

SELECTING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION* PROGRAM

* Child Care

Finding convenient, affordable, good quality early childhood education program can take a lot of time! Although there are options, including family child care homes and child care centers, it is often difficult to evaluate the services. Ask questions. The steps listed below will help you find the type of early childhood education program that will provide for your child's physical, mental, and emotional health and development.

STEP ONE: DEFINING NEEDS OF PARENTS AND THE CHILD(REN)

Parent Needs

- Work schedule
- Financial considerations
- Location of centers
- Proper curriculum for **YOUR** child
- After school transportation

Child Needs

- To feel secure and loved
- To be safe
- To be active in exploring and to move about freely
- To develop means of communication through language, art, music, science and other media
- To feel pride in his or her **own** achievements
- To play, to have adequate recreation and to enjoy life

General Selection

When you have defined your needs and your child's needs and you have made up your mind about the type of child care you want, use this directory to make a list of the providers in your geographic area that meet your specific requirements.

STEP TWO: PHONE SCREENING

Begin by telephoning possible early childhood education providers. When you call, ask for either the director or the center manager. Check to see that this is a good time to talk as you will want the person's undivided attention.

Things to Tell

1. Age and sex of your child
2. Hours and days you need care
3. When you want to start
4. Previous child care experience
5. Any special needs your child has

Selecting an Early Childhood Education Program (Phone Screening) Continued

Things to Ask:

1. Do you have any openings? Can I get on your waiting list?
2. What is the philosophy of your program?
3. How do you handle the mixed ages?
4. What would my child be doing?
5. What are the fees?
6. Where are you located exactly?
7. What is the size of the classes?
8. How many children are in the class? What are the ages of the children?
9. How many adults are in the class and what are their qualifications?
10. Can I visit any time?
11. How do you handle discipline?

STEP THREE: THE VISIT

- Using the results of your telephone calls, plan to visit and compare several child care centers before you make any final decisions.
- It is best to visit the centers during the morning hours of operation when the majority of the “educational” or “working” portion of the program takes place. If you are looking for a school-age program, then visit at a time after most of the children have arrived (e.g. 4 p.m.)
- Take a list of questions with you so that you are sure to obtain all the information you want. Do not be intimidated – remember, it is **your child** you will be leaving, not theirs.

STEP FOUR: SORTING OUT WHAT YOU SEE

Choosing a good child care facility for your child is a very important decision. Once you have made that decision, plan to review it after a short time and continue to monitor the facility regularly. In the end, no matter whether a caregiver is registered, licensed, or without official permit, that person is taking care of **YOUR** child. No inspector or official agency can take your place in determining whether your child will be safe, happy and well cared for.

YOU are the most important part of the process!

The key factors to consider in making your final choice include:

1. Your child’s needs
2. Your family needs
3. A center or provider with whom you feel comfortable and with whom you would be able to develop a partnership

PARENT'S CHECKLIST

HOW TO EVALUTE THE QUALITY OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM *

This checklist is designed to assist you in your search for a quality setting that meets your family's needs. There are three areas to look at when you visit a child care program:

- The relationship between the provider and the children
- The program
- Physical environment, health and safety

Remember, it is up to you to choose care for your child. When you have found a program that meets your family's and child's needs, stay involved, ask questions, and talk with your provider each day about your child.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PROVIDER AND THE CHILDREN

A positive and loving relationship between the provider and the children in care is essential for quality early childhood education to occur. In addition, the relationship between the provider and the parent is also crucial. It is important that parents choose a provider whose styles and attitudes are similar to their own.

Do the children seem happy and involved?

Does the provider appear to be warm, friendly, calm and patient?

Does the provider hold and touch children in a caring manner?

Does the provider listen to what the children have to say?

Does the provider talk to children and encourage them to express themselves?

Are children encouraged to make choices and do things for themselves?

Does the provider understand what children can do and want to do at different stages of growth?

Does the provider join the children in activities?

Is enough attention given to each child? Is each child treated as a special person?

Are children encouraged to resolve conflicts between themselves in an acceptable manner?

Does the provider use a positive reinforcement approach when disciplining and guiding children?

Does the provider have child-rearing attitudes that are similar to your own?

Does the provider have previous experience or training in working with children?

What type?

Does the provider like the children? Do the children like the provider?

How many different providers will be with your child during the course of the day?

Will a particular provider have primary responsibility for your child?

