

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?

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?

PARENT'S CHECK LIST: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SUGGESTIONS:

- Choose at least 3 places to visit. Make appointments and visit with your child.
- Check references of parents who are using or have used the provider you are considering
- If the program is required to have a license, contact Florida Department of Children & Families, 338-1341.
- Make sure you understand the provider's services, hours, rules, policies, and fees before enrolling your child.
- 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?