



Workfront-Homefront

A SERIES FOR PEOPLE MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM WELFARE TO WORK

Locating and Selecting Child Care

Finding a job and child care, on top of the many decisions you already make can seem too much to handle! Here are some key facts that will help you make the best possible decisions about child care.

Locating Child Care

Get information about child care in your area.

- Use “resource and referral” (you may see this written as “R&R”) agencies to get information about child care centers and homes in your area. These agencies can also help you learn more about how to choose good child care. Call 1-800-CHOOSE-1 (1-800-246-6731).
- Check newspaper ads and the yellow pages in the phone book.
- Ask your caseworker, or friends and neighbors who have children.
- Ask people at your church, your children’s school, or at colleges that teach child care and development.

Talk to each caregiver briefly.

- Call child care centers, schools, or homes first to find out which meet your needs. Ask questions like:

Where are you located? What is the cost? What are your hours? Is there an opening for my child?

- If you are thinking about care with a relative, friend, or baby-sitter, talk about what each of you expects from the arrangement. Be very clear from the beginning.

Selecting Quality Child Care

Visit the child care centers or homes you are considering. Go when other children are there, and bring your children with you.

Spend some time watching what goes on. Ask questions. You will feel much better about leaving your children when you know that they will be getting good quality care and positive learning experiences, in a place where they feel happy, loved, and safe.

Look around you as you walk in to the caregiving area.

- Does it feel safe and inviting?
- Are the rooms and equipment clean and in good shape?

Warning signs: Dirty floors and equipment, furnishings are damaged, unsafe, paint peeling, etc.

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- Are there lots of safe, interesting toys and materials that children can reach by themselves (but not too much clutter)?

Warning signs: Not enough toys or interesting activities.

- Is there enough space for children to move around freely?
- Is there quiet space for children to be alone or in small groups, and space for large groups?
- Is there a safe outdoor play area with sturdy equipment?
- Look at the children:
 - * Are they happy, relaxed, and smiling most of the time?
 - * Do preschoolers and school-age children seem busy and curious, and enjoy talking to each other?
- Watch the teachers. Do they:
 - * Seem warm, loving, and relaxed?
 - * Make children feel welcome when they arrive?
 - * Smile a lot and seem to enjoy the children?

Warning signs: Caregivers seem indifferent or harsh to the children, use a lot of “don’ts” and punishments.

- * Talk and listen a lot to children?
- * Ask children lots of questions?
- * Show interest in what children are saying and doing?
- * Let children explore on their own, but give them help and encouragement when they need it?
- * Play a lot with children on their level (for young children, usually down on the floor)?
- * Respond quickly to children’s cries, words, and behaviors?

Warning signs: Caregivers hardly ever talk to children or respond to them.

- * Praise children for doing things like sharing, comforting each other, and helping?

Warning signs: Caregivers discipline children by spanking, shouting, putting children by themselves for a long time, or not giving them food.

- * Supervise young children very closely?

Warning signs: Children are out of sight or are made to wait for long periods of time.

- Make sure the diapering area for infants and toddlers is clean, and wash their hands before and after diapering (and before feeding).

Warning signs: Not washing hands after diapering and before feeding.

Ask questions.

- What kind of training do the teachers have? Teachers should have some training or education in child development and child care. The more education they have, the better quality the care will likely be.
- How many children are in a group (or classroom)? How many teachers are there for this group? Children get more attention when they are in smaller groups and have more teachers in their classroom. (You can call 1-800-CHOOSE-1 to find out the ideal numbers of children and teachers to look for.)
- What kinds of activities do children do? Children should be able to choose from many different kinds of activities, such as blocks, art, music, reading books, writing, pretend play, sand and water play, and toys that help finger coordination (like building blocks or puzzles).

Good activities let children express themselves and make choices, without having to follow a teacher-made example.

- How are parents involved? Can I come visit whenever I want to? Child care centers and homes should encourage you to be involved, and you should feel welcome to visit anytime.

After You Start Using Child Care

- Keep visiting whenever you can, and watch what is going on. Ask questions when you have them.
- If drop-off and pick-up times seem too busy and hectic to talk to a teacher or director about problems, set up a different time to come in and talk.
- Write a note about your concerns and leave it for the teacher or director. Ask for a time to talk.
- If there are different caregivers each day, your children will not feel as secure.
- Read all notes that are posted or sent home. They tell you about special events or things your child needs to bring to the center.
- It is normal for children to be upset when they are first separated from their parents. They may even get upset for the first 2 to 4 weeks. **BUT**, if your child is distressed for more than a month, there could be a problem. Make some surprise visits to the center or home, and watch what is going on. Make sure your child is getting appropriate care.
- If you think your caregiver is breaking some safety rules (too many children, unsafe areas), then tell someone. Call 1-800 CHOOSE1 to find help.
- If you have doubts, seek new care. Too many changes, however can confuse your child.

As a parent, it is up to you to keep checking and be sure your child is happy in the care you have selected. Be involved in his or her learning and ask the teacher each day if your child seems happy and involved in the program.

References

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Easing Transitions: Balancing Work and Family, FCS-479-1

Parenting for the Busy Parent of Preschoolers, FCS-479-2

Adjusting to Work: Getting Along with Others, FCS-479-3

Decision Making: It's a Skill, FCS-479-4

Locating and Selecting Child Care, FCS-479-5

Personal Wellness for Top Performance, FCS-479-6

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