



The Guidance SeriesSM Solving Your Day Care Dilemma

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Introduction

Times have changed, and today we live in a much different world from that of our parents. One of the biggest changes over the past three decades has been the growing number of mothers who work at full- or part-time jobs. According to the federal government, by the first decade of the 21st century about two thirds of children under the age of 18 had both parents or an only parent working outside the home.

In the past, parents had relatively few choices about who would provide care for their children when both parents worked. They often relied on family members such as grandparents, siblings or extended family members. In some cases, a neighbor down the block may have provided care to small children or a home as a gathering place for kids when the school day was over.

Today there are many more choices in child care. In addition to family members, there are family care centers, day care centers and in-home care providers like nannies. Good child care providers offer a caring environment, educational opportunities, emotional support, healthy meals and supervised play. Studies suggest that being in a child care situation actually helps children develop critical social skills, including self-confidence. Child care centers should become your child's home away from home. Likewise, in-home providers can become your child's friend and confidant while acting as a surrogate parent when you are away.

Do not be surprised, however, if you find it hard at first to leave a child in the care of another, even when it is someone you know and trust. There are often many conflicting emotions involved. As one mother told us: "At first, I did not want to leave my daughter Ashley in family care, and Ashley did not like being there. But as time went on, our care provider Joan did such a fantastic job that Ashley seemed almost reluctant to come home with me when I picked her up after work. Needless to say, that did not make me happy either."

These feelings of guilt and anxiety may be troubling, but they are not at all unusual. Eventually, watching your child thrive in the right day care situation minimizes any initial misgivings you may have.

In addition, you may find that day care is the best or only option for you. For example, you may have a stimulating career that challenges you on a daily basis, or your financial situation may make it impossible for you to stay home with your child. In either case, it is certainly better for your child to be in day care and come home to a parent who is fulfilled, happy and financially secure.

The goal of this guide is to help make the process of finding quality child care easier for you and your family. We will look at the steps you can take to determine what kind of child care provider is best for your child. We will help you learn how to evaluate different care providers, and how to deal with problems that may arise once your child is enrolled in a child care program. Of course, if money were no object, most of us would pay as much as necessary to be sure our children were getting the best care available. Unfortunately, the reality for most parents is the need to compromise between the kind of care they want and the kind of care they can afford. For that reason this guide will also take a look at the cost of child care and suggest ways to make it more affordable.

To help you organize your planning and gather information without overlooking anything, we have included an Appendix of checklists. Designed to be printed, these checklists can help you maintain a written record of your findings as you explore various child care options. The checklists include questions that you should ask every caregiver as well as lists of questions tailored to individual situations.

Let's begin.

Chapter 1: Deciding What You Need

Finding the right kind of child care can be a challenging task. To begin, you will want to ask yourself some questions about the kind of care you need.

You will want to consider:

- › The age of your child (or children)
- › If you have more than one child, how their schedules and interests differ
- › If your child has special needs
- › If you will need child care year-round or for a shorter period of time
- › The days of the week when you will need child care as well as the hours during the day when you will need it (keeping in mind overtime and shift work)
- › If you will need overnight care (for example, if your job requires you to travel out of town)
- › The date you need child care to begin
- › How long you will need child care (for a year or two or over a longer time span)
- › If you will need someone to care for your child when he or she or your caregiver is ill
- › How much you think you can afford to pay for child care

We will explore each of these points in more detail throughout the rest of this guide. However, asking yourself these questions may help you eliminate certain kinds of child care. For example, if you do not need someone to stay with your children overnight, you probably do not need to consider a live-in care provider.

You will also want to think about child care from your child's point of view. Children of different ages have very different needs. Babies need much more attention, cuddling and physical care than toddlers. Toddlers need caregivers who can help with the development of language skills and make sure that a curious child's explorations do not lead to injuries. Preschoolers typically need a caregiver who can help them with tasks like learning to tie their shoes, working with puzzles and developing other skills they will need to master before entering kindergarten. School age children, on the other hand, may need help with homework or someone to take them to after-school activities.

Returning to work after a maternity/paternity leave

The decision to return to work after having a baby or taking a few years off to parent will depend on many factors. What kind of child care can you afford? How well can you balance having a job and being a parent? Does your spouse support your decision? Take some time to weigh the economic, career and emotional impact of returning to work.

The most important factor is the impact on the child. Fortunately, research shows that children receiving quality and consistent care—whether provided solely by the parent or with the help of day care professionals—usually do just fine.

For many families, having both parents work is a financial necessity. One way of looking at whether returning to work is for you is to determine your anticipated income minus expenditures. Start by listing your take home pay. Next, subtract anticipated day care costs, as well as any expenditures associated with working, for example, transportation costs, lunches, wardrobe purchases and additional taxes because of your higher income bracket and loss of your nonworking dependent status. What remains is the actual immediate economic benefit of your working.

It is also important to look at the long-term economic advantages of returning to work. Even if there is not much left over after subtracting child care and other expenses, returning to work now may put you on a path to greater economic benefits in the future. Someday your child may need a college education, and you will need the security of a sound retirement. As with all financial plans, it is important to look at both immediate and long-term goals.

Some families do the math and discover that they can meet their goals through part-time work. Working part time or sharing a job with another worker can make balancing work and personal responsibilities a little easier.

Of course, there can be disadvantages to part-time work, too. You may find that working part-time lessens your ability to have a major positive impact on your organization or your career path. Some part-timers report that the workload does not always decrease when their hours do, and not all part-time employment offers benefits such as health insurance and vacation time.

For some, working from a home office is attractive. Companies who value trained and loyal workers are often willing to consider arrangements such as telecommuting. Try submitting a

plan that demonstrates how your proposed arrangement will meet the business needs of the company. Look for companies offering flexible work arrangements and family-oriented benefits such as partial reimbursement for child care costs.

Some parents avoid child care entirely by working alternate shifts. Perhaps you can work evenings after your spouse comes home from work. Of course, this arrangement will lead to a reduction in your time together as a couple.

The decision to return to work is a very personal one. Weigh your options and discuss your decision carefully with your partner. When talking with your child, try to focus on the positive aspects of returning to work. Address his or her feelings honestly and talk about how everyone can help make this successful. Once you have returned to work, give the new arrangement some time. It may require extra patience and compromise to make it work—values that can enhance your family life in the long run.

Your wish list for child care

You may want to make a “wish list” of qualities you are looking for in your child’s caregiver. For example:

- › Do you want your child to spend time in an environment with many other children of various ages or in a smaller group of children close in age to his or her own?
- › Would you prefer to have your child in a one-to-one care situation?
- › Do you want your child in an educationally challenging atmosphere or would you rather have a caregiver more concerned with nurturing than teaching?
- › If you have children of different ages, can they all be cared for in the same setting and still have their individual needs met?

While it would be wonderful if you could find a caregiver for your child who would meet all of the criteria on your wish list, chances are you will have to make some compromises. But by knowing what you want as well as what you need, you are less likely to spend time investigating child care options that are not right for you and your child.

Child care options

The most common child care options are day care centers, family child care providers and in-home caregivers. You are not limited to just these types of child care, however: many families combine several types of child care options to meet their individual needs and to accommodate different requirements within the family. Some families, for example, need both infant care and after-school care during the day. Other families who have a child with special needs create a program to meet the child's individual requirements. We will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of common child care alternatives in the following chapters. In the meantime, you need to begin your search for the best child care for your children.

Starting your search

A good place to start is in your own circle of friends and acquaintances. Once you have identified qualities you are looking for in a caregiver or a caregiving situation, you may want to get the input of people you trust about their own child care experiences. Ask your friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers. Personal testimonials can provide you with valuable information and a unique perspective on the child care options available. Consider asking them:

- › What kinds of child care arrangements they have for their own children
- › What kinds of contracts did they sign and what do they recommend be included in a contract?
- › What are the names of the best child care providers in your community and the ones they would not recommend?
- › What kinds of problems they have experienced with child care and how were those problems resolved?
- › What they would do differently if they were looking for child care today?

Once you have thought carefully about the issues we have outlined above, you are ready to move to the next step—finding the right child care environment for your child. But before you contact or visit any of the care facilities, you need to prepare yourself to understand your rights and your responsibilities as a parent and to conduct a background search.

Rights and responsibilities

Take an active role in the child care program by asking questions and being aware of your rights and obligations as a parent.

You have a right to question or discuss:

- › Unsafe practices or poor hygiene that might affect your child
- › Discipline, care and educational issues
- › Anything that upsets your child
- › Your child's daily activities and progress

You have a right to expect:

- › Adherence to state rules and regulations regarding child care
- › Safe, nurturing, high-quality care in a clean environment
- › Open communication
- › Positive age-appropriate activities

You have a responsibility to respect the provider's:

- › Time: be punctual in picking up your child
- › Policies: know when child care payments are due
- › Opinions: they have usually had plenty of experience caring for children

You have a responsibility to watch for the following warning signs:

- › Complaints or anxiety from your child
- › A center that does not permit or encourage parents to drop in unexpectedly
- › Children without the immediate and direct supervision of an adult
- › A caregiver who has been observed screaming, yelling, swearing, threatening, criticizing or making fun of any of the children
- › A caregiver who is physically rough with the children
- › Repeated bruising or unexplainable injuries

You have a responsibility to your child to:

- › Talk with him or her about the day care setting and caregivers
- › Ask very specific questions about your child's day and the events of that day
- › Listen carefully to what your child is saying
- › Visit your child's day care provider or center at unexpected times of the day

Background checks for child care providers

There are few activities as important to the safety of your children as finding reputable and responsible child care providers. There are many resources to help you determine if a potential babysitter has the appropriate experience, training and background to care for your child or children. The extent of your research will vary depending on your child care needs. For example, if you want to hire a local teen to watch your fourth grader for an hour after school, you can ask around the neighborhood to learn who is reliable and available. But if you are hiring a child care provider to watch your one-year-old all day while you are at work, your background check will probably need to be more thorough.

If a potential child care provider is hesitant to allow a background check, it could be an indication that the check would reveal information that reflects poorly on the individual.

Interviewing references

The most common way to investigate a prospective child care provider's background is to interview his or her personal references. You as a potential employer use references for two main reasons: to verify information the potential employee has told you and to confirm any feelings or impressions you have already formed about the candidate.

When asking reference questions, whether on the phone or face-to-face, it is a good idea to take notes so you can document his or her responses. Also, it is important to assure the person that the information provided to you will not be disclosed to the prospective child care provider. For a list of commonly asked questions you can use when interviewing personal references provided by a potential babysitter or child care provider, refer to the Checklist for Interviewing References in the Appendix.

A word of caution: most job applicants carefully choose the people they use as references, so they are likely to select people who will say positive things about them. If the reference is a family member or a close friend of the person you are interviewing, the information provided may not be as valuable or objective as the comments made by previous clients of the child care provider.

Checking other types of information

Parents may wish to collect information about the following issues from potential child care providers:

- › Name changes
- › Criminal records
- › Marriage records
- › Lawsuits
- › Bankruptcies
- › Driving records
- › Credit reports

Some information, such as credit reports, can be gathered from credit agencies like Equifax, Experian and TransUnion that compile that information. Other background searches can be more difficult, and all may require the permission of the applicant. In addition, it is hard to do a nationwide (or even statewide) search for a person's criminal record, as this information is often gathered and recorded at a county level. Many statewide crime databases have so many pending entries that the most current information is months old. The only nationwide criminal record database is kept by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and it can only be used by law enforcement personnel.

According to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, "Before you can get a consumer report for employment purposes, you must notify the individual in writing—in a document consisting solely of this notice—that a report may be used. You also must get the person's written authorization before you ask a Credit Reporting Agency for the report."

Most employers use the information gathered from background checks to confirm or refute statements or facts presented by the potential employee, including information on his or her employment history, past addresses and driving record. If inconsistencies appear, you can ask the candidate to explain the discrepancies in the information.

In the case of day care centers, parents can contact state licensing agencies to see if any complaints or licensing problems occurred with the child care provider in the past.

Background check services

There are companies and services that you can hire to perform a background check on potential employees. A growing number of companies conduct these types of checks for individuals. These investigations not only verify the applicant's name and address but also provide information about the motor vehicle record, any criminal record and financial history. You can find the names of companies that conduct background investigations on the Internet or in the Yellow Pages of your telephone directory under "Investigators." Your state's Department of Human Services may also be able to help you obtain information regarding a child care provider's background.

Keep the following in mind when you are looking for a service to perform background checks for you:

- › Beware of companies that advertise "instant" results. Much of the research for a thorough background check cannot be done "instantly."
- › Do not use a company that relies on stored information. Stored information can be anywhere from a few months to a few years old, so it may not contain recent information on the prospective child care provider.
- › Do not base your decision solely on price. If you choose the cheapest background check company, you increase the chances that the information they will provide will be out-of-date and incomplete.
- › Make sure the background check company requires a signed release from your prospective child care provider to be in compliance with the federal law concerning background checks.

Additional references

Choosing child care

For information about selecting appropriate child care, contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com
- › National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
www.naccrra.org
- › Child Care Aware
www.childcareaware.org or in Spanish www.childcareaware.org/es
- › National Network for Child Care
www.nncc.org
- › U.S. government
www.childcare.gov
- › Local CCR&R (child care resource and referral) agency
800.424.2246

For information about state and federally funded programs:

- › Early Head Start programs
www.ehsnrc.org
- › Head Start Locator Tool
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hsic/HeadStartOffices>
- › Council of Chief State School Officers
www.ccsso.org

Federal laws concerning background checks

For information about federal laws concerning background checks, contact:

- › Federal Trade Commission
www.ftc.gov

Chapter 2: Day Care Centers

Day care centers vary significantly in terms of their facilities, programs and costs. From locally owned and operated day care centers to national chains, you will find a wide range of choices. In this chapter, we will look at the services day care centers offer and help you decide whether a day care setting is right for you and your child.

While many day care centers enroll children ranging from four weeks to 12 years old, many child care centers are structured like school programs, grouping children by age. Centers fall into one of the following categories:

- › Infant and toddler centers provide group care for very young children, from as young as six weeks of age up to age two or three years.
- › Early childhood centers provide care for children age two to five years. They may also be called preschools or nursery schools.
- › Before/after school programs are designed to provide care for children during the hours in which school is not in session and parents are at work. Like the programs listed above, some before/after school programs may be held in commercial day care centers. We will discuss before/after school care in more detail in Chapter 5.

No matter what age your child may be, you will want to enroll your child in a center with programs that provide adequate stimulation appropriate for your child's age, a safe and nurturing environment and the opportunity to form positive relationships with other children and adult caregivers.

As you start investigating the various day care center options, be sure to take along an appropriate Checklist copied from the Appendix of this book to each center you visit.

Pros and cons of day care centers

As with other kinds of child care arrangements, using a day care center has its advantages and disadvantages. Among the positives:

Most day care centers are regulated and inspected by the state and must meet minimum standards set by the government. (Church-operated centers are exempt from government regulation in some states.)

- › Day care centers typically stress education and creative expression by providing structured learning environments that include fun activities, crafts and a variety of books and toys.

- › A center environment is similar to a school environment and can help the transition to kindergarten.
- › Children may have a greater opportunity to make friends and to learn social skills by being around other children.
- › Day care centers are usually open during normal business hours, and some may offer early and late drop-off.
- › Day care centers are staffed by a number of caregivers, so you do not need to make alternate arrangements if a teacher is sick or has a family emergency.
- › Staff members often have taken classes in child development and early childhood education.

Some disadvantages of placing your child in a day care center may include:

- › Staff at day care centers may not give your child as much individual attention as you would like.
- › Centers may have high employee turnover, making it tough for your child to bond with a caregiver.
- › Schedules at day care centers tend to be less flexible, which may mean the hours the center is open may not coincide with the hours your child needs care.
- › Day care centers may close on holidays when you have to work, making it necessary to find alternative care.
- › If your child is sick, the day care center may not provide care until he or she recovers, which means you will need to make other arrangements or miss work.
- › Day care centers may be more expensive than other kinds of child care.

