searching.

Does the person who will be caring for your child...

- Encourage parents to visit at any time?
- Appear to be warm and friendly?
- Have a sense of humor?
- Seem to be someone with whom you can develop a relaxed, sharing relationship?
- Appear to be someone your child will enjoy being around?
- Seem to feel good about herself/himself and the job?
- Have child-rearing attitudes and methods similar to your own?

Does the childcare facility (center or home) have ...

- Equipment that is safe and in good repair?
- Equipment and materials suitable for the ages of the children there?
- Safety caps on electrical outlets?
- A safe place to store dangerous items such as medicines, cleaners, poisons, matches, sharp instruments, etc?
- An alternate exit in case of fire?
- A safety plan to follow in emergencies?
- An outdoor play area that is safe, fenced (or secured) and free of litter?
- Groups of manageable sizes?
- A scholarship program, subsidies, or sliding fee scale?
- Enough heat, light and ventilation?
- Any pets? If so, are they properly trained or penned and have they had all their appropriate shots?

- Safe transportation with seat belts and car seats?
- A nap or resting area depending on ages and needs of children?

Are there opportunities to...

- Play quietly and actively indoors and out?
- Play alone at times and with friends at other times?
- Follow a schedule that meets young children's need for routine, but is flexible enough to meet the different needs of each child?
- Use materials and equipment that help children learn new physical skills, develop muscular control and get exercise?
- Learn to get along, to share, and to respect themselves?
- Learn about their own and others' cultures through art, music, books, songs, games, and other activities?
- Play with many different toys and equipment that enable children to use their imaginations?

The following questions are unique to Infant Care:

- Is there a diaper changing area with a washable surface, and is it sanitized regularly?
- Are hands washed before and after feeding and diapering?
- Are bottles, nipples and toys kept clean? How?
- Are food and formula served at the right temperature?
- Are unused formula and food refrigerated and labeled or discarded when no longer fresh?
- Are babies changed promptly when diapers are wet or dirty?
- Are babies cleaned thoroughly during diaper changes?
- Is a separate crib, portacrib or playpen provided for each infant?
- Are babies held when fed? Do you avoid propping the bottle in a bouncy seat during feeding time?
- Are babies placed on their backs to sleep at naptime?

Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What is your child like?
- How does your child communicate his/her needs?
- Does your child need help moving around?

Checklist provided by Childcare Answers, an information service that supports parental choice. Access their website at www.childcareanswers.com

- Is your child on a special diet or medication?
- How does your child relate/react to other children?
- Has your child been immunized? (You will need to provide an immunization history record.)

10 Things to Expect From Your Childcare Provider

Whether your child is cared for by a babysitter in your home, a family childcare provider in her home, or many people in a childcare center, you should be able to expect certain things. Creating a positive relationship with your childcare provider is vital to finding good care for your child.

Open Communication

Providers should feel comfortable to call you when they can't handle your child or feel overwhelmed, and they should give you frequent and full updates on your child's progress and problems. They should welcome your questions and ask you questions about how they can help your child. If they let you know what is happening with your child during the day you can develop ways to deal with problems and to build on activities and accomplishments of the day.

Open Access to The Home or Center

Parents must be welcome to drop in any time, even without calling. Providers also should allow parents to make a reasonable number of phone calls to check on their children's well being, in case of illness or if there is a special problem such as separation anxiety. You and the provider should work out the best times for such phone calls and determine how many calls are reasonable.

Safety for Your Child

Providers should take all possible precautions to keep children safe. This includes covering electrical outlets, putting away knives and other sharp objects, closing off stairways and using only safe and well-maintained equipment, child safety seats and seatbelts.

Honesty and Confidence

Providers should not make commitments that they cannot or do not intend to keep. They should not cover up problems or accidents that occur. They shouldn't expect parents to help them avoid income taxes by slipping them money on the side. They also should not gossip about your child or your family to friends or co-workers.

Acceptance of Parents Wishes

Providers should abide by parents' wishes on matters such as discipline, TV watching, food and toilet training. However, most states have standards regarding adult smoking and spanking and the provider may not act against these standards. If providers feel that they cannot abide by parents' wishes, they need to tell parents before agreeing to provide care for the children and the parents should look for other care.

Advance notice of any changes

Since finding adequate care is often very difficult, providers should tell parents well in advance if they are going to change their hours or prices or if they are going to stop or limit the time of caring for a child. Parents need at least a month, or better yet, six weeks notice if a provider is no longer going to care for a child. Except in an emergency, they should give parents at least two weeks notice even if the provider will not be available for just one day.