Is there a way for parents to receive feedback from the provider about the child's day such as eating, sleeping, toileting and activities?

What is the staff turnover?

Do you feel this provider is someone you could build a sharing relationship with?

Parent's Check List continu

THE PROGRAM

The program should include experiences and activities you consider important as well as components that indicate a quality program, such as:

- Are a variety of age-appropriate materials and equipment available to help children learn and grow mentally and physically?
- Do activities encourage the children to think creatively?
- Is there time for children to work as a group?
- Is there time to play alone?
- Is there a schedule posted? Is it flexible?
- Does the schedule show a balance between active and quiet activities?
- Are there opportunities for indoor and outdoor play?
- What is the educational philosophy? Is it compatible with your own?
- Are parents encouraged to be involved in the program? How?
- Can you visit the program unannounced at any time?
- What is included in the fee? (For example, meals, diapers, materials, etc.)
- Is the cost within your budget?
- Does the facility close for holidays and vacations?

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The program's environment needs to be safe and health. Policies should exist regarding illness and communicable disease.

- Is there an up-to-date license posted? (If required)
- Are there enough adults for the number and age of children in a group? (Refer to Child Care and Family Child Care Home Regulations in this directory.)
- Is the facility cheerful, clean and well-lit?
- Is there enough equipment and materials? Can child reach materials?
- Is the equipment safe, appropriate and in good repair?
- Is there a comfortable, quiet place for a child to be alone?
- Is there enough space indoors and outdoors so all the children can move freely and safely?
- Are there individual places for a child's personal belongings?
- Is there a proper sleeping place for nap time?
- Are the bathrooms and diapering areas clean?
- Are there first aid supplies and fire extinguishers? Are emergency numbers posted?
- What kind of emergency training does staff have? (CPR, First Aid, etc.)
- What happens if a child becomes ill or hurt? How are parents notified about communicable diseases?
- Is the menu posted? Are the meals nutritious? (If meals are served)
- Are children involved with serving the meals and clean-up? Does the provider join the children for meals?

** Information provided by The Florida Children's Forum
259 East 7th Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32303 Phone: 1888-FL-CHILD*

**PARENT'S CHECK LIST: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
SUGGESTIONS**

1. Choose at least 3 places to visit. Make appointments and visit with your child.
2. Check references of parents who are using or have used the provider you are considering.
3. If the program is required to have a license, contact Florida Department of Children & Families, 338-1341.
4. Make sure you understand the provider's services, hours, rules, policies, and fees before enrolling your child.
5. If you need additional assistance call Child Care of Southwest Florida, 643-3908 or Naples Alliance for Children, 649-5260.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

IF YOUR CHILD IS AN INFANT OR TODDLER

- Is there time spent holding, playing, and talking with your baby?
- Are babies held while being bottle fed? Are babies and toddlers put to bed with bottles? This can cause tooth decay and ear infections.
- Is there a variety of toys available for developing skills?
- Does the infant or toddler spend time outdoors?
- Is there a written or other effective feedback mechanism to give parents accurate information about daily eating, sleeping and elimination?

IF YOUR CHILD IS SCHOOLAGE

- Does the caregiver help children follow through on projects, homework and suggest interesting things to do?
- Is there a room available in which to do homework?
- Are there physical activities available geared to school age children?
- Is it possible for a child to attend outside activities and clubs?

YOUR ROLE IN THE CHILD CARE PROCESS

Remember, not every center can meet every need, but a good center will work with you to meet your child's requirements.

Studies show that the greater part of human development happens before the age of five. From the standpoint of the child -- whether a child will be an asset or a liability in future society -- depends largely on his or her success in school. That often depends upon whether they attend two or more years in a **high quality** preschool setting.

Parents are the most important teachers and caregivers of children. Child care should be an extension of this care. Child care **is not baby sitting**. **Child care is a skilled profession** and should be regarded as such. Parents can become partners with their child care givers in providing a continuum of care and education.

- Provide your caregiver with all pertinent information for understanding your child's special needs.
- Read all handouts, newsletters and other printed materials that your child brings home.
- Pay your fees on time.
- Participate in conferences and attend seminars and activities arranged by the center.
- Establish a regular time to talk with your provider.
- Always stay involved.
- Offer to help out on special events.
- Get involved in center committees and activities.
- A thank you note or just "thanks" to the provider can create happy feelings.
- Whatever you choose to do to stay involved with your provider, you will find the time that you take is well worth the effort.

