Tips on Choosing Child Care

Choosing the right child care arrangement for your child is an important decision involving numerous considerations. While this handout may not answer all of your questions about choosing child care, it offers some helpful guidelines. The following should help in your search:

- **Start early**: Take the time to become an educated consumer by learning about available child care options in your Community.
- **Visit several programs**: Shop around so that you have a good sense of what your choices are and what’s available.
- **Take time to thoroughly interview the person who will be caring for your child**: The child care providers are the single most important resource an early childhood program has to offer, so find out who they are. Take the time to discover their experience and background. Discuss their philosophy on child education. Remember that these people will be the primary caregivers for your child during the hours you are not there.
- **Find out if the program is licensed**: Call Community Care Licensing at 1(844) 538-8766 to find out if a provider is licensed or if he/she has had any complaints or licensing violations in the past years. Some types of caregivers are license-exempt, such as those who come into your own home. If you are interested in having them get a background check, please visit www.trustline.org for more information.
- **Inspect health and safety conditions**: Is the facility clean and free of safety and health hazards? Are diapering and eating areas kept separate? Does the provider wash his/her hands and the children’s hands before and after changing diapers, blowing noses, eating, going to the bathroom, etc.? Are there established illness policies? Is there a disaster plan? Are toys sanitized daily? Are children’s allergies known and posted? Can the caregiver(s) maintain visual contact with all the children at one time?
- **Consider the emotional setting**: Is your first impression one of warmth? Are the children handled gently and nurtured by the provider? Does the provider listen to and appreciate the children? Do the children seem happy, relaxed, and comfortable? Is the provider aware of the various developmental stages children go through and sensitive to the children’s individual personalities?
- **Look closely at the environment and find out about the program**: Are the materials accessible to children? Is the space bright and pleasant? Are there opportunities for indoor and outdoor play? Are toys age-appropriate? Is this a place your child would want to spend the day? Does the environment match your child’s personal style or temperament? Does it provide the children with a structured yet flexible environment? Are there a variety of activities? Are transitions kept to a minimum? Is a copy of the daily schedule posted?
- **Ask the provider about the disciplinary techniques used**: Children need guidance and limits without humiliation or physical punishment. Does the provider show patience in helping children learn self-control? Are various disciplinary techniques used, and does the provider take into account the age and personality of the child(ren) involved?
- **Talk to other parents using the program**: Find out what they like and don’t like, and whether they would select this program again if they were to start over. You can ask the provider for names and numbers of parents you can contact as references.
- **Stay involved**: A solid relationship between you and your child care provider is important to the care your child receives.
Indicators of Quality Child Care and Preschool

Including a checklist of things to observe, ask and consider

Research shows that ninety percent of the brain is developed by the age of five. The child care and preschool environment that children spend their time in, is important. Taking time to seek a quality environment that matches your family’s values starts by understanding quality indicators that help foster a child’s development. There is no single item that defines quality in child care and preschool, although there are several indicators that can point you in the right direction.

Quality indicators are listed in bold with a description below.

**Adult-child relationships and interactions**

- Children are respected and treated as an individual.
- The environment creates opportunities for learning through different types of play.
- Personalized education plan for each child, ability to identify developmental milestones and if early intervention is needed.

Things to observe when touring a facility:

- Adults communicate with children at child’s eye level.
- Greet children individually and assist with transitions.
- Interact with children in a caring, positive manner.
- Model the behavior expected of children.
- Do children appear happy and engaged.
- Are activities child-centered rather than teacher-directed.
- Child care providers or teachers appear professional, competent, and happy in their work.
- Encourage and adequately respond to questions.

**Low adult to child ratio and small group size**

- The lower the adult to child ratio the more attention your little one will receive.
- Smaller groups are easier to manage and therefore tend to be safer and calmer.
- Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) have a maximum adult-to-child ratio of 1:4 infants or 1:6 children with no more than 3 infants. Center based care has a maximum adult-to-child ratio of 1:4 infants and 1:12 for preschool age. Anything less than the state maximum can indicate higher quality care.
Caregiver education and turnover

- Ongoing training and education in early childhood development supports higher quality programs for children.
- Research has consistently linked staff education in child development to positive outcomes for children.
- Children do best when they can remain with the same person for at least a year. A stable and continuous relationship between a caregiver/teacher and children is important.
- Low caregiver/staff turnover is associated with positive teaching practices and higher quality care.

Things to ask:

- Why are you in the field of child development?
- How long have you been in this field?
- What is the staff turnover rate?
- Are staff supported and encouraged to participate in continuing education?

Family Involvement – A quality program will work closely with parents to offer different ways for families to be involved and will:

- Keep parents informed about a child’s day, through regular check-ins and parent teacher conferences.
- Make parents feel welcome.
- Help parents feel that their opinions and feedback are respected.
- Offer opportunities for parents to volunteer.

