Kingdom Child Care Connection at umbrella

How to Choose Child Care for Your Child

Follow these five steps to success:

Step 1 – Start Early

Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering-a child care center or care in someone else's home – finding the right child care option can take some time.

Step 2 – Make the Call

Begin your search by calling your local experts- your child care resource and referral (CCR&R) center. CCR&R centers know a lot about child care and how to find help paying for it. They can give you a list of child care options that might work for you.

Key Considerations:

Child Care that is Good for Your Child

When your child is in a safe, loving and stimulating child care setting, you don't have to worry while you're at work. You know that your child is getting the kind of care children need to be healthy, happy, and ready for school.

Childcare That You Can Count On

When you have stable child care, you don't have to struggle to piece things together, and then scramble when your plans fall through at the last minute. Make sure that the child care options you are considering are not too far from your home or work and available during the times you need. And don't forget to have a back up plan for times like holidays and snow days.

Step 3 – Take a Look

Visit the child care options that make your first cut. Make sure you check for these things:

Adult to Child Ratio

Ask how many children there are for each adult - the fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. Babies need an adult to child ratio of no more than 1:4 (one adult for four infants –licensed setting) while four year olds can do well with a ratio of 1:10 (one adult for ten children).

Group Size

Find out how many children are in the group - the smaller the group the better. Imagine a group of 25 two year olds with five adults, compared to a group of 10 with two adults. Both groups have the same adult to child ratio. Which would be calmer and safer? Which would be more like a family?

Caregiver Education

Ask about the Caregiver's Training and Education. Caregivers with degrees and/or special training in working with children are often better able to help your child learn.
Are the caregivers involved in activities to improve their skills? Do they attend classes and workshops?

Turnover

Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It's best if children stay with the same caregiver at least one year. Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child. Getting used to new caregivers takes time and energy that could be spent on learning new things.

Accreditation

Find out if the child care provider has been accredited by a national organization, like NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) or NAFCC (National Association For Family Child Care), or if they are participating in Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS). Providers that are accredited have voluntarily met higher standards for child care than basic licensing requirements.

Step 4 – Make a Choice

Think about what you saw at each visit, and make a choice for your child and family. Use the checklist to help you.

Checklist

- ❑ Does the person who will be caring for your child have special training in early childhood education, First Aid and CPR?
- ❑ How long has the caregiver been in the same program or providing child care in the home?
- ❑ Are just a few children being cared for by one caregiver (low child/adult ratio)?
- ❑ If there is more than one caregiver in the setting, is the total number of children in the group still fairly small (group size).
- ❑ If you are considering a more formal child care program, is it nationally accredited, and is it state licensed or regulated?
- ❑ Does the caregiver welcome drop in visits and parent ideas and involvement?
- ❑ Does the caregiver get on the child's eye level and give them lots of attention and encouragement?

- ❑ Are there planned things for children to do, as well as lots of time for free play?
- ❑ Are materials-such as books, blocks, toys and art supplies-available to children all day long?
- ❑ Does the place look clean and safe, and is hand washing done often?
- ❑ Does the caregiver have written policies, including emergency plans?
- ❑ Does the caregiver have references?
- ❑ You know your child best-will your child be happy there?

Step 5 – Stay Involved

Here are some ways to be involved

- Make sure the provider has your name on the emergency contact list.
- Have parent/caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions.
- Offer to paint or fix broken toys etc.
- Be there for your child's birthday party.
- Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud.
- Join in special events, like Career Day, Black History Month, Cinco De Mayo, or other holidays.

Adapted from Child Care Aware 2003 NACCRRA, the Nation's Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (www.naccrra.org) or go to www.childcareaware.org for additional resources.