

Safe, Quality Child Care

The following information has been developed by two federal agencies to help parents, health professionals, and child care providers ensure that babies and children have safe, quality child care.

SELECTING A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

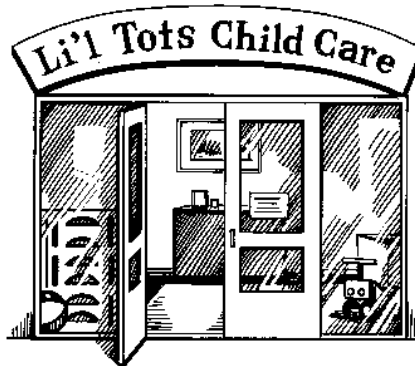
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recommends the following steps for parents as they begin the process of selecting a child care provider.

1. Interview Caregivers

- Contact the caregiver and ask the following questions:
 - Is there an opening for my child?
 - What hours and days are you open?
 - Where are you located?
 - How much does care cost? Is financial assistance available?
 - How many children are in your care?
 - What age groups do you serve?
 - Do you provide transportation?
 - Do you provide meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks)?
 - Do you have a license, accreditation, or other certification?
 - When can I come to visit?

2. Visit the Child Care Facility

- Visit the child care facility or home child care setting; visit more than once, and stay as long as you can. Look for the following indicators of a healthy environment:
 - Responsive, nurturing, warm interactions between caregiver and children.
 - Children who are happily involved in daily activities and comfortable with their caregivers.
 - Clean, safe, and healthy indoor and outdoor environments, especially the napping, eating, and toileting areas.
 - A variety of toys and learning materials that your child will find interesting and that will contribute to his or her growth and development.
 - Children getting individual attention.
- During your visit, ask the caregiver the following questions:
 - Can I visit at any time?
 - How do you handle discipline?



- What do you do if a child is sick?
- What would you do in case of an emergency?
- What types of training have you (and other staff or substitutes) had?
- Are all children and staff required to be immunized?
- May I see a copy of your license or other certification?
- Do you have a substitute or back-up caregiver?

- May I have the names and phone numbers of parents who use or have used your care?
- Where do the children nap? Do you know that babies should go to sleep on their backs?

3. Check References

- Ask other parents who use the caregiver the following questions:
 - Was the caregiver reliable on a daily basis?
 - How did the caregiver discipline your child?
 - Did your child enjoy the child care experience?
 - How did the caregiver respond to you as a parent?
 - Was the caregiver respectful of your values and culture?
 - Would you recommend the caregiver without reservation?
 - If your child is no longer with the caregiver, why did you leave?
- Ask the local child care resource and referral program or licensing office the following questions:
 - What regulations should child care providers meet in my area?
 - Is there a record of complaints about the child care provider I am considering, and how do I find out about it?

4. Make the Decision for Quality Care

- From what you heard and saw, ask yourself the following questions:
 - Which child care setting should I choose so that my child will be happy and stimulated?
 - Which caregiver can meet the special needs of my child?

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- Are the caregiver's values compatible with my family's values?
- Is the child care available and affordable according to my family's needs and resources?
- Do I feel good about my decision?

5. Stay Involved

- Ask yourself the following questions about your child care arrangement:
 - How can I arrange my schedule so that I can talk to my caregiver every day, talk to my child every day about how the day went, visit and observe my child in care at different times of the day, and be involved in my child's activities?
 - How can I work with my caregiver to resolve issues and concerns that may arise?
 - How can I keep informed about my child's growth and development while in child care?
 - How can I promote good working conditions for my child care provider?
 - How can I network with other parents?

OBTAINING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACF recommends gathering as much information as possible to help select the best child care provider. For more information, call Child Care Aware at (800) 424-2246 for the name of the Child Care Resource and Referral Program nearest you. For more complete guidelines on health and safety in child care, call the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care at (800) 598-KIDS (5437).

CHILD CARE SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

In 1998, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) staff conducted a national study to identify potential safety hazards in 220 licensed child care facilities (federal, nonprofit, for-profit, and in-home settings). CPSC staff investigated eight product areas with potential safety hazards (see checklist below). Overall, two-thirds of the child care facilities had at least one safety hazard.

To increase injury prevention awareness and reduce injuries among young children, CPSC has developed the following safety checklist:

- **Cribs:** To prevent strangulation and suffocation associated with older cribs and mattresses that are too small, make sure cribs meet current national safety standards and are in good condition. Look for a certification safety

seal. Older cribs may not meet current standards. Crib slats should be no more than 2³/₈ inches apart, and mattresses should fit snugly.

- **Soft bedding:** Do not put babies to sleep with pillows, soft bedding, or comforters. Babies should be put to sleep on their backs in a crib with a firm, flat mattress. These measures can help reduce sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and suffocation related to soft bedding.
- **Playground surfacing:** Look for safe surfacing on outdoor playgrounds. At least 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand, or pea gravel or mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubberlike materials should be used.
- **Playground maintenance:** Check playground surfacing and equipment regularly to make sure they are in good condition.
- **Safety gates:** Be sure that safety gates are used to keep children away from potentially dangerous areas, especially stairs.
- **Window blinds and curtain cords:** To prevent strangulation, be sure miniblinds and venetian blinds do not have looped cords. Check that vertical blinds, continuous-loop blinds, and drapery cords have tension or tie-down devices to hold the cords tight.
- **Clothing drawstrings:** Be sure there are no drawstrings around the hood and neck of children's outerwear; these can catch on playground and other equipment and strangle children. Other types of fasteners (like snaps, zippers, or Velcro) should be used.
- **Recalled products:** Check that (1) no recalled products are being used and (2) a current list of recalled children's products is readily visible to remind you and your child care providers to remove or repair potentially dangerous toys and products.

For more information about children's safety and recalls of children's toys and products, contact CPSC at

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Washington, DC 20207

Phone: (800) 638-2772

Web site: <http://www.cpsc.gov> (go to Recalls/News)

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau. Four steps to selecting a child care provider. In Administration for Children and Families [Web site]. Cited April 22, 1999; available at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/faq/4steps.htm>.

Adapted from U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Child care safety checklist for parents and child care providers. In Consumer Product Safety Commission [Web site]. Cited April 23, 1999; available at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/chldcare.html>.