

# Choosing Child Care

## A Checklist for Parents

### STAFFING

*The number of children allowed to be cared for by one adult is limited by licensing regulations (see ratio chart).*

- Are there enough adults to care for my child?
- What experience and education does the caregiver have? Are there plans for on-going education?
- How long has the staff/caregiver worked at the center/home? What is the “turnover” rate?
- Does the staff respect and value the cultural, ethnic, religious, and lifestyle diversity of the families served?
- Does the staff have the skills and knowledge needed to work with diverse groups of children?

### STAFF/CHILD INTERACTION

- How does the staff relate to the children? Are they friendly, supportive and actively involved with the children?
- Does the staff encourage language, social, and problem-solving skills when talking with children?
- Are you comfortable with the way the provider resolves conflicts between children?

### PROGRAM ATMOSPHERE

- Are the activities I see appropriate for my child’s age group? Ask for a description of a typical day.
- Do the children seem busy and engaged? Are there toys, games, crafts and other materials available?
- How much time do children watch TV or Videos?
- Do children have adequate, active, outdoor play time each day?
- Does the program content reflect and value the cultural, ethnic, religious and lifestyle diversity of the families served within the community?

### PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

*Washington State requires a parent handbook explaining the provider’s policies and procedures.*

- Is the parent handbook available? Does it include the following: Admissions/enrollment procedures, hours, rates (including fees for late pick-up, registration, field trips, insurance, supplies, transportation), meals and snacks, disciplinary philosophy, medical and emergency procedures, supplies, absences, illness, and vacation policies?

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Are the emergency phone numbers and procedures clearly posted, including a natural disaster plan?
- Is the center/home clean and free of clutter? Does the equipment and home appear to be safe and in good repair?
- Are fire drills held regularly and recorded? Are any fire exits blocked? Is the fire escape plan posted?
- Is the outdoor play area safe, fenced and easy to get to? How much outdoor play time do children have daily?
- What are the security measures surrounding drop-off and pick-up times? How are strangers excluded?
- Is transportation provided to school or field trips? What safety measures are followed?

### BASIC INFORMATION

- Are meals and snacks scheduled at appropriate times and do the menus offer a variety of nutritious foods?
- Is the discipline philosophy compatible with mine? Did the provider explain the discipline policy?
- Is the toilet training approach compatible with mine? Will the provider actively toilet train my child?
- What is the drop-in policy? Can I drop in unannounced to visit or check on my child? (*Washington State law requires programs to permit open visitation by parents/guardians while their children are in care.*)

### OVERALL IMPRESSION

- Am I comfortable with the other children’s behavior? How do staff respond?
- Does the place seem right for my child and me? Would I be happy here if I were a child?
- Does the program value and respect the home culture and language of my child? Do I feel welcome?

### LICENSING/ACCREDITATION/COMPLAINTS

*Anyone who provides care on a regular basis for a non-related child must be licensed by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Licensing indicates the program meets the minimum requirements set by DSHS.*

- Ask to see the provider’s license and Investigative Reports for the past three years.
- Get and call parent references. Check the complaint history of the provider through DSHS: Call (866) 482-4325
- Is the center/home accredited? (*NAEYC, NAFCC, or NAA accreditation means the program achieves a higher standard than minimum licensing requirements.*)

***For more information call***

**Child Care Resources**

**(206) 329-5544**

***Good luck in your child care search!***