Infant and toddler centers

In addition to the qualities listed above, you will want to consider some other criteria when choosing a care program for your very young child. Good quality infant and toddler centers have a relatively small ratio of caregivers to children.

In many states, regulations now prohibit centers from operating with ratios higher than one caregiver to every four children under the age of two years and require at least one caregiver for every six children over the age of two years. In many states the ratio of one caregiver for every 10 children is common.

Having the same adult assigned to care for the same group of children every day is another sign of a quality infant and toddler program. This consistency allows each child to develop a relationship and bond with an individual adult.

Ideally, caregivers should have some training in early childhood development. While a caregiver with a degree or extensive coursework is most desirable, at a minimum the center should provide its employees with training programs to help them learn how to care for young children.

Schedules at the center should be relatively flexible. Very young children rarely do well in a highly structured situation. A center that puts more emphasis on regimentation than on the individual needs of each child may not be the best choice for your child.

Do not leave your baby the first time with a caregiver on the first day you return to work after a maternity/paternity leave. Start leaving your child with a care provider a week before you return to work—maybe just for a few hours at a time at first and then for longer periods of time as the week goes on. This will help you and your baby establish a routine.

Some additional factors to consider when choosing an infant and toddler center include:

- › Whether the center has separate caregivers for infants and toddlers or requires one caregiver to work with both newborns and older children. A center that separates caregiving responsibility for the two groups demonstrates understanding that the needs of a baby are often different from those of a toddler.
- › The typical hours of operation for a center. You will need a center that opens early enough to allow you to drop your child off before work and stays open late enough for you to pick the child up at the end of the workday. Do not forget to ask what additional costs you will incur if you are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time.
- › Whether the center provides only custodial care (feeding, diapering, naps) or offers developmental programs designed to stimulate and educate your child.
- › The cost of care. Infant and toddler centers can be expensive, primarily because of the low adult/child ratio.

Visiting the center

You will want to visit an infant/toddler center before making a decision about where you want to enroll your child. If possible, it is a good idea to visit several centers. Do not make your visit a quick one. It is strongly recommended you plan to spend at least a couple of hours at each center, primarily in the room where your child will be cared for.

Try to get to the center when it opens, so you will have a chance to see the interaction between staff, parents and children. Are the children happy to see their caregivers? Do the parents seem relaxed about leaving their children? Does the staff seem interested in the children and take steps to minimize the stress of separation from Mom or Dad?

Take a look at the atmosphere within the center. Ask yourself the following questions:

- › Is the center bright, clean and comfortable? Are the walls decorated with colorful pictures at the child's eye level?
- › Are the restrooms and diapering stations clean and well maintained?
- › Where do the children take their naps? Can the area be darkened but still light enough to be seen by the caregivers?
- › Are the cribs padded and well maintained? Do the cribs and furniture meet safety regulations?
- › Is there plenty of space for crawling, and are the floors clean and carpeted?
- › Are there chairs and sofas where caregivers and children can snuggle up for a story or a song?
- › What kinds of toys are available for the children to play with? Are they clean and washable without any small parts that an infant or toddler could pull off and put in his mouth? Ask if the toys are lead-free.

Spend some time inspecting the entire facility, both inside and outside. Check out the emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors. Be sure that electrical outlets are childproofed and that kitchen facilities are clean and well maintained.

Take a look at outdoor play areas to be certain they are safe and in good condition. Play areas should have a soft surface instead of one made of asphalt or concrete. There should also be fencing around the play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime.

Pay attention to the staff and how they relate to the children.

Look for caregivers who:

- › Spend a lot of time holding, carrying and cuddling with infants, making good eye contact and responding to an infant's sounds, whether cooing or crying.
- › Follow good health and hygiene rules by washing hands before and after feedings, as well as after changing diapers, and by cleaning the changing area after use.
- › Are gentle when handling babies during feeding and diapering.
- › Give toddlers encouragement to try new tasks but also provide help when it is clear the child is becoming frustrated.
- › Provide positive reinforcement for good behavior and set appropriate limits when a child's actions endanger him or others.
- › Provide appropriate help to children during meals and snacks.
- › Give toddlers the opportunity to choose the activities in which they want to participate.
- › Are patient when children make a mess, get dirty or need a diaper changed.

Parent-to-parent: “After visiting a few centers, I was surprised at the number of caregivers who seemed appalled at having to change a diaper or clean up a toddler who had an ‘accident.’ Even knowing I was there observing did not seem to make much of a difference to them. One of the reasons we ended up choosing the center my daughter is in now was the attitude of the staff toward dirty diapers. It may not sound like a big thing, but no child should be made to feel ashamed of needing their diaper changed.”

Early childhood centers

These facilities are designed to provide care for children between ages two and five years. In addition to many of the considerations we discussed in the section on infant and toddler centers, you will want to think about some additional factors when selecting an early childhood center for your child.

There is no other time in life that your child will be able to learn and absorb as much as right now. Studies show that a quality preschool experience helps a child develop the necessary skills to achieve in school and in life. Preschool is designed to stimulate creativity, excite interest in learning new concepts and introduce children to different social situations.

Group size is still an important factor in an early childhood center. State laws usually limit the ratio of adults to children to one caregiver for every 10 four- or five-year-olds. Again, the smaller the group size per caregiver, the better.

The need for caregivers to have formal training is even greater in an early childhood center than in an infant and toddler program. You should look for programs that require caregivers and teachers to have at least an associate’s degree in early childhood education and that provide ongoing training programs for staff members.

In addition to safe and age-appropriate toys, children in early childhood centers should have access to plenty of books, as well as a comfortable place in which to read them. Good early childhood programs also expose children to music with CDs and musical instruments like drums available for them to play with. A preschool program should introduce your child to the basics that he or she will learn more about in kindergarten and elementary school: reading, the alphabet, counting, shapes and sizes, colors, textures, names and animals.

While it is still important for children to have some flexibility in the activities in which they participate, most early childhood centers use a more structured schedule than you will find in a good infant and toddler program. Still, children should have at least a little time in the day for them to pursue an activity they are especially interested in. For example, some children may desire to read a book, while others may want to take a nap.

Caregivers in early childhood centers also need good problem resolution skills. It is their responsibility to help children understand the concepts of sharing and to step in quickly when physical or verbal disputes break out. Each of the children involved should always be given the chance to explain what happened.

Early childhood centers or preschools are operated by many different institutions and organizations, including:

- › Public schools
- › Private and independent schools
- › Child care or day care centers with a preschool curriculum
- › Churches
- › Nonprofit groups
- › Private companies and franchise chains
- › Federal or state Head Start programs

Licensing

Whatever your child's age, here are some questions you will want to ask the staff or director of a care center you are evaluating. Is the center licensed by the state? Ask to see a copy of the license and note the expiration date. Check to see how many children the facility is licensed to care for and compare it to the number of children receiving care.

- › When was the last state inspection conducted? Ask to see a copy of the inspection report and note any problems that were detected and how they were corrected.
- › Have any complaints been filed against the center? If so, what were they and how were they resolved?

If the center's staff cannot provide the answers you are looking for, remember that licensed child care facilities should have a file at the state licensing authority. Although the exact contents of the file may vary from state to state, the file should contain the center's licensing history, the number

of children it is allowed to care for and information on past inspections and complaints. Contact the licensing authority for information on how to obtain access to the center's licensing file.

Keep in mind that licensing requirements vary from state to state and at best are only the minimum standards day care operators are required to meet. You may also want to find out if the center you are considering is accredited by one of the national child care organizations. Both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child care (NAFCC) accredit programs that meet high quality standards. You will find information on how to contact these organizations in the Additional References at the end of this chapter.

The waiting list dilemma

You have diligently examined all your day care choices, and now you are ready to make a decision about where you will send your child. Your first choice meets all your criteria: great programs, outstanding caregivers and a cost you can afford. Unfortunately, it has also reached its maximum capacity, and there is a waiting list for new enrollments. Should you wait it out?

The answer depends on a number of factors you need to consider. For example:

1. What will you do during the waiting period? Do you have a family member or neighbor who would be willing to care for your child on an interim basis?
2. Is there a large gap between the center with the waiting list and your second choice, or are they relatively close in quality?
3. How long does the center expect that you will need to wait before being able to enroll your child in their program?

If the waiting period is not a long one and the center's quality of care is far superior to that of the second choice, you may want to get your child's name on the list and take advantage of any short-term solutions that are available to you. But if there is a long wait ahead, the unhappy truth is that you may have to settle for second best, at least until there is an opening at the other center.

Before settling for second best, however, you may want to consider a couple of other child care options. In the next two chapters, we will look at family care centers and in-home child care for your child. Either one may provide the high quality of care you want your child to have in a slightly different setting. Do not forget to go to the Appendix to find checklists to help you evaluate the day care centers you visit. Use a new checklist to record your general impressions about each facility, its staff and the programs it offers.

Additional references

Finding good day care

For more information on finding good family day care, contact:

- › GuidanceResources for a list of family day care centers in your area
www.guidanceresources.com

Early childhood centers

For more information about the qualifications of effective preschool educators, see

- › “Teaching Our Youngest,” a document by the Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force, a joint effort of the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services
www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/page_pg9.html

Licensing

For more information about licensing and accreditation of day care, contact:

- › National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
www.naeyc.org
- › National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
www.nafcc.org

Chapter 3: Family Care Centers

Family care is an arrangement in which your child is cared for in someone else's home. In many cases, the caregiver is a mother who has decided to stay at home to be with her own children and is willing to care for someone else's children as well (most family care providers are women, so that is how we will refer to them in this chapter).

Family care centers come in a number of shapes and sizes. Some may include children who vary widely in age, while others only admit children in a very narrow age range. The qualifications of caregivers can also vary, from schoolteachers staying home to raise a child, to an older person who has finished raising her own family and wants to use her experience to help others, to very young mothers who have little experience in caring for children. A family care provider may have programs for the children she cares for that rival those of the most exclusive and expensive daycare centers, or she may do nothing more than include the children she cares for in the daily routine of her own family.

Pros and cons of family care

Like other kinds of child care arrangements, family care has its advantages and disadvantages.

On the positive side, family care:

- › May provide a more comfortable home-like setting for your child than a day care center
- › May care for fewer children and offer more personalized attention for your child
- › May be more flexible about the hours in which care is provided
- › May be able to offer after-school care for an older child as well as full-day care for younger ones
- › May be less expensive than a commercially-operated day care center or in-home care provider
- › May be licensed or regulated by the state

As far as the disadvantages of family care are concerned, a family care provider:

- › May not have the training or experience you require for your child
- › May not have the kinds of toys, books and educational materials you want your child to have access to
- › May not give your child as much attention as he or she needs, either because she puts her own children first or has too many children to care for
- › May not have a backup plan available to arrange for your child's care if she or one of her own children is sick

When searching for child care, it is important to understand the differences between family day care and day care centers

Family care providers care for children in the provider's own home. This type of arrangement offers a friendly and comfortable home-like environment for your child. Children are able to socialize and interact with several other children, who range in age from infants and toddlers up to school age.

In a family day care setting, one or more adults provide care for a group of children. The number of children that the provider can care for is determined by your state's licensing organization. Licensing requirements will also include health, safety and nutrition standards.

In contrast, day care centers may include preschools, nursery schools, drop-in centers and Head Start programs. This type of care is outside of the home and is structured as a school-type program, in which the children are grouped by age or developmental stages.

In a center your child may be exposed to a number of care providers. Each state has different rules and regulations for the licensing of child care facilities that include safety, health and caregiver training standards. In addition, centers are inspected on a yearly basis.

Ultimately, it is up to the parents and the child to decide which care option is best for their needs. Good quality care can be found with both family day care providers and day care centers. Which option is best for your child will depend on the specific needs of your family.

Finding quality family care

Finding a family care provider is much like finding a day care center. Your first step should be to talk with family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers for recommendations of family care providers they have used. You can also check bulletin boards at the grocery store, community center, your church or synagogue or local universities and community colleges for ads posted by family care providers. Do not forget to post your own notices at these locations, but be careful not to provide too much identifying information, such as your home address. You might also consider placing an advertisement in the classified section of your local newspaper.

Let your pediatrician or family doctor know that you are looking for day care. He or she may know of a family care provider that other patients use and are happy with.

Initial telephone interview

Once you have obtained the names of some family care providers, you will want to conduct an initial telephone interview. The Family Care Telephone Interview Form in the Appendix will help you structure your conversation to take notes and to schedule a visit to the provider's home.

Keep in mind that you will probably be talking to the family care provider while she has children in her home, so it may not be possible to conduct a really thorough interview over the telephone. However, you should be able to get enough information and a sense of the caregiver's personality to determine whether or not it is worth scheduling a visit to her home.

Parent-to-parent: "I called a family care provider to schedule a visit. While we were talking, I could hear a little one crying in the background and I asked her if she would like me to call back later. 'Oh, that is all right,' she said, 'sometimes kids just need to cry themselves out.' Needless to say, I cut our conversation short and decided to keep looking for someone a little more sensitive to take care of my son."

Making a home visit

No matter how well a caregiver sounds during your telephone interview, you will want to make one or more visits to her home before making a decision. You will want to take a look at the following:

- › Cleanliness and condition of the home
- › Food storage, laundry facilities and sleeping arrangements
- › Animals in the home
- › Size and location of the space devoted to child care
- › Safety equipment like smoke detectors and fire extinguishers
- › Multiple exit routes in case of a fire or other emergency
- › Childproofing, including outlet covers and safety guards on stairs and windows
- › Toys and other materials that are clean, well maintained and age appropriate
- › Kitchen and bathroom sanitation
- › Locks on medicine and kitchen storage cabinets
- › Outdoor play facilities, such as swings and sand boxes
- › Daily visitors

Your visit will also give you an opportunity to see how the caregiver interacts with the children in her home, as well as how they respond to her. It is important the children appear at ease with the caregiver and find her approachable when her attention is needed.

The caregiver should be comfortable with the children, be consistent in administering discipline that is in line with your philosophy, and be responsive to their needs. Be wary of caregivers who make children wait for long periods of time before answering their questions or reacting to a dispute.

Think about your child's age and personality as you observe the range of activities in the caregiver's home. If your son is quiet and shy, will he be comfortable in a setting where there is a lot of noise and physical activity? If your two-year-old is in the middle of toilet training, how does the caregiver deal with children at the same stage of development? A good caregiver will be patient and encourage potty training success. A quality caregiver should never punish or scold a child who has an accident.

Do not be afraid to ask specific questions to learn how the caregiver feels about child care issues that are important to you. For example, if your child is just an infant, you may want to know how the caregiver feels about picking babies up and holding them when they cry. Some care providers believe it is important to spend a lot of time cuddling and comforting a crying infant, while others may believe that doing so will spoil the child. Either way, what is important is that you find a caregiver who thinks along the same lines as you do.

The Family Care Checklist in the Appendix will help you evaluate these and other child care issues you may want to discuss with the family care provider during your visit.

Most experts agree that it is best not to take your child along on every visit you make to potential family care providers. They suggest that you wait until you have narrowed your search to one or two homes and then arrange another visit accompanied by your child. At that point, you will want to introduce your child to the caregiver and then step back to see how the two of them get along. You can also use this visit to see how your child interacts with the other children in the caregiver's home.

Remember that no matter how well you and the caregiver get along, your child will be the one spending his or her time in the caregiver's home. If your child is not happy with the caregiver, there is very little chance you will be either.

Checking references, licenses and backgrounds

No matter how satisfied you feel after your visit to a family care home, you will want to check the client references the caregiver provides. Ask how long the child has been cared for in the provider's home, and find out how the child feels about the care provider. You will also want to ask about their relationship with the caregiver. Remember to specifically ask if there have been any problems and the way in which those problems were resolved.

Be sure to review the information on background checks for child care providers in Chapter One and refer to the Checklist for Interviewing References in the Appendix.

Are family day care providers licensed and regulated?

Each state handles the licensing and regulation of family day care providers in a different fashion. Some states require providers to be licensed (which entails visitation and inspection from the state agency, as well as compliance with state regulations on how to care for children), while others only require that the provider mail in a self-certification form or register as an official place of business. And in some states certain family care homes are not even required to be licensed. For example, some states only require licensing when a caregiver is taking care of a specified number of children or providing care to children from more than one family.

