



# Tips for choosing child care

A child care provider should be a warm and supportive influence in your child's early years. A great provider will understand children's needs at each age and stage of development, and will provide an enriching experience for your child and peace of mind for you. The steps listed below are designed to help you consider the details involved in making a well-informed decision about child care.

## 1. LOCATE: Child Care

LOCATE: Child Care is a free referral service for parents and caregivers seeking child care within their communities. LOCATE: Child Care's Family Resource Specialists will help you find child care options near your home, work, school, or where ever is most convenient. They will consider requirements you have specified, including location, hours, cost, and other. LOCATE: Child Care can be reached at [877.261.0060](tel:877.261.0060) Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. or online anytime by [visiting the search portal here](#).

## 2. Telephone interview

Call all of the facilities you received from LOCATE: Child Care. Tell the provider your child's age and the time period you are looking for care.

Here are some questions you may want to ask in an initial phone call:

- What are your hours?
- How many children do you care for and what are their ages?
- Does the child care provider/child ratio allow for one-on-one attention to each child during the day?
- Do you serve meals and snacks or do I need to provide food for my child?
- When I have time, may I stay and watch my child at play?

## 3. Site visit

Visit at least three programs—and take your child along. Observe the spaces, the child care provider(s), and the children. Make sure to ask to see the provider's license.

Take a look at the following:

### Observe the environment

- Do the spaces appear clean and safe for every age child in attendance? For example, is there a crib for each infant?
- Is there enough area inside and out so all the children can have room to play?
- Do the toys and materials support different types of age-appropriate play, such as imaginative play, building projects, and arts and crafts?
- Is there a time and place for both quiet and active play?

### Observe the child care provider

- Does the child care provider use a calm voice and speak with the children at their level?
- Are you comfortable with the way the child care provider disciplines the children?
- Does the child care provider praise accomplishments and help resolve conflicts?

- Does the child care provider seem to enjoy and respect the children?
- If your child is an infant, does the care provider connect with your baby by gently holding and talking to the baby?
- Will the baby get attention when she/he is not crying?

### **Observe the children**

- Are the children engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age and stage of development?
- Are children offered choices to take part in activities that interest them?
- Does the daily schedule allow children to play both indoors and outdoors, have nap time if appropriate, and participate in individual play and group activities?
- Are the infants held and talked to in a reassuring way that helps them learn to trust that their needs will be met?

### **4. Interview other parents**

Ask the child care provider if you may speak with other parents who use that home or center.

Here are some questions that may help you make your decision:

- Does your child enjoy coming here?
- What do you like most about this setting?
- What are some of the things that you don't like?
- If you had to find care again, would you choose this place?

### **5. Make a decision!**

- Go over the notes from your observations and interviews.
- Narrow down the options to those that seem best for you and your child.
- If you feel unsure about the program, visit again.
- If you are not satisfied with the choices, call LOCATE: Child Care for more referrals.
- If you are having a hard time finding care nearby, you may wish to expand your search parameters.

### **6. Remain active**

Below are actions designed to establish a sound long-term relationship between you and the provider:

- Sign a contract before care begins. The contract should include:
  - Hours the program opens and closes
  - Holiday and vacation closures
  - What you will need to bring (e.g. food and snacks, a sleeping mat, extra clothing).
- The best way to get to know your new program is to get involved. Attend parent meetings, help with arts and crafts projects or bring in snacks to share.
- If you are pleased with the care your child receives, let the provider know. Good parent/provider communication benefits your child and is the key to a healthy relationship.

## 7. Need help?

- If you have any questions or concerns, call LOCATE: Child Care at [877.261.0060](tel:877.261.0060).
- Complaints about your child care provider should be made by contacting your [regional Child Care Licensing office](#).
- Concerns involving any threat to the health, safety, or welfare of a child, should be immediately registered with your regional [Office of Child Care](#) and, in certain circumstances, with the Child Protective Services division of your [local Department of Social Services](#).