

FINDING QUALITY CARE

Children need an environment that is a good match to their personality and learning style. Young children can find big changes difficult. Moving from program to program can slow their learning process and cause behavior problems. We hope this information will help you find the right place the first time.

Getting Started:

- Call providers, have a list of questions, arrange time for a visit at the site.
- Interview at least three providers in person.
- View the entire facility, watch how the provider interacts with children.
- Discuss any special needs your child may have.
- Ask for references.
- Ask about cost – is there a multi-child discount, does the provider accept DHS?
- Are there any other fees or deposits?
- Are healthy meals and snacks provided? Are they part of the USDA food program?
- If you have difficulty finding care, try asking family, friends, or at your church or school.

After You Decide:

- Drop in unannounced to see how your child is – you are welcome to drop in anytime your child is in care.
- Watch how your child reacts; listen to what he/she says about their experience.
- If your schedule changes, give the provider plenty of notice and they should do the same for you.
- Be sure you and the provider understand the responsibilities under contract; get copies of contracts, policies, and documentation (who is allowed to pick up your child, how medications or emergencies are to be handled).
- Ask about the back-up provider should your provider become ill or have an emergency.

Clear communication between provider and parent is essential to avoid misunderstandings.

Look and Ask – Regulations and Safety

- Children supervised at all times.
- Younger children are not left alone with older children or pets.
- The home or facility is clean and free of hazards.
- Emergency numbers are by phone.
- First aid kit, smoke alarms and fire extinguisher are present.
- Medicines, household cleaners, poisons, guns, and other hazards are safely stored and locked.
- By Office of Child Care rules, your provider cannot have a sick child in care. If your child is vomiting, has a rash with fever or itching, lice or nits, diarrhea, eye infection, sore throat or swollen glands, or fever, the child cannot be placed in care and must stay home.
- Computer/television time is limited and monitored.
- Proper safety seats are used for transporting and parent permission has been received.
- Americans with Disabilities Act – there is a federal civil rights law that includes the provision that children with disabilities are entitled to equal rights in all child care settings. Providers must make “reasonable accommodations” to serve children with disabilities.

Learning Environment:

- Quality providers like and respect children, respond to their needs, and are affectionate and loving
- See whether the program offers the right level of structure or flexibility in the daily routine for your child’s needs. Whether you have a bundle of energy or a quiet child, look for a program that supports your child’s energy level.
- Not every child thrives in a noisy room or with messy activities – programs should offer a quiet place that children can retreat to as needed
- Young children learn best through hands-on, interactive play that allows them time and opportunities to explore and discover. Find a program that offers a rich activity-based environment. Does the environment seem welcoming to a child? Does it encourage children to join activities or pull out books and toys?
- Good programs balance children’s freedom to make choices with setting limits. A few, clear rules are better than a long confusing list.