

TEN TIPS ON FINDING QUALITY CHILDCARE

You've made the decision to place your child in daycare! Now it's up to you to find the center that will not only meet **your** needs for quality care but will also be a good "fit" for your child. It can seem like an overwhelming endeavor to find an appropriate setting, but taken one step at-a-time the process will result in a successful match for you and your family. What then, are some of the items that you should consider?



- 1. Determine your priorities.** Do you want a center close to home? To work? How much can you afford to pay for childcare? Do you think a program that emphasizes academics is important? Maybe a program that offers opportunities for enrichment such as tumbling classes or music and dance classes is important to you. Perhaps you would like to find a center that gives you the option of placing your child in care on a part-time basis instead of full-time. Many centers offer nutritionally-balanced meals to the children so that parents don't have to worry about packing food; maybe this benefit would appeal to you.
- 2. Is the center licensed? Is it accredited?** A state-issued license shows that the center meets all state requirements; accreditation means that the center voluntarily meets standards that are higher than the basic requirements set forth by the state.
- 3. Does the center effectively communicate with parents?** How is important information passed along? Will you be told if your child slept, and for how long? Will you know how much food was eaten or how many ounces of formula your child drank? Do you feel that the center puts forth an effort to develop relationships with parents? Do not underestimate how important a trusting relationship is – it's the difference between going to work and being able to focus on your responsibilities rather than wondering how well your child is being cared for.
- 4. Does the center have low staff to child ratios?** How many teachers will care for your child? Are the teachers consistently present so that your child can develop a bond with the staff members?
- 5. What is the environment like?** Are the classrooms clean and cheerful? Do the rooms have lots of toys, books and other materials? What are the playgrounds like – are there separate areas for both young toddlers and older preschool children to run and play? What about an indoor play area in case of inclement weather? Is the center a place that your child would enjoy spending time in?
- 6. Do the children at the center look happy and content?** How about the teachers? Are they interacting happily with the children? Does the center have a pleasant sound of talking, laughing, and singing?
- 7. How does the center discipline?** Find out the center's philosophy regarding discipline. Are the center's philosophy and goals for the children compatible with yours?
- 8. What are the staff qualifications?** Do the teachers have a background in child development or early childhood education? What kind of credentials do staff members hold? Is on-going Professional Development offered to the staff?
- 9. Is there a structured curriculum?** What will your child learn? Is there a variety of activities offered that involve developing cognitive skills and motor skills? What happens if your child doesn't want to participate in an activity? Is there enough time for free play?
- 10. Is there a serious commitment to security?** Your child's safety should be of paramount concern. Does the center have security procedures in place? What are they? Do they have a written plan to deal with emergencies? What if the center needed to be evacuated: is there a plan? How would you be notified of an emergency? Does the center have a relationship with the local Office of Emergency Management?



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