



STEPS IN CHOOSING QUALITY CHILD CARE

We are glad to be a part of your recent child care search. The Child Care Network is one of 39 child care resource and referral agencies in New York State who works with parents, child care providers, businesses and community organizations to help promote the availability of quality child care services. Our Referral Specialist works specifically with parents to provide child care referrals and information on choosing quality child care, and to connect parents to resources on parenting issues.

A child care search is a multi-step process; therefore, the following information is intended to define each step along the way for finding child care that best meets the needs of you and your child. If you have questions that arise during the reading of this or any other information contained within this referral packet, please call and speak to our Referral Specialist, Katherine Place, at 518-798-7972 or at placek@saccn.org.

STEP ONE Phone Interviewing

Once you have referrals for available child care providers in your area, you will then need to place calls to the various programs to determine which you will visit. Some questions you may want to ask at this stage include:

- Is there an opening for my child for the days and hours needed?
- Where are you located?
- How much will care cost? Do you have sliding scale?
- What age groups do you serve?
- How many children are in your care?
- Do you provide meals and snacks?
- Do you have a license, accreditation or other certification?
- When can I come to visit?

STEP TWO Visiting the Child Care Facility

If possible, visit more than one child care center or family child care home in order to have a stronger point of comparison. Feel free to visit each facility more than once, stay as long as possible and do **ask questions**. As you observe the facility ask yourself:

- Are the children happy and actively involved?
- Is the environment more home-like or instructional?
- Are the rooms clean and safe?
- Are materials and equipment stored in low shelves available to children, or are children waiting for an adult to hand them materials?
- Do the caregivers greet children and parents as they arrive?
- Do the caregivers seem to enjoy children and do they focus their time and energies on them, or do they seem to spend more time arranging materials and/or talk to other adults?
- **A more complete child care checklist is enclosed with this packet.**

STEP THREE Look for Quality Child Care Indicators

Look for the following indicators of a quality child care environment during your visits.

1. **Adult to Child Ratio:** How many children are there in care for each adult? The fewer the children for each adult, the more attention for your child. And the younger the child, the more important the adult to child ratio is. For example, in a center program babies need at least one adult per 4 babies (1:4) and four year olds generally do well with one adult for 8 children (1:8).
2. **Group Size:** How many children are in the group? The smaller the group size, the better for your child; a smaller group size is likely to be a calmer, safer environment for young children, in general.
3. **Caregiver Qualifications and Training:** What type of training and education has he/she experienced? Caregivers with degrees and/or special training to work with young children will be better prepared to help your child learn. Ask caregivers what types of trainings they participate in to maintain and improve their skills.
4. **Staff Turnover:** How long has the staff at the center or the family child care home been there? Children benefit greatly when caregivers stay with the same children for at least a year. Learning and development can be negatively affected when children are repeatedly using their time and energy to transition to new staff.
5. **Parent Involvement:** How does the caregiver promote communication with parents? Is parent input and involvement valued by the caregiver? Forming positive relationships between the caregiver and the parent is essential to quality care. A parent needs to feel free to visit the child care program at all times and to know what happens in the day to day happenings in the life of his/her child.
6. **Health and Safety:** An important component of a quality environment for children is one that is safe for exploration, social interactions and freedom of movement. Supervision of children at **all** times is the primary way to promote overall health and safety. Additionally, does the provider know how to reach the parents in an emergency? Are rooms well lit and ventilated? Do the adults know first aid and CPR? Are smoke detectors evident? Child care regulations may be obtained on line at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/.

Note: While state regulated programs meet basic health and safety standards, they do not necessarily meet other quality standards as outlined above; quality standards go beyond state licensing standards.
7. **Accreditation:** Is the child care provider accredited by a national organization? Caregivers that are accredited have met voluntary standards for child care that are higher than licensing requirements. The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) are the two largest organizations that accredit child care programs.

STEP FOUR Check References and Contact Licensing Office

Ask caregivers whom you visit for references from parents. Questions to ask parents who use (or have used) a caregiver you are interested in include:

- Was the caregiver reliable on a daily basis?
- How does the caregiver discipline your child?
- Does your child enjoy the child care experience?
- Does the caregiver communicate regularly with you?
- Would you recommend the caregiver without reservations?
- If your child is no longer in care with the caregiver, why did you leave?

Also, at this phase of the process, you might wish to contact the New York State Office of Family and Children Services at 800-732-5207 or www.ocfs.state.ny.us to determine the caregiver's licensing history and complaint file.

STEP FIVE Making the Decision

One of the most important decision you will ever make as a parent is choosing quality child care for your child. Studies show that a high quality child care program will not only foster self-esteem and social learning, it will also help children be more ready for school, thus increasing their chances to succeed.

Now that you have visited various child care programs, think about all that you have seen and heard (and perhaps) read. You may want to ask yourself some of these questions? :

- Which child care setting will I choose so that my child will be happy and stimulated?
- Which caregiver can meet the unique needs of my child?
- Which child care settings demonstrated quality indicators as well as a healthy and safe environment for young children
- Are the caregiver's values compatible with my family's values?
- Is the child care available and affordable according to my family's needs and resources?
- Are the references and licensing histories positive?
- Do I feel good about my decision?

STEP SIX Stay Involved in the Child Care Program you choose.

Once you have made a child care decision, stay involved with your child's care. Your involvement and communication with your child's caregiver impacts the quality of your child's experience. Some ways for you to be involved include:

- Talk with your child's caregiver every day and schedule regular meetings
- Talk with your child each day about how his/her day went
- Volunteer when needed for special projects (i.e. process book club orders, make play dough, help plant a garden...
- Celebrate you child's birthday with staff and children
- Read a book
- Join in special events such as field trips



NOTES:

Attached: Childcare evaluation checklist

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