Remember, however, that looking for a licensed home will make your job easier. If a family care home you are considering is licensed by your state (sometimes referred to as certified or registered), you can contact the licensing agency to find out if the home is in good standing. Ask if there have been any recent inspections and if any problems were uncovered. Also ask the licensing agency if it has received any complaints about the home. The agency should be able to tell you the nature and resolution of any complaints or problems.

A family care provider should meet the following minimum requirements, according to the National Association for Family Day Care (NAFDC):

- › *Be at least 21 years old*
- › *Have a current good health assessment*
- › *Have a high school diploma or GED and at least 90 clock hours of relevant training or a current Child Development Associate credential (CDA)*
- › *Have at least 18 months experience in family child care, regulated at the state's highest available level (12 months if participating in an intensive training program)*
- › *Offer care and education to children in a home, spending at least 80 percent of the time with the children*

State licensing agencies usually conduct background checks on family care providers, as well as on other adults living in the home. If the home you are considering is not licensed, you may consider paying for a background check. A growing number of companies conduct these types of checks for individuals. These investigations not only verify the applicant's name and address but also provide information about her motor vehicle record, any criminal record, and her financial history. You can find the names of companies that conduct background investigations on the Internet or in the Yellow Pages of your telephone directory under "Investigators." Your state's Department of Human Services may also be able to help you obtain information regarding a child care provider's background. In some instances a background check may require the provider's permission.

Agreement to provide care

Once you have decided on a child care provider, you may want to document your agreement. While many family care arrangements are rather informal, a written agreement with your chosen caregiver will likely result in fewer misunderstandings.

Many caregivers have a letter of agreement or a printed form that covers the basics of your arrangement. If your caregiver does not use a written agreement, you may want to provide your own written agreement. Be sure that any written agreement includes:

- › The caregiver's name and Social Security number, which you will need in order to claim the Child and Dependent Care Credit when you file your federal and state income tax returns
- › The specific days and hours when your child will be in the family care home
- › The amount you will pay and terms of payment
- › The care provider's policy concerning caring for your child overtime and overtime charges
- › Any special meal or care arrangements your child may require
- › How holidays, vacations and sick days are handled and whether you will be required to pay for times when your child is not in attendance
- › Procedures to be followed when the caregiver is unable to care for your child; you will need to know who provides backup care and where it is provided (remember to visit the backup caregiver before signing an agreement with a family care provider)
- › An emergency plan in the event your caregiver must leave suddenly; you will need to know who will care for your child in an emergency situation
- › How much notice you will need to provide before taking your child out of the program and how much notice the caregiver must provide if she decides to stop providing child care

You will also want to make sure that the caregiver has up-to-date information about your child's health, including any allergies he or she may have, current immunizations or any medications he or she is taking. You will also want to give the caretaker all the information, including permission to seek care, she may need in case of an emergency. Emergency information should include the name of your child's doctor, the hospital with which the doctor is affiliated and additional contact numbers.

Once your child is enrolled in the family care program, you will want to carefully observe his or her behavior and reactions when you are together. If you see potential problems arising, such as fearfulness or aggressive actions in your child, be sure to immediately discuss your observations with the caregiver. It may also be worthwhile to spend some time at the family care home to see how your child is interacting with the caregiver and is relating to the other children in the home. It is always best to deal with difficulties sooner rather than later.

Additional references

Finding family day care

For more information on finding good family day care, contact:

- › Guidance Resources for a list of family day care centers in your area
www.guidanceresources.com

Licensing

For more information about licensing and accreditation of day care, contact:

- › National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
www.naeyc.org
- › National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
www.nafcc.org

Contracts or agreements

For more information about contracts or agreements with child care providers, contact:

- › University of Minnesota, *Understanding Child Care Contracts and Rules*
www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/00160.html
- › National Network for Child Care, *Contracts with Parents*
www.nncc.org/Families/fdc14_contracts.parents.html
- › Child Care Law Center
www.childcarelaw.org

Chapter 4: In-home Child Care

Hiring an in-home care provider for your child means establishing an employer-employee relationship. You are also establishing what will hopefully be a long-term personal relationship.

In-home care providers go by many names. They may be called babysitters, au pairs, nannies, live-in caregivers or housekeepers. To some extent, what a caregiver calls herself (most in-home care providers are women, so that is how we will refer to them in this chapter) is an indication of the way she views herself in relationship to your child. A housekeeper may be more interested in cooking and cleaning than in spending time with your children, while a nanny may see herself as a kind of substitute parent for your child.

Experience and education levels also vary widely among in-home care providers. While there are people with little formal training in this area of child care, many other in-home caregivers have taken classes in caring for children. Some may even have degrees in early childhood development or education.

Types of in-home caregivers

If, after assessing your needs for child care, you decide that you would prefer an in-home caregiver, you have several options.

Babysitter

While a traditional child care provider is a professional who watches children on a fixed schedule as their means of employment, babysitters are often responsible teenagers and/or adults who provide short-term supervision for children, often at irregularly scheduled time intervals. Even though babysitters provide short-term care, you should not be any less thorough in your screening and interviewing of potential babysitter candidates.

The following are some factors to consider when choosing a potential babysitter for your child or children:

- › How often will you need a sitter? Are you looking for a person to watch your child for two hours after school one or two days a week, or do you need a regular daily sitter? Let potential sitters know what kind of time commitment you need.
- › Are you looking for an older adult, or would you be comfortable with a teenage babysitter? If you have a young baby, you might prefer an older sitter, while a responsible teenager might be

- right for school-aged children. If you select a teenager, does he or she have a curfew or days and times when he or she is not available because of prior, regularly-scheduled commitments?
- › How much are you willing to spend? By talking with other parents in the community, you can get an idea of the current rates babysitters are charging in your neighborhood.
 - › Does the candidate live nearby? You might feel more comfortable hiring a teenager to look after your children if he or she lives down the block so that in the case of an emergency the sitter could quickly contact his or her own family as well as authorities or emergency personnel.

Au pair or nanny

Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, au pairs and nannies are not the same. Generally, au pairs are fulltime, live-in, English-speaking foreign nationals from around the world taking part in a government-sponsored cultural exchange program. Au pairs are usually between the ages of 18 and 25 and have at least some previous experience working with children. They agree to provide up to 45 hours per week in child care for a one-year period in exchange for a weekly stipend, housing and the opportunity to take classes while in the United States. Your state's Department of Human Services should be able to provide you with information about government-approved au pair programs available in your community.

Au pairs may look after infants and toddlers, as well as school age children. Their duties include waking the children, dressing, bathing, drop-off/pick-up from school and also housekeeping accompanying child care, such as cleaning up the kitchen after the children eat. Au pairs are regulated by an au pair agency such as Au Pair in America (a program designated by the U.S. government) or EF Au Pair. The application fee may range from a few hundred dollars; and the program fee can range from a few thousand dollars for screening, recruitment and training, as well as air fare and travel expenses.

Nannies may have no formal training, or they may have received extensive training at a nanny school or a college degree in early childhood education. Most are first aid and CPR certified. While there are not any legal requirements that need to be met in order to certify a caregiver as a nanny, many schools follow the requirements set out by the American Council of Nanny Schools. This program includes classroom instruction on child development, safety and first aid, family dynamics and nutrition. They may also be required to complete a program that includes working with children in a volunteer capacity.

The duties of nannies also may include light housekeeping accompanying child care. Full-time nannies receive a weekly salary that varies depending on whether they are live-in or live-out. If you search for a nanny through a nanny agency, you will need to pay a finder's fee if you hire through that agency. Finder's fees vary from agency to agency and can range from the caregiver's one week salary to a few thousand dollars. You will want to ask the same questions of an au pair or nanny program as you would ask of an employment agency.

Live-in caregiver

For some parents, especially those whose work requires unusual hours or a lot of travel, hiring a "live-in" child care provider can be a good option. Some of the benefits of having a live-in child care provider include:

- › No concerns about whether your care provider will show up on time or if you will make it home from work on schedule
- › No alternative arrangements when you work late or spend an evening out
- › Increased stability and continuity of care for your child
- › More relaxed communication about your child with the caregiver than spending a few hurried minutes at the door in the morning or evening.

On the other hand, having a live-in child care provider can have its drawbacks, including:

- › Sacrificing some of your privacy
- › Learning to deal with the live-in's own personality quirks and habits
- › Rearranging or even remodeling your living quarters to make room for the child care provider
- › Taking on the cost of the caregiver's salary in addition to the living quarters you provide; you will still need to pay your caregiver a competitive wage along with room and board
- › Complying with legal requirements, including paying benefits, taxes and Social Security contributions

Determining the caregiver's responsibilities

Before beginning your search for someone to provide whichever in-home care you have selected, you should think carefully about the responsibilities you want her to take on and the qualifications you want her to have. You will want to consider:

- › Whether you want the caregiver to take on household tasks like cleaning, shopping and cooking in addition to caring for your child
- › Whether the caregiver will be responsible for caring for family pets

- › Whether the caregiver will need to drive
- › Whether she will need to use her own car or use one of your family's vehicles
- › Whether the caregiver has education or previous experience in child care
- › Whether the caregiver will have adequate language skills so she can read to your preschooler, help an older child with homework and communicate about your children's needs with them and with you

In addition, you will want to consider the kinds of personal traits and habits an in-home caregiver may have. Do you want a caregiver who is calm and nurturing, one who is a disciplinarian or one who is very active? Today, most parents want a caregiver who does not smoke. If that is important to you, you will need to ask a potential caregiver about it before you hire her. Similarly, if you tend to be a bit compulsive about neatness, you will want to avoid hiring a caregiver who is not as interested as you are in keeping your home tidy.

Think about the ways in which you discipline your children. You will want to find a caregiver whose philosophy on the subject is compatible with your own. If your family tends to be loud and boisterous, hiring a caregiver who prefers a quiet household could be a mistake for you and for her.

You will also want to consider whether you need someone to work full-time or only on a part-time basis. If you have an infant or toddler that needs care, having a full-time caregiver may be important. On the other hand, if your children are already in school, you may only need to have someone provide care for the hours between the end of the school day and your return from work. In other cases, however, you may want to consider having a full-time, live-in caregiver for your child.

Finding in-home care

Parents find in-home care providers using a variety of methods. Some use employment agencies that specialize in representing in-home care providers. Others contact nanny schools or au pair programs. Some advertise in their local newspapers or post notices on bulletin boards at local universities or community colleges, grocery stores, their church or synagogue or community centers. Do not forget to post your own notices at these locations, but be careful not to provide too much identifying information, such as your home address.

Looking for a babysitter

There are a number of places where you can get leads, tips and recommendations for potential babysitters:

- › Ask your friends, neighbors and relatives if they can recommend a babysitter. Talking with people you know and trust is a great way to find somebody. They can tell you about their experiences and answer many of your questions about the sitter's skills, abilities and character.
- › Local schools may have job placement programs. Many high school students and, to a lesser extent, junior high students work as babysitters. Even some local colleges have placement programs for students seeking occasional work.
- › Youth groups and clubs are potential babysitter pools. The Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, YWCA, YMCA, 4-H Club and religious youth groups all might recommend candidates. Many of these organizations may also have provided the teenagers with basic safety and first aid training as part of their membership, which could make them more appealing candidates than other teenagers.
- › The local chapter of the Red Cross may offer babysitter training courses. Ask the instructor for recommendations of students in the class.
- › Day care workers may moonlight as babysitters. If you take your child to day care, perhaps one of the employees at the facility works as a sitter at night for extra money, or he or she can provide recommendations of other qualified sitters in the area.
- › Senior citizen centers are an option. Many responsible seniors have the time and expertise necessary to watch children and could benefit from the extra money and personal interaction with the children.

Once you have found one good sitter you should still continue checking out other candidates. A time will arise when you need a babysitter but your first choice is busy. In these instances it is better to fall back on a person you have already met than to hire somebody you do not know or to have to cancel your plans.

Using an employment agency

While employment agencies that place in-home care providers can be found in many communities around the country, not all of them are equal in quality. Some agencies specialize in representing caregivers, while others may work with other kinds of employees. If you are thinking about working with an agency to locate a caregiver for your child, here are some points to consider:

- › Does the agency recruit and screen the caregivers it represents?
- › What kinds of references does the agency require?

- › Does the agency conduct a background check, including driving records, on its caregiver clients?
- › What fees will you be charged if you hire a caregiver the agency represents?
- › Can you get a full or partial refund of fees if the relationship does not work out?
- › Will the agency provide a replacement caregiver at no cost if the first one is unsatisfactory?
- › Is the agency considered the caregiver's employer, or will you hire her directly?

You should also get the names of at least three references who have used the agency's services. Do not hesitate to follow up with these references to find out how satisfied they are with the agency and the quality of the caregivers it provides.

Advertising on your own

If you decide to advertise the position, you should be as explicit as possible when stating your requirements. Be sure to state the ages of your children, the hours you need care and the qualifications you are looking for in a caregiver. Never provide your exact address or your child's name, however. You may also want to limit the hours in which you will take calls from applicants.

Chances are you will receive many calls in response to your advertising efforts. Screening calls through voice mail or an answering machine can help minimize the hours you spend on the phone talking to potential caregivers. You can then return calls to applicants you want to speak to on your own schedule.

The interviewing process

You will begin the interviewing process when you return applicants' calls.

Initial telephone interview

During this first interview, you will want to be prepared to record your impressions of your conversation and make note of any in-person interviews you schedule. Be sure to ask:

- › If the applicant is available for the hours and days when your child needs care
- › If she has a salary range in mind; you can quickly eliminate candidates who are out of your price range
- › What previous experience she has as a caregiver, especially with children close in age to yours
- › Why she left her previous position

- › Why she likes caring for children
- › The names and telephone numbers of at least two (and preferably three) references and their relationship to her; ideally, they should be former employers

Using the In-home Caregiver Telephone Interview Checklist in the Appendix allows you to organize your notes and document your general impressions of the applicant. Does she sound enthusiastic about the prospects of working with your children? Does she have the experience and education you want? Do you sense that her personality will be compatible with yours and your child's?

If the initial telephone interview goes well, you can schedule a meeting at the end of the call and make a record of it right on the checklist.

Interviewing in person

You will want to consider scheduling interviews with a caregiver when your children will be around. This will allow you to get a good look at how she interacts with your children. See if the caregiver is able to establish rapport with your child by responding appropriately to the child's actions or verbal cues. You will also want to pay attention to how your child reacts to her. You might hire her for a few hours while you do some chores around the house so you can be there and observe her methods and attentiveness. You can also leave your child or children alone with the caregiver in the house while you do things outside to see how the kids react with you gone.

If the caregiver is a teenager, observing his or her actions may give you an idea of the caregiver's maturity and responsibility levels. After the test run is over, you can ask your children what they thought of the caregiver. If your kids have questions or problems, it is good to address them right away before the relationship gets too far along.

During the interview you should explain to the caregiver what your house rules are and if there are tasks you expect them to do. These could include rules about television watching, food preparation, what the kids can do, where they can go and what time they should go to bed. Be clear about whether or not the sitter and child can leave the home and who can come to visit.

While many parents are more comfortable using a predetermined list of questions, do not allow yourself to get bogged down by them. You may find yourself following a statement the applicant makes down an entirely different path than the one you thought you would follow. A good interview will include plenty of give-and-take between parent and caregiver.

It is also a good idea to pay attention to the kinds of questions the applicant asks of you as well as her answers to your questions. Someone who is interested in caring for children will want to know about their likes and dislikes, their schedules and their personalities. You may want to shy away from hiring someone whose only questions are about payday schedules and how much time off she will get.

Generally, it is best not to make an immediate offer at the conclusion of an interview, no matter how great you feel about the applicant. If you scheduled more than one interview, you should take the time to honor your commitment to the other applicants. One of them may be even more qualified to care for your child. You should also take the time to speak with your child about his or her reaction to the applicant. If your spouse or partner did not participate in the first interview, you may want to schedule another appointment so they can meet. You will also want to take the time to investigate the applicant's background just to make sure there are not any hidden problems that need to be handled before you make an offer.

