

Family Living Focus

by
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Selecting Quality Child Care

Have you ever spent \$2000 for an item in your home? If you did you probably spent a lot of time and effort to make sure you get the best buy for your money.

Yet, studies show that men and women treat selecting child care in such a quick manner that they take the first available spot for their most prized possession — their child.

Why do parents need to select child care so carefully? The child may be with that caregiver 8 to 10 hours a day. They are really substitute parents. The caregiver has a strong influence on a child during that period of time. Your child's well being and happiness are at

stake. A parent needs to approach selecting child care in the same manner as you would when buying a car or expensive appliance. Be a good consumer, shop around, compare quality and disadvantages of each child care arrangement.

It is absolutely necessary for you to visit the day care home or center and talk with the caregiver. You need to determine what the caregiver is like. Some questions to ask are:

- How did you get started as a family day caregiver?
- How long have you been doing it?
- Are you registered with the state?

• How many children do you care for each day? What are their ages?

- What type of things do you like to do with children?
- What sort of activities would my child take part in?
- How do you care for sick children?

• In addition, you should discuss such subjects as discipline and how arguments among children are handled. If the child is older, you should discuss what language is permitted by the caregiver and how she would handle inquiries by the child about some aspect of sex or religion.

During your visit you observe the caregiver with the other children and quite possibly your own if you initiate an invitation to have your child join the group for a short time while you look around. It is important that you see all the rooms and play areas, both inside and outside, that the children use. Use common sense. For example, if the house is near a busy road or creek, what amount of danger is present and what precautions are taken to safeguard the children. Most of all, how do you, the child's parent, honestly think and feel your child would fit into this family day care home or center? If you decide on a specific fami-

ly day care home or center, then make clear the arrangements — not only the payment but especially the services you expect and what responsibilities both you and the caregiver will be expected to carry out.

A written agreement is a far better arrangement than a verbal one. The following is a sample of the items you may wish to include.

Caregiver Service

1. Meals and snacks to be given.
2. Specific indoor and outdoor activities to be encouraged.
3. Toys, games, play equipment, and rooms available to your child.
4. Infant equipment and furniture to be supplied (crib, high chair, playpen, and so forth).

Your Responsibilities

1. Times for arrival and pickup.
2. Items to be brought from home (food, toys, change of diapers, change of clothes, toothbrush, infant furniture, and so forth).
3. Instructions for giving medicines or special food.
4. Telephone numbers: home, work, spouse's work, doctor, neighbor.
5. List of names and phone numbers of people who may pick up your child from the caregiver.

Specific Policies

1. Use of other adults to help out.
2. Use of other caregivers for emergencies, holidays, and vacations.
3. Care for children when they are sick.
4. Taking trips (need for permission or advance notice).
5. Advance written permission from you to obtain emergency treatment for your child, plus health insurance policy number, and agreement to call you in advance if possible.
6. How and when your child goes to school.
7. Whether your child may play with friends after school and amount of supervision needed.
8. Amount of notice and pay needed to end the arrangement.

Terms of Payment

1. Amount to be paid.
2. When payment is due.
3. Whether paid by cash or check.
4. Whether there are any other fees or expenses.
5. Whether you will be charged for days when your child is not in care due to illness, holiday, or emergency.
6. Payment for providing care at unusual hours or days.

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