

Visiting the Child Care Site

It is important to visit the site so that you may make observations. Be sure to visit and interview more than one caregiver or center. Even if you really like the first one you visit, it is important to go to at least one more for comparison purposes. The provider may prefer you make your first visit when there are no children in care so that he/she may devote his/her attention to you and your child. You should make a return visit with your child when the day care children are present and not napping so that your child may become familiar with the site and you can observe the day care activities and how your child reacts to the environment, caregiver(s) and other children.

As you visit the home or center, keep the following in mind:

- Put yourself in your child's place. Is there an attempt to make the environment interesting and stimulating for young children?
- Would you like to be here for two hours? Four hours? Nine hours?
- Is it child proof and safe? Are electrical outlets covered and medicines and other bottles kept out of children's reach?
- Is it too neat? Too messy? Is there "friendly clutter," especially where the children are?
- Are toys and equipment appropriate for their ages readily available?
- Is the caregiver relaxed with young people?
- Are the children respected and given attention?
- Are there smoke detectors?
- In case of an emergency, can the building be vacated quickly?
- Are they curious about you and your child...these new visitors to their space?
- Are babies held, cuddled and talked to as they are fed and changed?
- Is there adequate outdoor space where children can run and play?

The following questions are unique to a family day care home provider:

- Do you have a helper?
- How and why did you choose to do home day care?
- What is your background experience with young people?
- What do you least like?

The following questions are unique to a day care center:

- What is the staff/ration per child? How large are the groups of children?
- How much staff turnover has there been over the past year?
- How much training do the teachers have in early childhood education?
- Does the center have any sliding fees, scholarship programs or state subsidies?

Here are some questions you may want to ask the family day care provider or center staff. Choose the questions that are pertinent to you.

- Where do the children play? Inside? Outside?
- What are the fees, hours and vacation schedule?
- What meals and snacks do you provide? What are the menus like?
- What about emergencies? How would you handle them?

Do you have a medical treatment permission slip?

Do you charge for days my child is not at the provider site due to vacation, holidays, sick days, etc.?

Do you charge for days you are not available due to vacation, holidays, sick days, etc.?

How much have prices gone up in the past two years?

Are there extra charges if I am late to pick up my child?

Do you have alternative care for days you are not available?

What are the “house rules” and how are they communicated to the children?

How is discipline handled? (Is it unprofessional and illegal to use physical punishment. I.e. spanking or withholding food as punishment. It is important that this never be a part of your day care situation).

What is a typical day like?

Cooking? Storytelling? Outside play? Field trips? Arts and crafts?

Are the children ever transported in a vehicle while in your care? What safety restraints do you use?

Do you care for children after school? Part-timers? Drop-ins?

How many children do you care for? What ages?

How much time do the younger children spend in cribs, playpens and walkers?

What do you expect from parents?

Will you care for an ill child?

How many babies do you care for?

Is there any flexibility in the day care hours if the parents needs are unusual?

Do you allow unannounced, drop-in visits by the parents of the children in your care? (Regardless of whether you select a day care home or center, unannounced drop-in visits are a good way of monitoring the care of your child. You should be allowed to make these visits.)

What are nap time arrangements?

Be sensitive to the questions you are asked by the provider. Are they interested in you and your child? A good provider should discuss business and financial arrangements with you but beware of people that talk only about hours, pay and the amount of work required. Trust your “gut feeling” about the provider, realizing that some apprehension is normal. The most important overriding question for you to ask is whether you would feel comfortable leaving your child with the provider all day.