Checking references and background checks

No matter what method you use to locate potential child care providers, it is a good idea to check references from former employers. When you call the references the applicant has given you, you will want to ask the following questions:

- › How long did the applicant work for you?
- › How old were the children she was caring for?
- › What were her duties?
- › How comfortable were the children with her?
- › Was she reliable?
- › What was your relationship with her like? Did you get along well, or were there unresolved conflicts?
- › Why did the relationship with the caregiver end?

It is important to listen to what the references tell you, but it is just as important to pay attention to the way they talk about the applicant you are considering. You can often tell by the tone of voice a reference uses if he or she is being straightforward in answering the questions you ask. Make notes during these conversations about issues that come up that you may want to discuss with the applicant when you interview her.

Be sure to review the information on references and background checks for child care providers in Chapter One on p. 8 and refer to the Checklist for Interviewing References in the Appendix.

A number of agencies now conduct background checks on individuals. These investigations can verify the applicant's name and address and provide information about her motor vehicle record, any criminal record and her financial history. There is a fee for these investigations but it is a small price to pay for the peace of mind they can provide. Remember, you will need to get your applicant's written permission to look at some of her records. According to the Federal Trade Commission, before you can get a consumer report for employment purposes you must notify the individual in writing—in a document consisting solely of this notice—that a report may be used. You also must get the person's written authorization before you ask a credit reporting agency for the report. If the investigator takes a look at public records, however, no permission is required.

You can find the names of companies that conduct background investigations on the Internet or in your local Yellow Pages under "Investigators." Your state's Department of Human Services may also be able to assist you with checking the background of a child care provider.

Hiring the caregiver

You have checked the references, finished your interviews, conducted a background investigation and decided on the caregiver you want to hire. You and the caregiver have agreed on her hours of work, salary, benefits, time off and all the other details regarding her employment. Now it is time to make sure you are complying with federal and state employment laws.

Legal requirements

Before you actually hire your in-home care provider, you will need to confirm that she is legally authorized to work in the United States. Generally that means she will either have to be a citizen of the U.S., or a legal immigrant with the appropriate work authorization. In order to comply with federal law, you must have the applicant fill out the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's Form 1-9, Employment Eligibility Verification. To obtain a copy of Form 1-9, visit the CIS website, www.uscis.gov.

Both you and the applicant must complete and sign this form. You must also see actual proof that your caregiver is authorized to work in the U.S. See Form 1-9 for a complete list of the documents that are considered to be acceptable proof. These documents include but are not limited to:

- › A United States passport or passport card
- › A permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form 1-551)
- › A Social Security card
- › Employment Authorization Document that contains a photograph
- › U.S. military or draft card

In addition, you will also want to see a picture ID, such as a driver's license, student identification card or state identification card. Be sure to make and keep a photocopy of the identification the applicant presents.

As an employer, you now have plenty of other legal obligations to meet. Depending on the wages you pay your child care provider, you may have to obtain a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) to make contributions to her Social Security and Medicare accounts under the Federal Insurance Contribution Act or FICA. If you do, you will be required to provide her with a W-2 Form by January 31st each year, showing her earnings and the FICA contributions made to her account. You may also have to pay federal unemployment taxes. Call the Internal Revenue Service at 800.829.1040 or visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov to find out which forms you will need to complete.

You may also be required to pay state unemployment tax and purchase workers' compensation insurance, depending on the state in which you live. Contact your state's tax department for more specific information.

Employment agreement

Should you have a written employment agreement with your new in-home care provider? It is always a good idea to have a simple letter of agreement setting out the responsibilities each of you has agreed to.

The sample agreement/contract letter for an in-home caregiver in the Appendix will provide an outline to follow, but you should think about meeting with an attorney to be sure your agreement complies with current federal and state law.

A nanny contract can be thought of as an employment contract between a nanny and a family. Although the contract may be hard to enforce in a court of law, it can be helpful in establishing expectations for both the nanny and the family. The nanny contract can help to reduce misunderstandings regarding the nanny's responsibilities and the family's expectations.

If you are considering hiring a nanny, you may want to sit down and create a nanny contract. The main considerations in creating this type of contract are to be specific and to set clear expectations. This way, the contract can also serve as an evaluation tool when it comes time to review the nanny's performance.

The following areas should be covered in the contract:

- › General responsibilities. A nanny will generally be responsible for child care as well as everyday chores that are related to the children, such as light cleaning, laundry and meal preparation. These duties should be clearly stated in the contract. For example, if you would like the nanny to do laundry once a week on Thursdays, you should include this in the contract. Also, if you expect the nanny to perform more extended duties, such as grocery shopping or other household chores, the contract should contain this information. The contract should also specify if the nanny will use your car or his or her own with a mileage allowance.
- › Employment terms. The contract should clearly define the length of the nanny's service, when employment begins and when a review will be held as well as defining the grounds for termination or other disciplinary action.
- › Compensation. This includes the nanny's hourly or weekly rate as well as the frequency and method of payment. The contract should also include information about working hours and time off, such as holidays and sick days.
- › Benefits. If you will be providing additional benefits, such as health insurance, include details about these benefits in the contract.
- › Household rules. This section is especially important if you are hiring a live-in nanny. It will include policies about telephone use, guests and any other rules that are in place.
- › Emergency information. The contract should detail what you expect the nanny to do in an emergency situation. This section should also include emergency contact information for you, neighbors, relatives and nearby hospitals or clinics. Include emergency contact for the nanny as well (cell phone number, for example) and indicate that this information has been given to neighbors and relatives.

After drafting the contract, you should read through it with the nanny and make any changes that are necessary. Once it is final, you and the nanny should sign all pages of the contract. If you agree to any changes once the contract has been signed, you should both initial those changes.

Before hiring someone to work in your home, review your household insurance policy to see if and what kind of coverage you have if an employee is injured on the job.

Working with your in-home caregiver

You have crossed the “t’s” and dotted the “i’s”, and now it is time for your caregiver to start work. You will want to make sure that she knows how to use your home’s appliances and electronic devices, its heating and cooling system and any security system you may have. Show her the circuit breaker or fuse box. Plan to provide the caregiver with detailed instructions about the escape route to follow in case of a fire. You will also want to make sure the caregiver has clearly written guidelines to follow on matters such as your child’s schedule, how much time your child may spend watching television or being on the Internet and what kinds of snacks you approve. Include permission for your child to visit friends or go to the park or playground alone. Be extremely explicit about disciplinary issues; if you do not believe in corporal punishment, be sure to say so.

If you can arrange it, have your care provider start working when you have some time off from your own job. That way you can be there to observe her interaction with your child as well as help her become familiar with your home and your child’s daily routine. It would also help your child get used to having the caregiver around and “in charge” when you are home.

Your in-home care provider needs to be able to get in touch with you or your spouse and your child’s doctor as soon as possible in case of an emergency. You will want to complete an emergency and consent form and post it near every telephone. The caregiver should also have a copy in her possession when she takes your child out to play or to run errands. Use the Emergency Information and Consent Form in the Appendix.

Make sure your caregiver carries a cell phone whenever she and your children are away from your home phone. If you provide the cell phone, also provide your rules for using it. While cell phones make it easier to keep in touch with your child’s caregiver, there still may be times when you cannot be reached. If you know you are going to be unavailable, set up a time when you can call in to check up on your child’s day.

As time goes on, you will want to continue evaluating your caregiver's performance.

- › Does she arrive on time, or is she consistently late?
- › How does your child respond to her, and how does she interact with your child?
- › Is she fulfilling the responsibilities she agreed to in your employment letter?
- › Has the caregiver obeyed your house rules?
- › Does the caregiver check in with you at the times you specified?
- › Does the caregiver display good common sense with the children?
- › Do you still have a good "gut instinct" about the caregiver?

While you can probably learn some of this by observing her before you leave for work or when you return home, do not be afraid to come home early on occasion to check up on how things are going. If you call home while out, how does the sitter sound when she answers the phone? Can you hear the children in the background playing or are they crying about something? You can also ask a relative, friend or neighbor to stop by during the day to check on everything and keep you informed.

You will also want to be sure to keep your in-home care provider up to date on your child's development and any problems that he or she may be experiencing, such as toilet-training problems or difficulties at school. Doing so can help keep the relationship between you, the caregiver and your child running smoothly.

Additional references

For more information about finding good in-home child care, contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com

Au pairs and nannies

For more information, contact:

- › EFAu Pair
www.culturalcareaupair.com
- › Au Pair in America
www.aupairinamerica.com
- › International Nanny Association
www.nanny.org
- › Nannies4Hire
www.nannies4hire.com
- › Sitter City
www.sittercity.com
- › Citizenship and Immigration Service
www.uscis.gov

Tax requirements for in-home employees

For more information, contact:

- › U.S. Internal Revenue Service
www.irs.gov or 800.829.1040
www.irs.gov/Spanish in Spanish
www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc756.html
- › Employment Taxes for Household Employees
www.irs.gov/publications/p926/ar02.html#en_US_publiu00086722
- › International Nanny Association
www.nanny.org/tax-information

Federal laws concerning background checks

For more information, contact:

- › Federal Trade Commission
www.ftc.gov

Legal assistance

For more information, Contact:

- › Legal Services Corporation
www.lsc.gov
- › Child Care Law Center
www.childcarelaw.org

Chapter 5: Special Circumstances

No matter how carefully you set up day care for your children, sooner or later you will probably encounter some sort of scheduling or coverage problem: before or after school care; summer, winter and spring school breaks; snow days; early dismissal days; school holidays; sick days. And these are the situations you can anticipate. What if the school furnace breaks down or storm damage prevents the school buses from making their rounds? What about an unanticipated teacher strike? Or what if your own work schedule changes requiring a change in your child care arrangements?

Night care

Night care refers to child care during nontraditional hours in the evening or overnight after 7:00 p.m. and through the night. As employment patterns change, many parents are finding that available jobs may mean shift work and that they need night care instead of day care for their children.

Only a few years ago you probably would have had to rely on family members or close neighbors to help you if you worked during nontraditional hours. Many parents were even forced to piece together several night-care arrangements to cover the entire time they were at work. Now however, many child care facilities, such as child care centers, small family child care centers and large group family child care homes, offer night care. The need and the number of facilities have grown to the point that many states now license and regulate these centers.

Child Care Aware offers information about child care and nontraditional work schedules (www.childcareaware.org).

Finding an after-school care program

What can parents do to keep their children entertained and supervised in the hours following a typical school day? After-school care is one answer. The following offers information on after-school care: the types of programs, the average costs, what to look for in a program and alternative care options.

Types of after-school programs

Depending on your child's age and needs, there are a variety of after-school programs from which to choose. Availability and cost will depend on your location and specific needs. Most afterschool Care programs fall into one of the following categories:

- › Community programs; typically these are operated by religious organizations, recreation centers, youth organizations or local communities

- › School programs; some public and private schools provide after-school care for attending students as well as local children; this type of program is sometimes referred to as extended day care
- › Child care center programs; child care centers providing services during the day for children too young for school will often expand their services in the afternoon to accommodate school-age children as well
- › Special-needs programs; these programs, often set in specialized locations, cater to children with disabilities or special needs

No matter what type of care you need, your local public school and PTA and your employee-assistance program (EAP) can help you with your after-school care search. If your child has special needs, contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) at 800.695.0285 www.nichcy.org.

What to look for in an after-school program

All after-school programs should offer the following:

- › Adult supervision. Make sure your child is supervised for safety reasons. Also verify that at least some of the staff has educational credentials.
- › A safe environment. The program should always meet your child's physical and emotional needs. This may require a low child-to-adult ratio, quiet rooms, attendance check-in or a strict no-bullying policy. Above all, caregivers should always account for your child's presence and safety. Caregivers should not dismiss a child to anyone who does not have prior permission on file.
- › Play space. This is after school, not an extension of school. Be sure there are indoor and outdoor play areas, places to nap, quiet spaces to do homework and areas for your child to interact with other children.
- › Organized play. Your care provider should encourage physical activity but in a supervised, organized setting to prevent accidents. The staff should encourage your child to try new activities and to join in team and group events.
- › Snacks. Children are notoriously hungry after school. A care provider should always have a healthy snack and juice or milk for your child.
- › Entertainment. This means more than television and movies. Ideally, it is entertainment like arts and crafts, word games or group projects that encourages your child to think and be creative. In addition, entertainment should always be age-specific.
- › Opportunity for participation—for you and for your child. A care provider should always make you feel welcome to drop by, announced or unannounced.

Paying for an after-school program

Despite the incredible need for after-school care programs, they remain underfunded and can be costly for some families. However, the cost will depend largely on your location, your child's age and needs, frequency of care and the number of children you are enrolling. Though the fees may seem daunting, there are ways to save on the costs of after-school care:

- › Talk with someone in your human resources department at work about flexible spending plans. If possible, put money into your employee flexible-spending account for child care purposes. Be aware that you must use the entire amount you put in to get the benefits.
- › Claim a tax credit for child care exemptions. This credit will vary according to your income, marital status and other factors. Your accountant can offer additional information.
- › Ask if you can help out at the after-school program in exchange for a price break. If you can spare a few afternoons per month or are willing to help prepare snacks or plan activities, some programs may be willing to waive some of the fees.
- › Be aware of the costs of the little things. If an after-school facility charges for a child's snack, ask if he or she can bring one instead. Some places charge by the minute when you are late picking up your child; if this is inevitable, try to establish a flat fee. If there is an extra fee for certain activities, be sure there are other activities available for your child as an alternative.

For more information about paying for child care, see Chapter Eight.

Alternatives to after-school care

Depending on your needs and your child's likes and dislikes, an after-school program may not be the best choice. Consider these alternatives:

- › Hire a babysitter to watch your children in your home or the sitter's. (See Chapter Four for more information about selecting a babysitter.) To lighten the fee, ask whether neighbors would like their children watched as well.
- › Network with neighbors and friends to establish a rotating schedule of parents who can supervise children after school. If you are only available to supervise on the weekends, that may work with the parents who supervise during the week.
- › If your children are older, a neighbor may need help preparing dinner, mowing the lawn or doing light chores. This is a way for your children to become more independent and learn to enjoy helping others while still in a supervised setting.

- › If your work environment allows it, consider a private service that can pick up your children from school and drop them off at your office. Stress that this is quiet time to do homework, draw or snack while you finish up your work.
- › Ask your company about working flextime so you can adjust your schedule to your child's or your partner's schedule.

Old enough to be home alone?

Many child experts agree that the earliest age a child should be left home alone is 12 years and no younger than 15 if he or she is to care for a younger brother or sister. However, there are many factors parents should consider before assuming that the time is right. It is important first to evaluate your child's confidence and self-reliance, assess your home environment and weigh all the alternatives to leaving your child home alone. Additionally, your local laws may establish the minimum age at which your child can be left home alone. (For information about the age at which your child can stay alone, call Childhelp® at 800.422.4453 to find your local child protection agency.)

Parents should ask their children and themselves these questions when deciding if a child is old enough to be home alone:

- › Does your child feel comfortable? Perhaps the most important factor to consider is your child's own comfort and confidence level.
- › Is your child mature and responsible enough? Mentally, can your child respond to different situations quickly and appropriately? Does your child have enough common sense to keep him- or herself safe, and can he or she make good judgments on the spot? Emotionally, is your child capable of being left alone for long periods without becoming depressed, afraid or frustrated? Also, can your child use his or her time alone constructively and productively? Does he or she have enough self-discipline to follow your limits and boundaries? Will he or she get homework done on time? Will he or she violate your rule of not having friends over? These are all important questions.
- › Is your child able to respond to an emergency? A child home alone must be prepared to react to an emergency like a fire or a self-injury. It is extremely important to teach your child what to do in a crisis and continue to practice safety drills. Show your child where the first aid kit is and how to use it. Practice drills on how and when to use fire extinguishers. Remind your child to call 911 in an emergency and never to open the door to strangers.
- › Is the environment safe? How safe are your home and your neighborhood? Have there been any recent crimes? Are there locks on all the windows and doors and smoke, carbon-monoxide and security alarms in place?

