



circuit lines



A Guide: “How to Choose Quality Child Care”

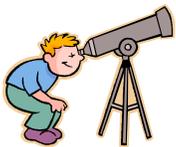
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choosing child care

You are about to make a very important decision – choosing your child care arrangement. The process of selecting a child care provider includes five key steps:

- Contacting the provider
- Observing the program
- Interviewing the provider
- Selecting the program
- Evaluating the program



contacting the provider

You have already received important information about child care from your Child Care Circuit specialist. Your specialist has helped you to think about your criteria for choosing child care and has given you the names of providers that are most likely to meet your specific needs. The specialist has shared information with you about each provider's schedule, hours, fees and daily activities with the children.

You are now ready to call the providers. The first call is important. You have the chance to ask for more detailed information.

For example, you may want to ask:

- Has any of the information you received from the Child Care Circuit changed?
- What types of activities does the provider conduct with the children? Is there a wide variety that reflects the social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs of the children?
- What kind of training and experience does the provider have in the early care and education field?

If you feel comfortable with the information you receive over the phone, ask to arrange a visit with the provider. Find a time convenient for both of you that will allow you to observe the program for at least one half of an hour.

Following the observation, you will want to have time to also do a personal interview with the provider. The following are some general guidelines for the classroom observation and the provider interview.



observing the program

You will want to observe a few key aspects of the program when you visit:

Environment: - Look for:

- Space that is child proofed (i.e. covered electrical outlets, covered radiators, free of hazardous objects within the reach of a child).
- Smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, posted emergency phone numbers.
- Two exits leading outdoors.
- Space that is clean and well maintained
- Enough safe, open indoor and outdoor space for adults and children to move about freely.
- A noise level that is comfortable – not too noisy, but not too quiet.

Activities: - Look for:

- A good variety of age appropriate toys, blocks, puzzles, books, games, stuffed animals, dress-up clothes, puppets, arts and crafts.
- Children who are busy with activities that interest them, the absence of passive watching or aimless wandering.

- A variety of activities offered to the children i.e. quiet, active, indoor, outdoor, small motor (like puzzles or beads) large motor (like dancing and jumping).
- Provider's understanding of why she is offering a particular activity to the children.
- Indication that the provider plans activities in advance. Can the provider give you a description of the activities she'll be doing today, tomorrow and next week?
- A harmonious and inviting environment.

Provider/Child Interactions: - Look for:

- Attentiveness of the provider to the needs of the children
- An environment that indicates that the children and the provider are relaxed, comfortable and happy together.
- The provider's ability to work with a child in handling a nervous or scary situation.
- Similarities between your values and those of the provider on child rearing, particularly as they relate to topics like sharing, good nutrition, etc.
- Provider's listening skills. Does he/she respond to the children positively (in speaking and body language)?





interviewing the provider

Below is a list of topics to discuss with the provider when considering a center-based program or a family child care home. An interview should be conducted at a time convenient to both of you, when the provider is not involved with caring for children.

Ask About:

- A typical day's routine and schedule.
- The program's philosophy about how children learn.
- Program policies regarding health and safety, ill children, vacation pay, parent involvement, etc.
- The adults who would be working with your child, their experience, training and qualifications.
- The program's curriculum and how it varies depending upon children's ages.
- The provider's recent training and plans for ongoing training (college courses, workshops, etc.).
- The provider's plans for continuing in the child care field.

If you have any questions, please contact the Child Care Circuit at info@childcarecircuit.org or call for further assistance.



selecting the program

Before you make your final decision about the right program for your child, check that you have gone through the following steps:

- Observe and compare several programs.
- Visit a second time those programs that you are considering seriously.
- Understand the terms of the enrollment agreement and all of the fees involved: payment for vacation days, snow days, etc.
- Check at least two references from parents who have used the program.
- Check with the Department of Early Education & Care (EEC) and ask for a licensing history.



ongoing evaluation

Once you have enrolled your child in a program, it is very important to continue evaluating the provider and the program to insure that it is meeting your needs and those of your child. Is the provider what you expected? Does your child feel happy and comfortable with the program and the other children?

A Guide to Specific Child Care Options

1. **Family Child Care** means children are cared for in the home of the provider. Families choose this type of care because of the home setting, flexible hours, mix of ages and small group size. Providers may care for up to 6 children. Some providers are designated **Family Child Care Plus** which means providers may care for up to 8 children (2 of the children must be school-aged). Providers are required to be licensed by EEC.
2. **Large Family Child Care** offers the home setting of family child care for up to 10 children. With more than 6 children, an EEC certified assistant must be present in addition to the provider. Providers are required to be licensed by EEC.
3. **Family Child Care Systems** are a formal network of licensed family child care homes coordinated by a central child care organization. Often, these systems provide social workers and/or educational coordinators who may be involved in training and recruiting providers and assisting them with issues and problems that arise.
4. **Child Care Centers** provide care for larger numbers of children for part or full day programs. Centers are organized to meet the needs of children and working families. They are usually open year round. Child Care Centers offer programs to a variety of age groups and vary in terms of educational philosophy, curriculum, costs and services. Programs are subject to licensing by EEC and staff must be qualified under EEC regulations.
5. **Nursery School Programs** typically offer only part-time care, usually for children 2 years & 9 months to five years of age. The children have an opportunity to socialize with other children their own age and engage in a variety of organized activities. Most nursery schools close for the summer, vacations and holidays, though there may be coverage at an extra fee. As in centers, programs and staff are subject to licensing by EEC.
6. **Before & After School Programs** are usually located in schools, child care centers, family child care homes, churches or other settings that offer child care. These programs may be licensed by EEC or license exempt depending on their overseeing entity. School-Age Centers usually provide child care to kindergarten through sixth grade children before and after school and may be open during school vacations and summer breaks.
7. **Camps:** A summer camp (day or overnight) must be licensed by the local board of health. A camp may run through the entire summer, or it may run for shorter sessions. Though most offer a range of recreational activities, a camp may also have a special focus, such as drama or sports.