Things to observe from child care provider:

- Encourages and adequately responds to questions.
- Treat parents with courtesy on the phone and in person.

Things to ask:

- How is parent participation encouraged and are there opportunities for parents to meet and socialize?
- What is the system for daily/weekly communication (i.e. end of day verbal check in, email, blog, bulletin board)?
- Do visiting parents have the opportunity to speak with enrolled families?

Health and Safety

- Program is in good standing with Community Care Licensing (CCL). Contact their office at 844-538-8766 to check for any past complaints or licensing violations.
- Emergency plans – information should be posted and drills should be practiced with children on a regular basis.
- Criminal background checks – In California, any person over the age of 18 residing in a Family Child Care Home (FCCH) is required by law to be fingerprinted or have an exemption. All staff working in a licensed child care center and all assistants in a FCCH are required by law to be fingerprinted. Nannies are not required to have a background check unless they are hired through a nanny placement agency.
- Child and Adult Food Program – programs that participate in the federally funded food program are required to serve healthy meals and snacks.
- Hand washing – providers and children should be washing hands before meals, after using the restroom or coming in from outdoors.

Things to observe:

- Can the caregiver/teachers maintain visual contact with all the children at one time?
- Does the caregiver/teacher wash their hands and the children’s hands after changing diapers, blowing noses, using the restroom, and before eating, etc.?
• Diaper changing area is separate from playing and eating areas.
• Separate sinks are used for toileting and eating.
• Indoor/outdoor areas are free of hazardous materials and chemicals.
• Electrical outlets are covered.
• Gates, latches, and door/cabinet/drawer locks are utilized and in good condition.
• Is facility clean, well-maintained, bright and pleasant?
• Toys are clean, safe, accessible to children and age-appropriate.

Things to ask:
• Are emergency and evacuation procedures established and practiced?
• Emergency contact information is on file and updated regularly?
• Are there established illness policies?

• Does the site follow Universal Precautions (for Preventing Transmission of Bloodborne Infections)?
• How often are surfaces, toys, and diaper changing areas sanitized?
• What is the procedure for administering medication; Are children’s allergies known and posted?
• Are there separate toileting facilities available for children and teachers (centers only)?

Things to consider:
• When meals and/or snacks are provided, are they nutritious?

Accreditations
• When a child care provider or preschool is accredited, they have met voluntary standards that are higher than most state licensing requirements.
• Any child care program can get accredited. Below is a list of organizations and their websites:
  - National Association for the Education of Young Children  http://www.naeyc.org
  - National Accreditation Commission  www.earlylearningleaders.org
  - National Early Childhood Program Accreditation  www.neca.net
  - National Association for Family Child Care  http://www.nafcc.org
  - Council for Professional Recognition  www.cdacouncil.org
• Is the child care provider a member of any professional organization such as a local provider association and/or do they participate in any local professional development programs?

Other considerations
Environment/Setting:
Things to observe:
• Are materials, art projects, and decorations at the children’s eye level?
• Do materials and facility setup encourage choice and exploration?
• Is furniture and materials child sized?
• Are there opportunities for indoor and outdoor play?
• Is a copy of the daily schedule posted?
• Do pictures, decorations, & books recognize a variety of languages and ethnic backgrounds?

Things to ask:
• Is nap time provided? What time & where? How is it handled if a child chooses not to nap on a particular day?
• How much time do children watch television during the day, if any?

Things to consider:
• Does the environment match your child’s personal style or temperament?
• Is this a place your child would want to spend the day?
Program/Philosophy

Things to observe:
- Do children appear happy and engaged?

Things to ask:
- How does your curriculum promote learning through play, literacy, and language development?
- Are transitional objects from home allowed and/or encouraged (blanket, doll)?

Things to consider:
- Philosophy of the program matches family values.
- Do activities promote success, independence, and self-esteem?
- How is play incorporated? Play is the “work” of children and how they learn. Ideally a child care provider or preschool will allow time for outdoor and indoor play with different learning materials.
- Allows children to choose between group and individual activities?
- Integrates field trips and enrichment activities.
- Do discipline techniques emphasize education rather than punishment?

Registration and Fees

- What are your daycare fees for full-time and part-time______________________________
- How do I register my child______________________________
- Is there an application fee______________________________
- What is the fee for picking up my child late______________________________
- Do you accept/offer any kind of financial aid______________________________

Notes:

Sources:
http://childcareaware.org/
http://trustline.org/
Child Care Checklist

Center/Family Child Care provider:_____________________________________________________