- › Is there someone to whom your child can immediately turn for help? Can you arrange a safe haven with a trustworthy neighbor or nearby resident, to whom your child can go in a crisis? Have your child and this person meet ahead of time and post this adult's phone number and other safety numbers in a visible area near every phone.

Once you have determined that your child is ready to stay home alone, the following suggestions may help you to prepare your child and to feel more comfortable about leaving him or her home alone:

- › Have a trial period. Leave the child home alone for a short time while staying close to home. This is a good way to see how he or she will manage.
- › Role play. Act out possible situations to help your child learn what to do.
- › Establish rules. Make sure your child knows what is (and is not) allowed when you are not home. Some experts suggest making a list of chores or other tasks to keep children busy while you are gone.
- › Check in. Call your child while you are away to see how it's going or have a trusted neighbor or friend check in.
- › Talk about it. Encourage your child to share his or her feelings with you about staying home alone.
- › Do not overdo it. Even a mature, responsible child should not be home alone too much.

When it comes to your child, there is no such thing as trying to be too safe. Review your home-alone rules regularly with your child, and be sensitive to his or her needs and concerns, which can change as your child grows older.

Finding child care for summer and winter breaks

Parents with school-age children often face a dilemma during the winter and summer school breaks when they may have to find day care that they do not need during the regular school year. Those families who do not have live-in help or cannot arrange parental schedules to accommodate school breaks can turn to other options for temporary day care, including:

- › Local schools that use their facilities for day care for a fee
- › Day care centers that offer programs for school-age children during school breaks
- › Parks and recreation centers that provide short-term winter programs or long-term summer programs during the community's school breaks
- › Co-operative arrangements with neighbors who share the cost of hiring one or two caregivers
- › Public libraries that offer reading programs or access to computers

- › Summer school as an enrichment program
- › Relatives as child care providers
- › Summer camp, either day or overnight

During the school year asking relatives to be caregivers is a common occurrence, particularly on those short breaks such as holidays, early dismissal days and snow days. During the summer there are more options for parents, including summer camp. Both of these arrangements, however, need to be explored carefully to be certain you and your child are satisfied with the situation. Be sure to talk with your child about the types of programs he or she would like.

Asking relatives to be caregivers

As perfect as this type of arrangement might appear, there are many problems that could arise, leading to disagreements between relatives and strained relationships. You do not want to create a situation where an argument that arises out of the child care situation ruins a relationship with a family member. By anticipating potential difficulties before you enter into this kind of child care arrangement, you can prevent family feuds down the road.

There are many positive aspects about having a relative provide day care for your child. You already know the person and have a good understanding of his or her personality, character and values. You will feel less stress than if you were leaving your child with somebody you just met. Likewise, your child will know the person caring for them so will be less likely to act out or become emotional when left with the relative.

Nevertheless, before having a relative watch your child, you need to consider:

- › Is your relative capable of providing safe, nurturing day care?
- › Does he or she have experience raising or looking after children?
- › Are his or her child care and discipline beliefs and methods similar to yours?
- › Does your relative have the time to commit to your child?
- › Are you able to communicate well with the relative?
- › If the relative is a grandparent, is he or she healthy enough to deal with the physical demands of watching a young child?

You should also think about the following factors before agreeing to a child care relationship with a relative:

- › Payment. You should have an open and honest discussion with your relative about the issue of payment. Some relatives may be willing to watch your child free of charge, while others may want an hourly wage or daily rate for their service. If your relatives do not want to be paid, you should make a point of doing something nice for them on a regular basis like buying them dinner or giving them a gift certificate to a favorite store.
- › Transportation. Will you be dropping your child off with the relative, will they be picking your child up or will the relative come to your house to watch the child? Does your relative have a car seat that is the appropriate size for your child? Whatever the arrangement is, be sure you agree on it ahead of time.
- › Location. If your child is spending time at your relatives' home, has the house been childproofed or baby proofed? Have they put all sharp, poisonous, dangerous and breakable items out of reach? Do low cabinets and drawers have baby latches? Are electrical outlets covered?
- › Entertainment. Do your relatives have toys and games that are age-appropriate for your child? Do they have movies, cartoons or educational materials that will entertain your child?
- › Food. Do your relatives have appropriate food and snacks for your child?
- › Cribs and playpens. If your child takes a nap, does your relative have a crib or playpen where the child can safely sleep?
- › Medical consent form. Give your relatives a signed medical consent form that will allow them to seek medical treatment for your child in the event of an accident or emergency situation.

Use the Emergency Information and Consent Form in the Appendix.

Making the experience easier

You can make the day care experience easier for your child and the relative providing the care by planning ahead.

Try to establish a daily routine with your child for the days they are going to day care, and encourage your relative to do the same during the day while they are supervising the child.

Children react best to situations they are familiar with, so if the events around them happen in a repetitive fashion (occurring the same way at relatively the same time of day) your child will have an easier time adapting to the new circumstances.

You may want to allow your child to bring one or two favorite toys or a special blanket, doll or stuffed animal along so that there is something familiar to play with and to hold on to while he or she is away from you.

Have a backup day care provider in case your relative is not available to watch your child. Emergencies, days off, unanticipated absences and planned vacations could complicate your child care routine, so having a contingency plan means that these circumstances will not catch you unprepared.

Always talk to your relatives about your child. Ask them how your child is behaving, what they are doing during their time together and if there are any problems. You should also inform your relative about how your child is doing from your perspective. For example, let your relative know if your child was up all night because of teething so the child's subsequent state-of-mind and behavior will not be a complete surprise.

If you and your relative have a disagreement about something, try to talk about it right away. Do not let little problems grow into bigger ones. If both of you are too busy to discuss the problem, make sure you find some quiet time in the near future to sit down together. By allowing both of you to express your feelings and thoughts, you will be more likely to agree on a reasonable solution that satisfies everybody.

Summer camp

Summer camp can provide a fun, friendly environment for your child during the summertime school break. A good camp program features plenty of exciting and creative indoor and outdoor activities that kids enjoy. While your child is busy building social skills, making new friends, playing games and going on fun field trips, you will be comforted in the knowledge that he or she is in the hands of quality caregivers. Many options exist. Take time to search for the right summer camp, and you will have done your best to ensure a good experience for you and your child.

Summer camp options

Camps fall within two main categories: daytime camps and overnight camps. Day camps are, as the name implies, camps that your child can attend during the daytime, usually only on weekdays (either full or half days) over the course of several weeks. Conversely, children attend overnight camp, typically held at a camp complex or resort, for as little as a few days or as long as several months. Child experts warn, however, that children under age 10 usually are not mature enough to adjust to overnight camps and can become homesick easily.

There are also two types of camps within these categories: private and public. Private summer camps are typically offered by private organizations, such as day care centers, churches, private or parochial schools, clubs or even companies. Examples of private summer camps include:

- › Vacation Bible school (also called Bible camp)
- › Boy and Girl Scout summer camps
- › Nature camps (for example, camps that include camping, hiking, fishing, bird watching)
- › Special-interest camps (for example, science camps, art camps, sports camps)

Public summer camps, which can be less expensive, usually are provided by public community groups and nonprofit organizations like the YMCA/YWCA or sponsored by your city or town. Examples of public summer camps include:

- › Day camps sponsored by community park districts or public schools
- › YMCA swim or sports camps

Convincing your child to attend camp

As a parent, you may love the idea of sending your child to summer camp, but selling him or her on the idea may not be so easy. Here are a few ways to boost your child's enthusiasm:

- › Tell your child it is a great way to make new friends. Perhaps your child's friends also may attend the same camp.
- › Describe how a completely different, exciting environment will open your child's eyes to the world; summer camp may, for instance, allow your city-dwelling child to go horseback riding for the first time.
- › Stress the fun of exploring and adventuring in the wild if it is a nature-oriented or outdoor-activity camp.
- › Relate your positive memories if you attended a summer camp as a child. Tell of the fun you had learning new songs and campfire stories at camp.

The time your child spends at summer camp can create exciting memories that last a lifetime. When choosing a camp, be sure to carefully weigh costs and your child's best interests. Build enthusiasm about attending camp by talking about all the games and activities in which he or she can participate. Assure your child that it will be a lot more fun than staying home all summer. Tell your child that if he or she really enjoys it, perhaps he or she can return to camp next summer, too.

If your child is old enough or mature enough to attend overnight camp for the first time, be sure to involve your child in the camp selection process. If possible, visit the camp before the session starts, and try to arrange to enroll your child with a close friend or relative. Some parents even do some role playing, such as pitching a tent in the backyard or exploring the house at night using a flashlight, before camp begins. Most importantly, do not register a first-time camper for too long a stay away from home. Programs that last one week or less are ideal for a child who has not spent a great deal of time away from home and family.

When choosing a summer camp, therefore, you must consider not only cost but also your child's best interests. Before registering your child, investigate the program. Try to visit the facility sponsoring the camp with your child or at least talk on the phone with the camp supervisor. Use the Summer Camps Checklist in the Appendix when visiting camps or talking with camp directors.

Summer school

Summer school is an alternative to summer camp that can stimulate your child's learning while providing you with quality child care while you are at work. Many summer classes for children are offered through local public schools or nearby colleges. This can be an excellent option for a bright child who needs enrichment in addition to the usual school curriculum. Summer classes also can be a solution for a child who needs remedial instruction in reading or math or who has fallen behind his or her grade level in a particular subject. Parents may hesitate to send a child to summer school because they are worried that their child will feel as if it is a punishment. Consider, however, that handling only one or two classes at this time can encourage your child to learn in this less demanding, more relaxed atmosphere.

Additional references

For more information about finding child care for special circumstances, contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com

Home alone

For more information about leaving your child home alone, contact:

- › Child Welfare Information Gateways
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/homealone.pdf
- › American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Home Alone Children (Facts for Families No. 46)
www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/home_alone_children
- › KidsHealth (The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media)
Leaving Your Child Home Alone
www.kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/home_alone.html
- › National Network for Child Care, *Home Alone*
www.nncc.org/sacc/sac31_home.alone.html
- › Prevent Child Abuse America
"Home Alone" Child Tips
www.preventchildabuse.org/publications/parents/downloads/home_alone.pdf
- › Childhelp®
www.childhelp.org

Disabilities

For more information about day care for children with disabilities, contact:

- › National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)
www.nichcy.org
800.695.0285

Nontraditional work hours

For more information about night care and how to find it, go to:

- › National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center
<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/nontradhts.html>
NCCIC is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees child care issues.
- › Childcare Aware
http://childcareaware.org/sites/childcareaware.org/files/news_room/naccrra_in_the_news/2012/volume_19.pdf

Chapter 6: Child Care Services for Children With Special Needs

Finding a day care provider for a child with a physical disability, learning difficulty or other special need can be a difficult and time-consuming process. There are a number of steps parents and guardians can take to ensure their search for day care is thorough and comprehensive, resulting in a good situation for the child.

The Americans with Disabilities Act and child care

If you have a child with special needs, you should be aware of your rights as outlined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) before you begin to look for child care. The information below can be found on the government website, www.ada.gov.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal law that states that many public institutions and private companies, including most child care programs, cannot discriminate against individuals because of a disability. Most child care centers are required to comply with Title III of the ADA. Title III states that certain institutions cannot discriminate against people with disabilities on the basis of that disability. These institutions must also provide children and parents with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in programs and services. The law applies to all public nurseries, child care centers, preschools and family care homes.

Privately-run child care centers (like other public accommodations such as private schools, recreation centers, restaurants, hotels, movie theaters and banks) must also comply with Title III of the ADA. Child care services provided by government agencies (including Head Start, summer programs and extended school-day programs) must comply with Title II of the ADA. Both titles apply to a child care center's interactions with the children, parents, guardians and potential customers that it serves.

Therefore, almost all child care providers, regardless of size or number of employees, must comply with Titles II and III of the ADA. Even small, home-based centers that may not have to follow some state laws are covered by Title III.

The exception is a child care center that is actually operated by a religious entity such as a church, mosque or synagogue. Activities controlled by religious organizations are not covered by Title III.

Private child care centers that are operating on the premises of a religious organization, however, are generally not exempt from Title III. Where such facilities are leased by a child care program not controlled or operated by the religious organization, Title III applies to the child care program but not to the religious organization. For example, if a private child care program is operated out of a church, pays rent to the church but has no other connection to the church, the program has to comply with Title III, but the church does not.

The ADA contains the following provisions:

- › Child care programs cannot refuse service to a child because their staff lacks training if training is readily available at a reasonable cost.
- › Centers have to make reasonable modifications to their policies and practices to integrate children, parents and guardians with disabilities into their programs unless doing so would constitute a fundamental alteration.
- › Child care programs cannot deny service unless the services needed by the child are fundamentally different from those offered by the day care program.
- › Child care programs cannot charge more to serve children with disabilities or special needs.
- › Child care programs can charge for “extra services” that are not within the range of services normally covered by the program. These could include services like specialized medical care, physical therapy and speech instruction.
- › Child care programs cannot deny service to a child with special needs if admitting the child would cause the day care provider’s insurance rates to increase.
- › Child care programs cannot deny service unless the changes to accommodate the child are cost-prohibitive to the individual day care program.
- › Centers cannot exclude children with disabilities from their programs unless their presence would pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others or require a fundamental alteration of the program.
- › Centers must provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services needed for effective communication with children or adults with disabilities when doing so would not constitute an undue burden.
- › Centers must generally make their facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. Existing facilities are subject to the readily achievable standard for barrier removal, while newly constructed facilities and any altered portions of existing facilities must be fully accessible.

Starting the child care provider search process

Children with special needs will often require special circumstances, facilities and supervision for their day care. Many states and local communities have resources for helping families locate facilities that offer appropriate care for children with disabilities and special needs. Start by contacting:

- › Local school district
- › Local child care and referral agency; refer to www.guidanceresources.com for more information
- › Community support groups
- › Other families and neighbors

Take advantage of these resources to help you create an initial list of facilities and providers to research.

Making lists of needs

Parents and guardians should make a list of needs the child and family want a day care provider to meet. These needs could include:

- › Care for a specific number of hours and days each week
- › Mobility assistance
- › Assistance in the bathroom
- › Assistance when eating
- › Help with transportation
- › Timely administration of medications or physical therapy

Parents and guardians should also make a list of skills, capabilities and services they would expect to see on display in a quality child care environment before they start visiting day care centers and interviewing providers. These include:

- › Physical accessibility and a user-friendly environment for children with disabilities
- › A small child-to-staff ratio, meaning caregivers will spend more time caring for each individual child
- › A safe, caring and educational environment for all children
- › Promotion of the physical, social and educational growth of all children
- › The skills and training needed to care for the child

- › Experience of caring for children with the condition or need before
- › Children interacting with each other
- › Appropriate discipline and guidance
- › Fast staff responses to challenges and questions

Interviewing

While interviewing a potential day care provider, make sure to clearly state the needs your child and family have. Provide details of the condition and describe the current structure of your child's daily life.

In addition to the typical questions any parent would ask a child care provider, there are specific questions that parents of disabled or special needs children should ask during the interview process. These include:

- › Is your program licensed or accredited?
- › Do you have a mission or philosophy statement that I can read?
- › What is your staff-to-child ratio?
- › How has the staff been trained to care for and educate children with disabilities and special needs?
- › What will you help my child to learn?
- › Will your staff work with a family to determine and achieve developmental goals for a child?
- › Are parents allowed to observe the day care environment?
- › Do you involve families with the program?
- › How would you deal with communication problems with a parent?
- › Is the staff willing and able to interact with other professionals who are working with your child?
- › What are your disciplinary policies?
- › How do you resolve disputes between children?
- › What is a typical day like for a child under your care?
- › Do you have special equipment/toys/programs for children with disabilities or special needs?
- › Is the facility inviting without being overwhelming? (some children react poorly to too much visual stimulation)
- › Is the facility clean and does the staff maintain hygienic practices?
- › How is the home/facility childproofed?
- › Do you have emergency preparedness, first aid or CPR training?

- › What special costs might be associated with providing care for my child?
- › Are there families of other disabled or special needs children you have cared for who can be contacted as references?

