

Types of Child Care

CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE

Child care centers are places where children are cared for in a group away from their homes for all or part of the day. Keep in mind that center-based care may not be as “home-like” as some children want. Your child may not be happy in a large group for most of the day. Many child care centers have a planned program of activities to help children learn. Some centers have formal plans. Others are more informal and use their day-to-day experience working with children to guide their activities.

FAMILY CHILD CARE

In this setting, the child goes to the home of the caregiver. Often this is a mother with children of her own. You may find a relative, friend, or neighbor who is willing to care for your child in her home, or you may find a family child care home run by someone you do now know. Usually, only about five or six children are cared for at any one time. Family child care is likely to be the easiest to find in rural areas. Keep in mind that a family child care provider may go out of business or stop keeping children at any time. Because many of these homes are not inspected or licensed, it will be up to you to make sure that it is a safe and healthy place to leave your child.

IN-HOME CARE

An in-home caregiver is one who comes to or lives in your home. The caregiver can be a relative or a friend or can be someone you pay to come to your home.

AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

After-school care is provided in most cases by your child's school as a place for children to learn and have fun between the time school is over and 6:00p.m. This is a good choice if you have to work after school hours. Most of the time, these types of programs do not keep children younger than school age.

Locating Child Care

Get Information About Child Care in Your Area:

- ✓ Use “resource and referral” (you may see this written as “R&R”) agencies to get information about child care centers and family day care homes in your area. This services is free of charge. Also, these agencies can help you learn more about how to choose good child care.
- ✓ Check newspaper ads and the yellow pages in the phone book.
- ✓ Ask you caseworker, child care broker, or friends and neighbors who have children
- ✓ Ask people at your church, your children’s school, or at colleges that teach child care and child development courses.

Talk to each caregiver briefly:

- ✓ When you have found a few centers you are interested in , call them to find out which ones meet your needs. Ask questions like,

“Where are you located?”

“What is the cost?”

“What are your hours?”

“Is there an opening for my child?”

- ✓ If you are thinking about care with a relative, friend, or babysitter, talk about what you expect from them and find out what they expect from you. Be very clear from the beginning.

Selecting Quality Child Care

Visit the child care centers or homes you are considering. Go when other children are there, and bring your children with you. Spend some time watching what goes on. Ask questions. You will feel much better about leaving your children when you know that they will be getting good quality care and positive learning experiences in a place where they feel happy, loved, and safe. Look around you as you walk into the caregiving area.

_____ Does it feel safe and inviting?

_____ Are the rooms and equipment clean and in good shape?

Warning signs: Dirty floors and equipment, furnishings are damaged, unsafe, paint peeling, etc.

_____ Are there lots of safe, interesting toys and materials that children can reach by themselves (but not too much clutter?)

Warning signs: Not enough toys or interesting activities

_____ Is there enough space for children to move around freely?

_____ Is there quiet space for children to be alone or in small groups, and space for large groups?

_____ Is there a safe outdoor play area with sturdy equipment?

- Look at the children:

_____ Are they happy, relaxed, and smiling most of the time?

_____ Do preschoolers and school-age children seem busy and curious, and enjoy talking to each other?

- Watch the teachers. Do they...

_____ Seem warm, loving, and relaxed?

_____ Make children feel welcome when they arrive?

_____ Smile a lot and seem to enjoy the children?

Warning signs: Caregivers seem harsh or don't pay attention to the children; they use a lot of "don'ts" and punishments.

_____ Talk and listen a lot to children?

_____ Ask children lots of questions?

_____ Show interest in what children are saying and doing?

Let children explore on their own, but give them help and encouragement when they need it?

Play a lot with children on their level? (for young children, usually down on the floor?)

Respond quickly to children's cries, words, and behaviors?

Warning signs: Caregivers hardly ever talk to children or respond to them.

Praise children for doing things like sharing, comforting each other and helping?

Warning signs: Caregivers discipline children by spanking, shouting, putting children by themselves for a long time, or not giving them food.

Supervise young children very closely?

Warning signs: Children are out of sight or are made to wait for long periods of time.

Make sure diapering area for infants and toddlers is clean, and caregivers wash their hands before and after diapering (and before feeding.)

Warning signs: Not washing hands after diapering and before feeding.

Some Questions You Can Ask

- **What kind of training do the teachers have?** Teachers should have some training or education in child development and child care. The more education they have, the better quality the care will likely be.
- **How many children are in a group (or classroom?) How many teachers are there for this group?** Children get more attention when they are in smaller groups and have more teachers in their classroom.
- **What kinds of activities do children do?** Children should be able to choose from many different kinds of activities, such as blocks, art, music, reading books, writing, pretend play, sand and water play, and toys that help finger coordination (like building blocks or puzzles.) Good activities let children express themselves and make choices, without having to follow a teacher made example.
- **How are parents involved?** Can I come visit whenever I want to? Child care centers and homes should encourage you to be involved, and you should feel welcome to visit anytime.