Hours: __________ Fee(s): Full-time _________ Part-time __________

Caregivers/Teachers

Yes No

• Treat parents with courtesy on the phone and in person ___ ___
• Encourage and adequately respond to questions ___ ___
• At least one staff member is on-site at all times who meets the required ___ ___
  15 hours of health and safety training, pediatric CPR, and first aid
• Have Early Childhood Education units and/or meet education requirements ___ ___
• Teacher-to-child ratio meets state licensing requirements ___ ___
• Appear professional, competent, and happy in their work ___ ___
• Participate in continuing education and training ___ ___
• Low staff turnover rate ___ ___
• Model the behavior expected of the children ___ ___
• Interact with children in a caring, positive manner ___ ___
• Communicate with children at their eye level ___ ___
• Greet children individually and assist with transitions ___ ___

Communication/Parent Involvement

Yes No

• Use a bulletin board, newsletter for parent-teacher communication ___ ___
• Have a system for daily/weekly communication (i.e. journal, daily notes) ___ ___
• “Open door” policy welcomes parents to drop in unannounced ___ ___
  (Remember, this is your legal right after your child is enrolled!)
• Visiting parents have the opportunity to speak with enrolled families ___ ___
• Parent participation is invited and encouraged ___ ___
• Have established illness and conflict resolution policies ___ ___
• Have opportunities for parents to meet, discuss, and socialize ___ ___
• You agree with the discipline policies ___ ___

Environment/Setting

Yes No

• Materials, art projects, and decorations are at the children’s eye level ___ ___
• Materials and facility setup encourages choice and exploration ___ ___
• Facility is clean and well-maintained ___ ___
• Child-size materials and furniture ___ ___
• Pictures, decorations, books, and curriculum recognize a variety of ___ ___
  languages and ethnic backgrounds
• Outdoor play area is fenced ___ ___
• Toys are clean, safe and within reach of children ___ ___
### Health and Safety

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program is licensed or regulated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has been verified with Community Care Licensing (650) 266-8843</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proper hand washing techniques are used before/after toileting &amp; handling food</td>
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<tr>
<td>The site follows universal infection control practices (i.e. paper towels, pump soap, disposable gloves, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surfaces, toys, and diaper changing areas are disinfected throughout the day and at closing time using bleach and water solution</td>
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<td>Separate sinks are used for toileting and eating</td>
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<td>Gates, latches, and door/cabinet/drawer locks are utilized</td>
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<td>Have procedures for administering medication; children’s allergies are posted</td>
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<td>Emergency cards are on file and updated regularly</td>
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<td>Evacuation procedures are posted and practiced</td>
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<td>All areas are visible and easily supervised by teachers</td>
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<td>Separate toileting facilities are available for children and teachers (centers only)</td>
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<td>Emergency and evacuation procedures are established and practiced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designated area is available for isolation when a child becomes ill</td>
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### Program/Philosophy

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<td>Philosophy of the program matches my own</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children appear happy and engaged</td>
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<td>Transitions during the day are kept to a minimum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily schedule is posted and followed</td>
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<td>Transitional objects from home are encouraged (blanket, doll)</td>
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<td>Nutritious meals and/or snacks are provided</td>
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<td>Activities are child-centered rather than teacher-directed</td>
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<td>Activities promote success, independence, and self-esteem</td>
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<td>Curriculum promotes literacy and language development</td>
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Parental Rights and Responsibilities

When your child is in child care or preschool, as a parent you have certain rights and responsibilities. Below is a list of things to know and consider.

Your Rights are:

- Enter and inspect the child care facility (home or center) without advance notice whenever your child is in care
- File a complaint against the licensee with the licensing office and review the licensee’s public file kept by the licensing office
- Review, at the child care facility, reports of licensing visits and substantiated complaints against the licensee made during the last three years
- Complain to the licensing office and inspect the child care facility without discrimination or retaliation against you or your child
- Be notified and receive, from the licensee, a written notice that lists the name of any person not allowed in the child care facility while children are present
- Request in writing that a parent not be allowed to visit your child or take your child from the child care facility, provided you have shown a certified copy of a court order
- Receive the name, address and telephone number of the local licensing office from the licensee
- Be informed by the licensee, upon request, of the name and type of association to the child care facility for any adult who has been granted a criminal record exemption, and that the name of the person may also be obtained by contacting the local licensing office
- Receive, from the licensee, the caregiver background check process form
- Be informed when a communicable disease or injury defined as an unusual incident by Community Care Licensing has arisen with your child

Your Responsibilities are to:

- Keep your child home when sick unless sick care is provided
- Let the teacher know you are interested in understanding your child’s progress in child care
  - Share information about the child and home that may affect behavior
  - Set goals with the teacher and share in decisions made about your child’s care
  - Discuss problems and concerns with the teacher first
  - Show appreciation for teachers
  - Continually hone your parenting skills and understanding of children
  - Volunteer to assist the teacher in some way
  - Follow the child care program’s policies and reread the contract and policy manual regularly
- Read to your child and spend time talking and playing together

Sources:
Community Care Licensing http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/forms/english/LIC995A.PDF
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/forms/english/LIC995.PDF
Children’s Council of San Francisco http://www.childrenscouncil.org/

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