Try to observe the interaction of children in the care of the provider. Watch the supervisor's interaction with other special needs children, and then see how they interact with your own child. Observe the day care provider to get answers to the following questions:

- › Are the children treated in a welcoming and respectful manner?
- › Is the child care provider attentive?
- › Do the children receive individual attention?
- › Are the children comforted when necessary?
- › Do the children seem happy?
- › Do the children seem stimulated?
- › Is your child having a good experience?
- › Are any children misbehaving, and, if so, how are they being dealt with?
- › Does the staff ask you questions about your child?
- › Can you picture your child spending more time in the program and with the staff?
- › What does your "gut instinct" tell you about the facility?

Schedule a second visit to the program if you are impressed, but always check out more than one facility, even if you think the first one you visit is exemplary. In order to select the right program for your child, you will have to base your decision on a comparison of several day care centers and providers. Take plenty of time to think about the pros and cons of each program before you make your decision. Be sure to print and take a copy of the Special Needs Day Care Checklist in the Appendix on each facility you visit.

After you have decided on a provider

Once you have chosen a day care provider for your child, there are several steps you should take to make the transition easier for your child and the day care provider. If your child has never been to day care before, you should talk with him or her about the experience. Supply picture books that tell a story about "My First Day at Day Care." This will help make the first day, and all subsequent days, easier. Also, be sure to educate the child care provider or the facility's staff about your child's physical, emotional, medical and educational needs.

After your child has started day care, you should stay in contact with the care provider and staff. Initially this communication could take the form of a daily debriefing when you come to pick up your child. As your child becomes more integrated into the day care system and the personnel become more used to addressing your child's special needs, the need for daily briefings may end. But the lines of communication must always be open so that the day care provider can work with the parents to identify and address any changes and unexpected events (both good and bad) that the child experiences in and out of school.

Children with special needs include gifted children whose parents often have a difficult time finding day care or educational resources that challenge their children and help them reach their potential. Such parents can use some of the same suggestions and checklists in this chapter to locate and evaluate programs for the special needs of their children.

Additional references

Locating day care

For help in locating special needs child care, contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com
- › Childcare Aware
www.childcareaware.org
- › Easter Seal, which supports local agencies offering early intervention, pre-kindergarten and after-school programs
www.easter-seals.org
- › National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, which offers information about infant, toddler, child and youth special needs.
www.nichcy.org (English), www.nichcy.org/espanol (Spanish) or call 800.695.0285 (English or Spanish)

General information

For other resources for children with special needs, contact:

- › Child Care Plus+
www.ccplus.org
- › The ALLIANCE National Parent Technical Assistance Center (NPTAC)
www.parentcenternetwork.org/national

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

For information and details about the ADA, contact:

- › U.S. Department of justice, Civil Rights Division
www.ada.gov
www.usdoj.gov

Toys and playthings

For a source of toys for children with special needs, contact:

- › Lekotek
www.ableplay.org

Gifted children

For information about resources for gifted children, contact:

- › National Association for Gifted Children
www.nagc.org/resourcedirectory.aspx

Chapter 7: Dealing With Problems

If you have followed the advice in the previous chapters of this book, you should be able to minimize the problems you experience once you have settled on a caregiver for your child. In some cases, however, you may still encounter situations that are less than ideal. Your son may become angry, irritable or stressed while at the child care center. Your daughter may suddenly tell you that she no longer wants to go to day care or family care. An in-home care provider may not be fulfilling all the responsibilities to which she had agreed.

In addition, at some point you may find yourself needing to change your child care arrangement because your child has outgrown the care provider you originally selected. A school-age child, for example, may no longer be able to stay at the center you selected when he or she was an infant or toddler. In the rest of this chapter, we will look at the steps you can take to deal with challenges you may be facing with your current care provider, as well as the ways you can ease your child's transition from one setting to another.

Problem-solving Step One: Stay in touch

It is not always easy, but it is important that you stay actively involved in the child care program you choose for your child. That means spending time with your child and his or her caregivers when you can, observing the way their relationship is progressing. If you notice that the caregiver is doing something that makes your child uncomfortable or that she is not reacting to conflicts between your child and others in her care, you need to make your concerns known. The sooner you do so, the better; quick action will help prevent compounding the problem through repetition.

If your child is in a day care center, it is likely that you will be invited to meet with the staff on a regular basis. These meetings give you a chance to discuss your child's situation and learn about problems staff members may have noticed in caring for your child. Make every effort to attend as many of these meetings as you can. If other parents are present at these meetings, take the time to talk to them about their own children's experiences. Do not be afraid to drop in at the center from time to time without giving advance notice of your visit. You may discover that activities, atmosphere and attitudes are not what you thought they were based on your observations during a scheduled visit.

If your child is in a family care home, you will want to take time to visit with the caregiver to find out what is going on during the day. It is a good idea to plan to spend a few minutes with the

caregiver when you drop your child off to let the caregiver know about events at home that may affect your child's behavior. A lost tooth, a missing security blanket or the death of the family goldfish can be traumatic experiences. Your child's caregiver may be able to help lessen that trauma if she is aware of it.

Similarly, it is wise to spend a few extra minutes with the caregiver at the end of the day to learn about the day's events and activities. This will also give the caregiver a chance to talk with you about any problems you need to be made aware of, such as aggressive behavior or eating problems.

Schedule a time for a weekly telephone conversation with your child's family care provider. Arrange to speak with her in the evening. Talking to her for a few minutes when she is not distracted by the children in her care gives each of you a good opportunity to evaluate how things are working out.

Remember that no matter how happy your child may be in a child care setting, there will be days when he or she simply does not feel like playing along. A confrontation with another child or a reprimand from a caregiver one day can make your child reluctant to go back on the next. Think back to your own childhood, and you are likely to recall days when you would rather have stayed home than have gone to school. An occasional day like this probably is not cause for undue concern. However, sometimes more serious problems do occur, and you should act quickly to put a stop to them.

Problem-solving Step Two: Speak up

If you do believe that there is a serious problem you and your child's caregiver need to discuss, do not hesitate to address it. It is an unfortunate fact of life that many people wait until a small problem has grown into a major one before doing anything about it.

While you want to call a problem to the caregiver's attention as soon as you can, you should also try to do so in a cooperative manner. Initially, at least, you should approach the situation with the belief that your caregiver wants to work with you to solve the problem. It is better to say, "Lately, Sophie's been using some words that we do not want her to use, and we wonder where she is learning them," rather than "What kind of filthy language do you let the kids use around here?" The first alternative gives the caregiver a chance to offer an explanation or look into the matter further, while the second immediately puts her on the defensive. If it turns out that Sophie picked up her new vocabulary from her older cousin Mike, you may have a hard time undoing the damage to the relationship between you and the caregiver.

Parent-to-parent: “No matter what, I never hesitate to speak up about a problem if there is any chance my son Geoff or any of the other kids Rose cares for may be in danger. For example, one day I noticed that the door to her basement was open and the safety gate at the top of the stairs was unlatched. I pointed it out immediately. You could tell Rose felt awful—she apologized then and for days afterward. I bet that gate will never be left open again.”

Child care providers usually want to provide a comfortable and happy setting for the children in their care. Discussing your concerns informally and in a relaxed manner will go a long way toward solving the vast majority of problems you may encounter. However, if you have used the informal approach and the situation does not seem to be improving, it is time to take an additional action.

Problem-solving Step Three: Put it in writing

If a problem with your child care provider persists after you have spoken to her about it, you will need to begin documenting the situation. In a journal, you should note:

- › The problems you and your child are having with the caregiver
- › Your recollection of the conversations you and the caregiver have had about the situation
- › The dates and times of those conversations
- › The caregiver’s response to the problem
- › The current status of the situation

If the caregiver continues to do nothing to rectify a problem, denies it exists or refuses to work with you to correct it, you may want to write a letter about your concerns. Again, it is best to remain as calm as possible when writing the letter. Your letter should mention all the items in the list above, as well as the steps you propose to solve the problem and a deadline for taking action. Do not make threats or personal accusations. Simply set out the facts and state the response you desire. In the Appendix you will find a sample letter that you can use as a model for your own. Be sure to keep a copy of your letter for your own records.

Chances are, a letter like this one will serve its purpose, and the problem you are experiencing will be solved quickly. However, if you still cannot get matters taken care of to your satisfaction, it may be time to take more drastic action.

Problem-solving Step Four: Get help from the government

Enlist the help of the state agency that regulates your child care provider. If you do not already have the agency's telephone number, you can find it in the government listings of your telephone directory or by calling your state government's general information number. If you have access to the Internet, you may be able to contact the agency through your state's website.

In some states, making a verbal complaint will be enough to trigger an investigation, but in others you will have to make your complaint in writing. Be sure to state the problem clearly, as well as the steps you took to try to correct it. Make copies of any correspondence you had with the care provider about the problem and enclose them with your letter of complaint. State child care licensing agencies are often overworked and understaffed, so it may take some time to get your complaint investigated.

Be sure to get the name, title and telephone extension of the state government employees you speak to during your conversations with the licensing agency. Keep a record of the dates and times of your calls and write down a summary of what the employees tell you about the way your complaint is being handled.

If you are using in-home care, you may be forced to dismiss the caregiver if she refuses to live up to her job responsibilities. It is always best to have solid documentation of the reasons for firing an employee in order to protect yourself from the possibility of a lawsuit. Talking to a lawyer before you decide to terminate your in-home provider is probably a good idea just to be sure you do not inadvertently expose yourself to litigation. In addition, depending on your income, you may also qualify for free or low-cost assistance from your state's legal aid program. You can visit www.guidanceresources.com for help in finding a lawyer to assist you.

Making new arrangements

If you are having a serious problem getting your child's caregiver to deal with a problem you and your child are having, you need to think long and hard about whether you want your child to continue in the care of a provider about whom you have had to file a complaint. You may need to make other arrangements quickly. If you cannot make a permanent change immediately, you may have to resort to some temporary measures until you have the time to make more lasting child care arrangements. Some options you may want to consider include:

- › Asking your employer to let you modify your work schedule

- › Having your spouse or partner adjust their working hours to help cover the times when your child needs care
- › Trading care with a neighbor or family member who needs help at a time when you are available
- › Contacting your state licensing agency for advice about child care providers who have openings available

The problem of child abuse

Of all the potential problems associated with child care, child abuse is the one that is most feared. Media reports of alleged child abuse seem to turn up far too often. While most child care providers are decent and responsible, the unfortunate truth is that some reports of child abuse by caregivers are legitimate.

If you have checked references, contacted your state licensing agency for information about care providers and conducted thorough background checks on caregivers who are not licensed, you will greatly reduce the risk that your child will be victimized by a caregiver. However, there are some clues you can look for to help you identify potentially abusive situations. Be on the lookout for:

- › A caregiver who tickles, holds or grabs children when it is clear the children are responding negatively
- › Children who seem afraid of a caregiver or of attending their child care program or who are unusually reluctant to be left alone with a caregiver
- › Caregivers who insist on being hugged or kissed by the children in their care
- › A center that does not permit or encourage parents to drop in unexpectedly
- › Caregivers who are physically rough with children or have been observed screaming, swearing, threatening or making fun of children

Pay attention to your own child's behavior:

- › Does your child say or do anything that could be reenacting some kind of mistreatment?
- › Has your child's personality changed in a negative way? For example, has your child suddenly become nervous, depressed or withdrawn?
- › Does your child seem upset about bathing, getting undressed or using the bathroom?

Most importantly, listen carefully to what your child is saying and listen to your own instincts. If you have even the slightest suspicion that your child is being abused, remove him or her from the situation immediately. Contact your local law enforcement agency to investigate your suspicions.

Some children experience feelings of guilt when things do not work out with a care provider, believing that it was somehow their fault. Be sure to let your child know that the reason for changing child care arrangements is not because of anything he or she did but because of a decision you made to help and protect him or her. If possible, try to make arrangements for your child to visit later with friends he or she made at the care provider you are leaving.

Remember that as a parent you need to do what is in the best interests of your child. Sometimes it is not convenient, and it can be downright unpleasant, but ultimately you will be glad you did what is right.

Additional references

For more information about dealing with problems. Contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com

Legal assistance

For more information about legal assistance, contact:

- › Legal Services Corporation
www.lsc.gov
- › Child Care Law Center
www.childcarelaw.org

Chapter 8: Paying for Child Care

It is no secret that quality child care is expensive. For many families, child care expenses are the second largest monthly expenditure, right behind housing. Families with children younger than age five years generally pay more than those with older children.

Fortunately, there are a number of federal and state programs that can help you pay for child care. Eligibility for these programs is based on a number of factors, including total family income, family size and the cost of child care in your area.

Budgeting for child care

If you are having trouble fitting quality child care into your budget, you may want to take a look at ways you can cut some of your other expenses. Here are some simple and relatively painless suggestions for you to consider:

- › Take lunch to work instead of eating out
- › Skip one latte or soft drink from a fast food outlet every day
- › Go to the discounted early-bird movie showing, and buy the small popcorn instead of the jumbo or entertain at home with rental movies and board games
- › Raise the deductible on your automobile insurance policy from \$250 to \$500
- › Consider canceling collision and comprehensive coverage on a car more than eight years old
- › Review your telephone bills to see if you could save on long distance calls by switching to another carrier or using a cell phone family plan
- › Call your credit card companies and ask to have your interest rate or payments reduced

Federal tax credit programs

There are four major federal tax credit programs that may help lower your out of pocket costs for child care.

The Earned Income Credit (EIC)

The Earned Income Tax Credit or the EITC is a refundable federal income tax credit for low- to moderate-income working individuals and families. For parents with little earned income it can be a real help. Congress originally approved the tax credit legislation in 1975 in part to offset the burden of Social Security taxes and to provide an incentive to work. When the EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit.

To qualify, taxpayers must meet certain requirements and file a tax return, even if they did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a tax return. You can find the specific instructions on IRS Form 1040, 1040-A, or 1040-EZ or go to www.irs.gov and type Earned Income Credit in the search window.

Child and Dependent Care Credit

This credit is available to you if you pay someone to care for your child under the age of 13 so you can work or look for work. You may also be able to claim the credit for care provided to any dependent that is mentally or physically unable to care for him or herself. You may be eligible for this credit no matter what your income, but the exact amount you will receive as a credit depends on your total adjusted gross income.

Child Tax Credit

This credit is available to parents who have children under age 17 and who are U.S. citizens or resident aliens. It is in addition to the credit for child and dependent care expenses and the earned income credit.

A qualifying child is a child who is your son, daughter, stepchild, foster child, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister or a descendant of any of them (for example, your grandchild, niece, or nephew). An adopted child lawfully placed with you for legal adoption is always treated as your own child. In addition, to qualify, the child must have depended on you to provide at least half of his or her support for the current year, and he or she must have lived with you for more than half of the year.

A child is considered to have lived with you for all of the current year if the child was born or died in the current year and your home was this child's home for the entire time he or she was alive. Temporary absences by you or the child for special circumstances, such as school, vacation, business, medical care, military service or detention in a juvenile facility, count as time that the child lived with you.

Additional Child Tax Credit

This credit is available for people who have three or more children but are not eligible for the full Child Tax Credit. Like the Earned Income Credit, this credit may entitle you to a refund even if you do not owe any income tax.

State programs

Most states that collect income taxes also offer credits for certain kinds of child care expenses. For specific information, contact your state's Department of Revenue. Depending on your income, your child may also be eligible for free or low-cost child care subsidized by your state.

Direct aid programs

On the federal level, Head Start programs are available for children whose parents have minimal incomes or who are eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Your state welfare agency can also provide information about enrolling your child in Head Start or a state-sponsored care program.

Employee benefit programs

A growing number of employers now recognize the importance of helping their employees arrange and pay for child care. Studies show that workers at family-friendly employers are more productive and miss fewer workdays than those at companies with fewer family-related benefits and programs.

For example, some employers now offer flexible spending accounts as part of their benefit programs. With these accounts, workers can set aside a portion of their pre-tax income to pay for child care. Other employers offer on-site care centers for their employees' children or arrange with care providers to offer backup care when a child's regular caregiver is sick or otherwise unavailable. Some allow parents to work flexible schedules offer job-sharing programs or provide paid family leave.