No interference in the child's family or family problems

Providers should not talk to children about their families' problems, lifestyle or values. Likewise, the provider should be careful not to take sides in any family disputes such as custody battles. Providers should not try to impose their religious or other beliefs on the children they care for. This includes not taking children to religious services unless asked to by the parents.

No Advice Offered Unless Asked for and No Judging of Parenting Practices

Providers should not criticize or advise parents on child rearing unless the parents ask for their advice. They should not set themselves up as experts on parenting. If parents ask for advice, providers should offer it in a non-critical way. Of course, if providers see something that is seriously wrong with how parents are raising their children, such as if they fear child abuse or see a child apparently suffering from malnutrition, they are legally bound to report their concerns to the local authorities. They should also discuss any concerns with the parents.

Assurance that Those in Contact with the Child are Trustworthy and Properly Trained and Supervised

Providers must be responsible for everyone who enters, visits and works at their home or center. This includes screening custodial help, not admitting strangers into the home, seeing that all transportation workers are properly trained and that all visitors, including friends or relatives of the provider are trustworthy and supervised and will not harm the child.

No Surprises

This means that your family childcare provider does not suddenly tell you that since they have taken a part-time job, their teenage son or daughter will watch your child three afternoons a week or that your child's favorite teacher at the center just disappears without warning or comment. Surprises are probably what parents fear the most from their childcare provider.

10 Things a Childcare Provider Should Expect From You

While expectations will differ somewhat depending on whether your child is cared for in your home, in the home of a family childcare provider or in a childcare center, your provider should be able to expect certain things from you. Creating a positive relationship with your childcare provider is vital to maintaining good care for your child.

Open Communication

Your provider should be given information on how to contact you at all times while your child is in their care. Your childcare provider should know that it is alright to contact you and should be encouraged to contact you at any time about problems or concerns with your child. Explain clearly and carefully your wishes and expectations about how your child will be cared for. Give the provider information about your child's routine activities and preferences, and provide updates on problems and progress that your child is making. Good communication helps parents and providers work together in the best interest of children.

Agreement on Terms or Arrangements

You should fully understand the expectations of the provider and what you as a parent are agreeing to. A written agreement between the provider and parents is usually helpful for both parties.

Honesty and Trust

This includes being honest about how you believe the arrangement is working. Is your child happy with the provider and are you? Although you need to be vigilant in order to safeguard your child, you should still trust your childcare provider to do the best for your child. Show your trust by asking questions rather than jumping to conclusions when apparent problems develop.

Advance Notice of and Agreement to Any Changes

Providers deserve advance notice if you are going to stop using their services, take a vacation, change hours, etc. If you want the provider to start feeding your child breakfast, this change should be discussed and agreed to and an adjustment should be made in the rate of pay. If you expect a month or six weeks notice if the provider can no longer care for your child, you owe the provider similar notice.

Pick Up on Time and Follow Through on All Agreements

Providers should be able to count on you to pick up your child at the agreed upon time. If it actually takes you 15 minutes longer to get home than you expected, then you need to work out a new agreement with the provider or find a way to abide by the original one. If you agreed to provide diapers, formula or other supplies, you should bring them before they are needed.

Do Not Send Sick, Hungry or Overly Tired Kids

Agree with your childcare provider in advance about when you can and cannot bring a

sick child. Never bring a child who you know is not feeling well enough to be away from home and family. Likewise, you shouldn't expect your childcare provider to cope with a child who has not had breakfast or who went to bed four hours late the night before.

Payment on Time

Childcare providers are your employees, so make arrangements so they can get their pay on time.

Respect

Realize that taking care of children is a job and the childcare provider is often a working parent just as you are. Recognize also that this is not an easy job. A childcare provider is not a baby-sitter. She is one of the most important people in your child's life and in yours, too.

Jealousy

Try not to be jealous of your child's attachment to childcare providers. Children who spend hours every day with a childcare provider will come to love that person. That love doesn't diminish the love the child feels for you. Don't feel that you have to compete with your childcare provider for your child's affection.

No Surprises

Your childcare provider shouldn't learn on Friday that you have decided to take next week off work. Your family childcare provider shouldn't learn that you now expect them to pick up your kindergartner after school because the car pool you have been using has dissolved. Childcare providers don't like surprises any more than parents do.