Talk to your employer, union representative or your company's human resources department for information about the child care programs that are offered in your workplace.

Should you pay your child care provider when you go on vacation?

One potentially unpleasant situation that can arise from a family going on vacation has very little to do with the trip itself: should the family pay their child care provider for the days their child will not be under the provider's care?

Many child care providers spell out in their contract or agreement a policy concerning payment for days when a child is not under their care. Some common policies include:

- › Families pay the same amount every week, 52 weeks per year, regardless of whether or not their child is under the provider's care.
- › Families pay a discounted amount for the weeks their child is not under the provider's care (often 50 percent of the normal weekly rate).
- › Families are given two weeks of "vacation" time each year for which they do not have to pay the child care provider. They are required to pay for the remaining 50 weeks whether their child is being cared for or not.
- › Families have to pay when they are on vacation, but they do not have to pay for times when the child care provider is on vacation.
- › Families only pay for time their child is in care.

If there is no written agreement, and no agreed-upon understanding between the child care provider and the family, both parties will find themselves in a difficult situation. In these cases there is no right answer to the question of whether a child care provider should be paid for time when the child is not in their care. But if there is a good relationship between the two parties and the children enjoy being under the supervision of the provider, it would be smart for the family to compensate the provider. You should talk with your child care provider and possibly put the details of the compensatory agreement into writing to prevent future misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Additional references

For more information about paying for child care, contact:

- › GuidanceResources
www.guidanceresources.com
- › For more information about tax credits, contact:
- › Internal Revenue Service
www.irs.gov or call 800.829.1040
- › National Women’s Law Center
www.nwlc.org

For more information about direct aid program, contact:

- › U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.hhs.gov
- › U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’
Administration for Children and Families
www.childcare.gov

For more information about funding options, including state funding, contact:

- › Child Care Aware
www.childcareaware.org

Appendix

To help you organize your planning and gather information without overlooking anything, we have included an Appendix of checklists and forms, arranged by the chapter in which the explanatory material appears. Designed to be printed, these checklists can help you maintain a written record of your findings as you explore various day care options. Many of the checklists include questions that should be asked at every facility of every caregiver followed by questions tailored to individual alternatives.

The first form in the Appendix, Emergency Information and Consent Form, should be printed and left with every caregiver you are using. In addition, you should insist that home care providers and in-home providers carry a copy with them if they go out or run errands with your child. Place a copy next to every telephone in your home. Better yet, tape the form to the bottom of the phone or attach to the nearby wall so it cannot be misplaced. This form contains vital information and allows a caregiver to seek emergency attention or treatment for your child in your absence.

Emergency Information and Consent Form

Poison Control Number: _____

Child's name: _____ Date of birth: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Mother's name: _____ Cell phone: _____

Work phone & ext.: _____ Cell phone: _____

Work Address: _____

Father's name: _____ Cell phone: _____

Work phone & ext.: _____ Cell phone: _____

Work Address: _____

Child's health information

Medications: _____

Allergies: _____

Health conditions: _____

Emergency contacts

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Doctor: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Hospital affiliation: _____ Telephone: _____

Nearest hospital: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Other emergency numbers

Police and fire (emergency only): 911

Police Department: _____ Fire Department: _____

Poison Control: _____

Consent for emergency medical treatment

I hereby give my consent for first aid treatment, emergency services or admission to hospital of my child.

Child's name: _____

Parent's signature: _____

Date: _____

Chapter One

Checklist for Interviewing References

1. How long have you known the child care provider?

2. How did you come to know/hire the child care provider?

3. How long were the children you left in their care?

4. How long did the provider work for you?

5. What were the provider's specific duties and tasks?

6. Was the provider dependable and on time?

7. What did the provider do best?

8. In what areas did you think the provider needed improvement?

9. If the provider is no longer working for you, why did the arrangement end?

10. If you needed a child care provider now, would you hire this person again?

11. Are there other people you think I should talk to for information about this provider?

12. Is there anything I did not ask about the provider that you think I should know?

Chapter Two

Infant and Toddler Center Checklist

General questions

1. Is the school licensed or accredited (and by which agency)?

2. Is the school's state license up to date?

3. Have any complaints been filed against the center with the applicable state licensing agency?

4. Has the school ever been cited for a violation of any kind?

5. Have any serious accidents or injuries occurred?

6. Has the school ever been sued?

7. Does the center have sufficient liability insurance coverage?

8. What are the typical hours of operation for a center?

9. Can I visit the center anytime to observe my child?

10. How can I become involved?

11. What are children allowed to bring or not bring?

12. What happens if my child is sick? What are the rules about bringing mildly ill children to day care?

13. Are parents allowed to participate in caregiving?

14. What are the tuition costs? Are any other fees required (e.g., registration fees)?

15. Are there additional costs if we are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time?

16. If my child is absent for any reason, am I still charged?

17. What financial-aid opportunities and payment plans exist?

18. Does the center provides only custodial care (feeding, diapering, naps) or does it offer developmental programs designed to stimulate and educate my child?

19. Are records kept on diapering, eating and sleeping?

20. Are diapers provided?

21. Is food provided or do I bring it?

22. Can I see a weekly menu?

23. How long are children kept in cribs or playpens while awake?

24. Can you provide me with any written information describing program policies, health forms, payment contracts, fee schedules, sample menus, etc.?

25. Do you have at least five references I can call?

Questions about facilities

26. Is the center bright, clean and comfortable?

27. Are the kitchen and bathroom facilities clean and well maintained?

28. Are the restrooms and diapering stations clean and well maintained?

29. Are the walls decorated with colorful pictures at the child's eye level?

30. Where do the children take their naps? Can the area be darkened but still light enough to be seen by the caregivers?
-
31. Are the cribs padded and well maintained?
-
32. Do the cribs and furniture meet safety regulations?
-
33. Is there plenty of space for crawling?
-
34. Are the floors clean and carpeted?
-
35. Are there chairs and sofas where caregivers and children can snuggle up for a story or a song?
-
36. What kinds of toys are available for the children to play with?
-
37. Are the toys clean and washable without any small parts that an infant or toddler could pull off and put in his mouth?
-
38. Are the toys lead-free?
-
39. Are there emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors?
-
40. Is there an emergency exit plan in place?
-
41. Are the electrical outlets childproofed?
-
42. Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies secured away from the children?
-
43. Are the outdoor play areas safe and in good condition?
-
44. Does the play area have a soft surface instead of one made of asphalt or concrete?
-
45. Is there fencing around the outside play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime?
-

Questions about caregivers

46. What is the adult/child ratio?

47. What type of training and background is required of staff (e.g., are they certified in early-childhood education)?

48. How are staff members screened during the hiring process? Is a criminal background check completed?

49. Have all the caregivers gone through a background check?

50. Have staff members been trained in first aid and CPR for infants and young children?

51. Have the caregivers been trained to recognize, prevent and report child abuse?

52. Does the center have separate caregivers for infants and toddlers or does one caregiver work with both newborns and older children?

53. Do the caregivers spend a lot of time holding, carrying and cuddling infants, making good eye contact and responding to an infant's sounds, whether cooing or crying?

54. Do the caregivers follow good health and hygiene rules by washing hands before and after feedings, as well as after changing diapers, and by cleaning the changing area after use?

55. Do the caregivers encourage toddlers to try new tasks but also provide help when it is clear the child is becoming frustrated?

56. Do the caregivers provide positive reinforcement for good behavior and set appropriate limits when a child's actions endanger him or others?

57. Do the caregivers provide appropriate help to children during meals and snacks?

58. Do the caregivers give toddlers the opportunity to choose the activities in which they want to participate?

59. Are the caregivers patient when children make a mess, get dirty or need a diaper changed?

Early Childhood Center Checklist

General questions

1. Is the school licensed or accredited (and by which agency)?

2. Is the school's state license up to date?

3. Have any complaints been filed against the center with the applicable state licensing agency?

4. Has the school ever been cited for a violation of any kind?

5. Have any serious accidents or injuries occurred?

6. Has the school ever been sued?

7. Does the center have sufficient liability insurance coverage?

8. What are the typical hours of operation for a center?

9. Can I visit the center anytime to observe my child?

10. How can I become involved?

11. What are children allowed to bring or not bring?

12. What happens if my child is sick? What are the rules about bringing mildly ill children to day care?

13. Are parents allowed to participate in caregiving?

14. What are the tuition costs? Are any other fees required (e.g., registration fees)?

15. Are there additional costs if we are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time?

16. If my child is absent for any reason, am I still charged?

17. What financial-aid opportunities and payment plans exist?

18. Who is the director of the school?

19. What are the director's educational credentials?

20. Who determines the curriculum?

21. Can you provide me with any written information describing program policies, health forms, payment contracts, fee schedules, sample menus, etc.?

22. Do you have at least five references I can call?

Questions about facilities

23. Is the center bright, clean and comfortable?

24. Are the kitchen and bathroom facilities clean and well maintained?

25. Are there emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors?

26. Is there an emergency exit plan in place?

27. Are the electrical outlets childproofed?

28. Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies secured away from the children?

29. Are the outdoor play areas safe and in good condition?

30. Does the play area have a soft surface instead of one made of asphalt or concrete?

31. Is there fencing around the outside play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime?

Questions about caregivers

32. What is the adult/child ratio?

33. What type of training and background is required of staff (e.g., are they certified in early-childhood education)?

34. How are staff members screened during the hiring process? Is a criminal background check completed?

35. Have all the caregivers gone through a background check?

36. Are staff members trained in first aid and CPR?

37. Have the caregivers been trained to recognize, prevent and report child abuse?

38. What is the rate of turnover of staff members in the last three years?

39. Do staffers demonstrate patience, friendliness and a sense of humor to children?

40. What are the qualifications for being a main teacher or an aide?

41. How many different caregivers will be with my child during the day?

Questions about approach to learning and child care

42. What is your school's philosophy or approach to education?

43. How many students are in each class?

44. What is the age range of children in each class or group?

45. How are children grouped (e.g., by age or ability)?

46. Can you give me a chronology of an average day, such as what events and activities will occur?

47. What the disciplinary approaches are used, and how are conflicts handled?

48. How many children are cared for at one time, and what are the maximum limits?

49. Do the children appear comfortable, happy and relaxed?

50. How are chronic discipline issues addressed?

51. If television is allowed, what kind and how often?

52. What type of food is provided and when?

53. Are snacks provided by the preschool, or do I need to supply food for my child?

54. Is there a designated rest time, and is my child allowed to nap if he or she is tired? What do the children sleep on?

55. How often will I be given progress reports on my child, and will areas of concern regarding behaviors or conflicts be communicated to me?

56. How is toilet training handled?

57. How is separation anxiety handled?

Questions about skills and activities

58. What new skills can I expect my child to learn?

59. What is the balance between structured learning and independent play?

60. What activities are available for children to do independently? Are there designated areas for group vs. independent play?

61. What is the schedule of activities?

62. What new skills can my child expect to learn?

63. Are there any field trips? How will my child be supervised? What is the mode of transportation?

64. Do children participate in reading and music to aid speech and cognitive development?

Day Care Center Checklist

General questions

1. Is the school licensed or accredited (and by which agency)?

2. Is the school's state license up to date?

3. Have any complaints been filed against the center with the applicable state licensing agency?

4. Has the school ever been cited for a violation of any kind?

5. Have any serious accidents or injuries occurred?

6. Has the school ever been sued?

7. Does the center have sufficient liability insurance coverage?

8. What are the typical hours of operation for a center?

9. Can I visit the center anytime to observe my child?

10. How can I become involved?

11. What are children allowed to bring or not bring?

12. What happens if my child is sick? What are the rules about bringing mildly ill children to day care?

13. Are parents allowed to participate in caregiving?

14. What are the tuition costs? Are any other fees required (e.g., registration fees)?

15. Are there additional costs if we are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time?

16. If my child is absent for any reason, am I still charged?

17. What financial-aid opportunities and payment plans exist?

18. Who is the director of the school?

19. What are the director's educational credentials?

20. Who determines the curriculum?

21. Can you provide me with any written information describing program policies, health forms, payment contracts, fee schedules, sample menus, etc.?

22. Do you have at least five references I can call?

Questions about facilities

23. Is the center bright, clean and comfortable?

24. Are the kitchen and bathroom facilities clean and well maintained?

25. How often are the facilities, toys and equipment cleaned?

26. Are the toys lead-free?

27. Are there emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors?

28. Is there an emergency exit plan in place?

29. Are the electrical outlets childproofed?

30. Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies secured away from the children?

31. Are the outdoor play areas safe and in good condition?

32. Does the outdoor play area have a soft surface instead of one made of asphalt or concrete?

33. Is there fencing around the outside play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime?

Questions about caregivers

34. What is the adult/child ratio?

35. What type of training and background is required of staff (e.g., are they certified in early-childhood education)?

36. How are staff members screened during the hiring process? Is a criminal background check completed?

37. Have all the caregivers gone through a background check?

38. Are staff members trained in first aid and CPR?

39. Have the caregivers been trained to recognize, prevent and report child abuse?

40. What is the rate of turnover of staff members in the last three years?

41. Do staffers demonstrate patience, friendliness and a sense of humor to children?

42. What are the qualifications for being a main teacher or an aide?

43. How many different caregivers will be with my child during the day?

44. What is the rate of employee turnover?

Questions about approach to learning and child care

45. What is your school's philosophy or approach to education?

46. How many students are in each class?

47. What is the age range of children in each class or group?

48. How are children grouped (e.g., by age or ability)?

49. Can you give me a chronology of an average day, such as what events and activities will occur?

50. What the disciplinary approaches are used, and how are conflicts handled?

51. How many children are cared for at one time, and what are the maximum limits?

52. Do the children appear comfortable, happy and relaxed?

53. What are the disciplinary approaches used, and how are conflicts handled?

54. How are chronic discipline issues addressed?

55. If television is allowed, what kind and how often?

56. What type of food is provided and when?

57. Is there a designated rest time, and is my child allowed to nap if he or she is tired? What do the children sleep on?

58. How often will I be given progress reports on my child, and will areas of concern regarding behaviors or conflicts be communicated to me?

Questions about skills and activities

59. What new skills can I expect my child to learn?

60. What is the balance between structured learning and independent play?

61. What activities are available for children to do independently? Are there designated areas for group vs. independent play?

62. What is the schedule of activities?

63. What new skills can my child expect to learn?

64. Are there any field trips? How will my child be supervised? What is the mode of transportation?

65. Do children participate in reading and music to aid in speech and cognitive development?

Chapter Three

Family Care Telephone Interview Form

Provider's Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Days and hours of operation care is available: _____

Experience: _____

Training/Education: _____

Licensed? Yes No License expires: _____

Accredited? Yes No By: _____

Number of children currently in provider's care (including caregiver's): _____

Ages of children being care for: _____

Number of openings currently available: _____

Fees and Costs:

_____ per hour day week month

Backup care provided? Yes No

Sick care provided? Yes No

Reference 1:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Reference 2:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Reference 3:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

In-person visit scheduled? Yes No

Date and Time: _____

Notes: _____

Family Care Provider Checklist

1. Are you licensed (by what agency)?

2. What are the typical hours of operation?

3. What would an average day's schedule be like for my child?

4. How many children are cared for at a time, and what are your maximums and minimums?

5. What are your disciplinary approaches and how are conflicts resolved?

6. What is your procedure when children have ongoing discipline issues or pose a threat to the other children?

7. What kind of television programming is shown, and how often?

8. What type of food is provided and when?

9. What additions or renovations were done to make the home more child-friendly?

10. Is the home clean and well-maintained, especially the kitchen and bathrooms?

11. Are you and/or your staff trained in first aid and CPR?

12. Are there emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors?

13. Is there an emergency exit plan in place?

14. Are the electrical outlets childproofed?

15. Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies secured away from the children?

16. Are there locks on medicine and kitchen storage cabinets?

17. Are you and/or your staff trained to recognize and report child abuse?

18. How much time do the children spend outdoors?

19. Are the outdoor play areas safe and in good condition?

20. Does the outdoor play area have a soft surface?

21. Is there fencing around the outside play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime?

22. Is there a designated rest time, and is my child allowed to take a nap if he or she is tired? What do the children sleep on?

23. Will I be given any progress reports on my child, and will areas of concern regarding behaviors or conflicts be reported?

24. Do you take the children out while running errands or on field trips? If so, what is the condition of the vehicle you use and do you have the appropriate child seats, seatbelts, etc.?

25. What activities do you participate in with the children, and which ones do you enjoy the most?

26. Do you expect older children in the home to help care for the younger ones?

27. How flexible are you in regard to keeping my child in your home when I need to work late, or letting me drop my child off early on occasion?

28. Do you allow parents to visit and observe their children's progress?

29. Are parents permitted to make unannounced visits?

30. How can I become involved?

31. What are children allowed to bring or not bring?

32. What happens if my child is sick? What are the rules about bringing mildly ill children to day care?

33. Are parents allowed to participate in caregiving?

34. What are the costs? Are any other fees required (e.g., registration fees)?

35. Are there additional costs if we are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time?

36. If my child is absent for any reason, am I still charged?

37. What financial-aid opportunities and payment plans exist?

Chapter Four

Interview Questions for a Babysitter

1. How long have you been babysitting?

2. Can you give me a list of at least three references?

3. May I talk to your parents (if the sitter is a teenager)?

4. What age were the children you have cared for? (You may have specific questions relating to the ages of your children, including if the babysitter has ever watched a newborn that needed feeding or if they ever watched a toddler who would not stop misbehaving.)

5. Have you watched more than one child at a time?

6. Where do you live?

7. What do you charge for your services?

8. Have you ever taken a babysitting, first aid or CPR course?

9. Have you ever prepared food for the kids you are watching?

10. Why do you enjoy babysitting?

11. What kinds of activities do you do with the kids?

12. What would you do in the event of an emergency?

13. How old are you?

Babysitting Checklist

When you have just hired a new sitter, you will want to spend half an hour or so going over important safety and precautionary measures. Go over each step carefully the first time, and review them briefly each time the sitter returns.

The first step you take is to post and explain the following emergency procedures:

Place the Emergency Information and Consent Form near all phones. Show the sitter exactly where it is, and double-check that it is visible before you leave. Explain that the document gives permission to the babysitter to summon emergency services and admit your child to a hospital. Place a blank notepad and pencil near the phone and the fact sheet in case the sitter needs to write on something in an emergency. Because some of the information you list is bound to change, you may want to write it on an erasable marker pad or chalkboard.

Then, discuss with the sitter when and how to:

- Initiate and supervise play, games and other activities.
- Change diapers and/or help with potty training if necessary.
- Feed your child.
- Dress and undress your child.
- Give your child a bath. Remind the sitter that young children should never be left unattended, especially in the bathtub.
- Positively discipline your child. Talk to the sitter about how you expect him or her to respond to different negative behaviors. Make it absolutely clear that he or she should never physically reprimand your child.
- Administer your child's medications. Remember to read the label, prepare the dose and read the label again before giving to the child. Make sure your sitter is aware of any side effects the medication may have.
- Use the phone. Establish time-limit rules and agreeable boundaries. Talk about how to respond to unwanted calls (e.g., telemarketing pitches) and how to use your answering machine or voice-mail service.
- Answer the door. Insist that the sitter use the peephole (if you have one) before opening the door to anyone. Reinforce that he or she should never open the door to strangers or go outside to investigate strange noises or activities.

- Leave the house. If you would like the sitter to take your child to the park, for instance, discuss appropriate times, safe boundaries in your neighborhood and the necessary preparations (e.g., carrying a cell phone, clothes to dress your child in, how to strap your child in the car, etc.).
- Put your child to bed. Discuss appropriate times and bedtime rituals.
- Have visitors over. Experts strongly recommend not allowing visitors over while babysitting.
- Properly lock all doors and use keys and home security alarm systems.
- Call your child's doctor.
- Call the poison control hotline. Make sure you post this and other emergency numbers.
- Call 911. Tell the sitter to always summon help first and contact you second in an emergency.
- Use the Heimlich maneuver. Get a diagram chart of the necessary steps from your doctor or hospital, and post it in a highly visible, easily accessible area, such as on the bulletin board or refrigerator.
- Administer CPR. Nobody should administer CPR unless he or she has passed a training course or received certification from the local Red Cross.
- Administer basic first aid. Be sure your home has an easily accessible first-aid kit. Stock your medicine cabinet with fresh bandages, antiseptic, gauze, cotton balls and other supplies.
- Use fire extinguishers. Place a fully charged and operational ABC-type extinguisher in the kitchen and somewhere on each floor level.
- Use fire escape routes. Review each possible exit in your home.

Before leaving:

- Check to see that your emergency fact sheet is updated and visibly posted.
- Make sure all windows, doors and entrances/exits are locked.
- Test smoke, carbon-monoxide and home security alarm.
- Check fire extinguishers.
- Give the sitter your estimated return time.
- Inform the sitter if your child has experienced any recent health or behavioral problems.
- Be sure your home is stocked with enough food, necessary medication, clean clothes and other supplies.
- Inform the sitter if you expect anyone to visit the home (e.g., package delivery, lawn-mowing service, etc.).

In-home Agreement

The following sample in-home agreement/contract letter can serve as an outline for you to follow, but you should consider meeting with a lawyer to make sure your agreement complies with current federal and state law.

November 4, 2013

Mary Caregiver
1234 Mockingbird Lane
Happy Hollow, KS 66299

Dear Mary,

This letter will set out the terms of our agreement regarding your employment as the caregiver for our daughter Ellen. You will start work on Monday, November 18, 2013, at 8:00 a.m. Your hours of employment will be from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday each week. You will receive a weekly salary of \$ ___ per week, as well as a stipend of \$ _ per week to pay for public transportation. In the event that you must stay with Ellen past 5:00 p.m., we agree to pay you an additional \$ _ per hour for that time. We will also make contributions to Social Security and Medicare and pay any other taxes related to your employment as required by state or federal law.

We will also provide the following benefits (sick days, vacation time, paid holidays, health insurance, etc.):

Your job responsibilities will be as follows:

You agree to do the following in an emergency situation:

Emergency contact information:

Emergency services: _____ Mother: _____ Father: _____

Neighbor (name): _____ Relative(s): _____

You agree to provide us with at least _ weeks' notice before terminating this agreement.

If you agree that this letter sets out all the terms of our agreement, please sign it on the line next to your typewritten name and return one copy to me.

We look forward to having you work with us in providing quality care for our daughter.

Sincerely,
Polly Parent

Accepted and Agreed Mary Caregiver:

Signature: _____ Telephone: _____

In-home Caregiver Telephone Interview Checklist

Date: _____

Applicant's Name: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Experience: _____

Education/Training: _____

Hours and days when available: _____

Previous experience with children of what ages: _____

Reason for leaving previous position: _____

Why he/she likes caring for children: _____

Fees/salary range: _____

The names and telephone numbers of at least two (and preferably three) references, ideally former employers

Reference 1:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Reference 2:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Reference 3:

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Interview scheduled? Yes No

Date and Time: _____

Notes: _____

Telephone Interview Questions for a Nanny or Au Pair

1. What is your experience in child care?

2. What type of education and training do you have?

3. Do you have special training in infant/child CPR, Heimlich maneuver and first aid?

4. What were your last three jobs, and why did you leave your last job?

5. Do you have any health conditions?

6. Are you available on a live-in or live-out basis?

7. What is your location and availability, and when can you start?

8. Is your schedule flexible?

9. Do you drive? What is your driving record like? What kind of car do you drive and how much insurance do you carry?

10. Are you willing to run errands?

11. Are you willing do light housework?

12. What are your salary and benefit requirements?

If your candidate has made the first cut on the phone, request an in-person interview:

1. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a nanny?

2. What are your discipline techniques?

3. How would you handle ... ? (give them a hypothetical situation based on your child's age)

After the interview, obtain the applicant's Social Security number, driver's license number, date of birth and written consent to conduct a private background check. Introduce the candidate to your child and see how they interact.

Chapter Five

After-school Program Checklist

- Play space. This is after school, not an extension of school. Be sure there are indoor and outdoor play areas, places to nap, quiet areas to do homework and places for your child to interact with other children.
- Adult supervision. Make sure your child is supervised for safety reasons and is nurtured and encouraged. Also verify that at least some of the staff has educational credentials.
- Snacks. Children are notoriously hungry after school and for good reason: lunch was hours earlier, and dinner may not be for a few more hours. A care provider should always have a healthy snack and juice or milk for your child.
- Organized play. After school, kids want to run wild. Your care provider should encourage physical activity but in a supervised, organized setting to prevent accidents. If your program has a large number of children, look for organized team sports or smaller group activities.
- Encouraged participation. This goes for you and for your child. A care provider should always make you feel welcome to drop by, announced or unannounced. If you volunteer to help out, they should never turn you down, unless there is a sufficient reason. The staff should encourage your child to try new things and to join in team and group events.
- A safe environment. The program should always meet your child's physical and emotional needs. This may require a low child-to-adult ratio, quiet rooms, attendance check-in or a strict no-bullying policy. Above all, the staff should always account for your child's presence and safety.
- Entertainment. This means more than television and movies. Ideally, it is entertainment that encourages your child to think and be creative, such as arts and crafts, word games or group projects. Entertainment should always be age-specific, so be sure to ask about the types of entertainment when looking at facilities.

Summer Camp Checklist

1. What is the camp arrangement: daytime or overnight?

2. How long is the program? What are the days and hours?

3. What are the fees? Payment options?

4. What activities, games and sports will my child be participating in?

5. Exactly where will my child be traveling and visiting with the camp?

6. What is the ratio between structured and unstructured time in the daily camp program?

7. What are the ages of the children enrolled? What is the ratio between boys and girls?

8. What is the ratio of camp staffers to children (ideally, there should be one staffer for every six to 10 children)?

9. Who will be instructing or supervising my child? What is each staffer's background and credentials? How are staffers screened and evaluated in the hiring process?

10. What is my child allowed to bring and not bring to camp? Is food provided?

11. What percentage of campers returns the following year? What percentage of counselors were previously campers at your camp?

12. What are the camp's policies on discipline or behavioral problems?

13. What happens in the event of an accident, injury or emergency? What safety, first aid and fire-prevention measures do you practice? Is a nurse or other health practitioner on staff? Is a physician available for emergencies?

14. What is the mode of transportation used by the camp? Is it in safe condition?

15. Are the facilities clean and large enough for the activities being promoted?

16. Is the equipment in good condition, supervised under use and suitable for my child's age group?
-
17. Is the camp licensed or accredited (and by which agency)?
-
18. Is the camp's license up to date?
-
19. Have any complaints been filed against the camp with the applicable licensing agency?
-
20. Has the camp ever been cited for a violation of any kind?
-
21. Does the camp have sufficient liability insurance coverage?
-
22. Can I have the names and numbers of three parent references whose children attended the last camp season? (Call these parents and ask about their children's experiences in the camp. Would they recommend the program?)
-

Chapter Six

Children with Special Needs Checklist

General questions

1. Is the school licensed or accredited (and by which agency)?

2. Is the school's state license up to date?

3. Has the school ever been cited for a violation of any kind?

4. Have any complaints been filed against the school with the applicable licensing agency?

5. Have any serious accidents or injuries occurred?

6. Has the school ever been sued?

7. Does the school have sufficient liability insurance coverage?

8. What are the typical hours of operation for a center?

9. Can I visit the center anytime to observe my child?

10. How can I become involved?

11. What are children allowed to bring or not bring?

12. What happens if my child is sick? What are the rules about bringing mildly ill children to day care?

13. Are parents allowed to participate in caregiving?

14. What are the costs? Are any other fees required (e.g., registration fees)?

15. Are there additional costs if we are delayed and cannot make it to the center by closing time?

16. If my child is absent for any reason, am I still charged?

17. What financial-aid opportunities and payment plans exist?

18. Who is the director of the school?

19. What are the director's educational credentials?

20. Who determines the curriculum?

21. Can you provide me with any written information describing program policies, health forms, payment contracts, fee schedules, sample menus, etc.?

22. Do you have at least five references I can call?

Questions about facilities

23. Is the center bright, clean and comfortable?

24. Are the kitchen and bathroom facilities clean and well maintained?

25. Is the facility inviting (without being overwhelming)?

26. How is the home/facility childproofed?

27. Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies secured away from the children?

28. Are there emergency exits, sprinklers, alarms and smoke detectors?

29. Is there an emergency exit plan in place?

30. Are the outdoor play areas safe and in good condition?

31. Does the outdoor play area have a soft surface instead of one made of asphalt or concrete?

32. Is there fencing around the outside play area to prevent children from wandering off during outdoor playtime?

Questions about caregivers

33. What is the adult/child ratio?

34. What type of training and background is required of staff (e.g., are they certified in early-childhood education)?

35. How are staff members screened during the hiring process? Is a criminal background check completed?

36. Have all the caregivers gone through a background check?

37. Are staff members trained in first aid and CPR?

38. Have the caregivers been trained to recognize, prevent and report child abuse?

39. What is the rate of turnover of staff members in the last three years?

40. What are the qualifications for being a main teacher or an aide?

41. How many different caregivers will be with my child during the day?

42. Are the children treated in a welcoming and respectful manner?

43. Do staffers demonstrate patience, friendliness and a sense of humor to children?

44. Is the child care provider attentive?

45. Do the children receive individual attention?

46. Are the children comforted when necessary?

47. Do the children seem happy?

48. Do the children seem stimulated?

49. Are any children misbehaving and, if so, how are they being dealt with?

50. Does the staff ask you questions about your child?

51. Can you picture your child spending time in the program and with the staff?

52. What does your “gut instinct” tell you about the facility?

Questions about approach to special needs children

53. Do you have a mission or philosophy statement that I can read?

54. How many children with special needs are currently enrolled or have been cared for in the past?

55. What extra training do staff members receive in caring for the special needs of some children?

56. How large are the groups? Are children with special needs integrated into the mainstream groups?

57. What type of special attention will my child receive?

58. What is a typical day like for a child under your care?

59. What are the planned activities?

60. Can you include activities recommended by my child’s doctor or therapist?

61. Is the staff willing and able to interact with other professionals who are working with my child?

62. Are any support services available (e.g., occupational therapists, speech pathologists)?

63. Do you have special equipment/toys/programs for children with disabilities or special needs?

64. What will you help my child to learn?

65. Will your staff work with a family to determine and achieve developmental goals for a child?

66. Are parents allowed to observe the day care environment?

67. Do you involve families with the program?

68. How would you deal with communication problems with a parent?

69. What are your disciplinary policies?

70. How do you resolve disputes between children?

71. What special costs might be associated with providing care for my child?

72. Are there families of other disabled or special needs children you have cared for who can be contacted as references?

Chapter Seven

Problem-solving Letter

June 2, 2013

Connie Caregiver, Director
QRS Child Care Center
1313 Mockingbird Lane
Hometown, CO 80000

Dear Connie,

On Friday, May 10, I called your attention to the poor condition of the playground swings at the QRS Day Care Center. At that time you agreed with me that the swings were in need of repair and that you would have your maintenance man take care of the problem immediately.

On the following Friday, May 17, I again noticed that the swings had not been repaired and that the cracking in the swing seats was worse than it had appeared previously. I mentioned this to you again, and you promised that the seats would be replaced over the weekend.

When I visited the Center this afternoon, I noticed once again that nothing had been done to repair or replace the seats on the swing set. Because you were out of the Center and unavailable, I spoke with your maintenance man, Mr. Conley, who was on the playground at the time. He told me that he had more important projects to work on and would “get around to fixing the swings when I can.”

Connie, I believe this situation is unacceptable and poses a danger to my daughter and to the other children at the Center. You assured me that swings would be fixed immediately, but three weeks have passed with no repairs.

Please see to it that the swings are repaired as promised by next Wednesday afternoon at the latest. Feel free to call me if you want to discuss this matter with me personally.

Sincerely,

Mary Motherhood