

What To Look For In a Childcare Facility

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Avoid These Top Six Reasons When Choosing Your Child Care Options

Choosing the appropriate childcare option for your child or children can be a daunting task. Certainly you all have your reasons for making the choices you make, but when it comes to choosing the right childcare, as with anything else, there are good reasons and bad reasons. You want help in avoiding the most common “bad reasons” that lead people to making poor choices for childcare.

1. Location, location, location! Sure, when it comes to opening a business, location may be everything, but when it comes to your child's care, it's really just a small part of the overall equation. Don't make the mistake of simply choosing a childcare provider based on the convenience of the location. That doesn't mean that it shouldn't be important to you that your child's care provider is close to where you work or live, just make sure that it also meets your other expectations and is the most appropriate child care provider for your child's needs.

2. Well, everyone is doing it! Parents are human and face it; humans are influenced by trends. Sometimes it is difficult to avoid getting caught up in the current trend of placing children on long waiting lists to get into prestigious pre-school preparatory programs. There does seem to be a logic to the phrase “well, if everybody is doing it, it must be good” and that just may be true, but not necessarily for your child.

Stop and question your motives. It is important to determine whether or not your choice is influenced by what other parents think is good for their children or what you know your child really needs and wants. Following the latest trend in childcare can often lead a parent astray when it comes to what their child truly wants and needs. Be an individual and your child will have a great example to follow.

3. What a deal! It can be difficult navigating childcare options on a strict budget, but it is not impossible. There are affordable childcare options that offer optimal care, but there are also start-up businesses offering cheap child care that do not have the proper experience. Just because you are on a strict budget doesn't mean you won't find the perfect child care fit, though it may mean you will have to search a bit harder and be a bit more discerning. Cost is definitely something to consider when choosing a child care provider, but don't allow it to be your biggest determiner.

4. But we're family! Yes, members of extended families have taken an active role in childcare through out the ages, but, that doesn't always mean they know what they are doing. It may be tempting to have a family member care for your child, but make sure that family member is up to your standards of care or it won't be much help in the long run.

5. It just felt right. While judging a person place or thing by your “gut feeling”, or intuition might be tempting, when it comes to your children go the extra distance. Some parents make

the mistake of not asking questions and doing the appropriate research when choosing a child care provider. While your “gut feeling” may be important, don’t let it be the deciding factor. Make a list of questions with your partner that you want to ask the potential child care provider and remember that when it comes to your child, and remember, when your children are involved, there are no stupid questions or insignificant worries.

6. This is as good as it gets. Definitely do not feel as though you have to stay with a child care provider with whom you are not satisfied, simply because you think there is nothing better out there. Chances are, if you are dissatisfied it is for a good reason. You owe it to yourself and more importantly to your child to research other places to find one that suits you both better. These years of your child’s life, and of your life as a parent are precious and fleeting and it is important to make the most of them, so if a childcare provider or facility is not working for you or your child, don’t settle.

Avoiding these reasons for choosing a child care provider can greatly increase your chances of finding the perfect fit for you and your family. It helps to keep a fine balance between having a plan or a goal and keeping an open mind. Good luck!

Creating a Great Daycare Experience for Your Child

Going to a daycare center is a big deal to your children, especially if this is the first time they’ve ever been in a group setting. In fact, it might be a stressful event for you too, if you’ve been the primary care giver, or a close family member has been in charge of their care. Knowing how to relieve the stress for you, and make the experience of going to a center fun for your child, will make you both happy in the end. All it takes is a few steps of preparedness before you leave them for the first time.

If you’ve decided that a daycare would be beneficial for your child, but feel a little scared about it then know that proactive steps are in order. The adjustment to going to daycare can be made less stressful for everyone involved – including the daycare. One of the worst things you can do is not to talk with your children about going to daycare. Ask for their input about how they feel about it. Tell them your feelings to and why you think it’s necessary, and how they might just like it. Even if they disagree with your ideas, don’t argue, just discuss it.

They do have a right to express their feelings on it. Next, check out the center as far as activities of fun, and let them know that it’s the same types of things that they do at home. Tell them that there are things that they’ve told you they have wanted to do in the past. The most important thing is to make absolutely sure that the center offers what you tell your child that they do.

Another way to get your child ready to go to daycare is to view the center hand in hand. Your children might be hesitant at first, but by going with them and viewing the activities that take place will give them confidence with their surroundings. Don’t be surprised that it could take more than one time because all children accept and grow in different ways to new surroundings. You could make a day of it, but ask for permission with the center before just barging in.

Many will often work in letting a child participate in certain activities, and they can introduce your children to others at the center. It'll give them an opportunity to view your child's personality, and introduce them to others that are new to help ease the transition with others in the daycare center. It might be helpful to go to the center before your child arrives, and see if there are any other children that they may know from the neighborhood too.

On the big day of going to the center don't just drop your child off, and leave in a hurried manner. Some parents arrange for a day off to make sure their child feels confident and happy, even after several visits to the daycare. If it's not possible then get there as early as possible, and stay as late as you can if your children need it. Taking a few minutes of eating a snack with them, or interacting with the toys there will ease their mind.

Assure them that you'll be back, and most importantly never leave without saying goodbye in an excited and happy way. You know your children better than anyone else, so work with what they communicate with you as far as their needs. The goal is to get your child comfortable and content emotionally.

Finally, before your children go into daycare get them used to a regular schedule at home based around the daycares routines. For example if the daycare has a planned naptime then ease your children's nap into the timeframe at home. Lunches and snacks are served at daycares, so try to do the same thing, and again at the same time at home.

Also remember to start and maintain the routine a few weeks before daycare ever begins. This gives their mind and body a way to cope with all of the new changes that are going on in their life. If your children are not school age yet, and only attend daycare part time, then it's a good way to get them ready for the routine of school and part time daycare later.

A guideline put into place, both before and after they start going to daycare, will help your children get ready for the fun experience of it. Not only that it'll let you relax because you'll they've been prepared well.

Eight Issues that Daycare Providers Want Parents to Be Aware Of

While parents have many questions and concerns when it comes to choosing the right daycare provider for their children, the providers and caregivers themselves have some questions and concerns they would like to voice to the parents as well. Sadly, there are times when parents are not receptive to the issues that daycare providers raise, while at other times they may feel unable to communicate them properly, simply because their livelihood is at stake if they ask too many questions of the parents.

Here are the top eight issues that daycare providers want parents to be aware of:

1. Immunizations are not optional. While you may have had reasons to put off that visit to the pediatrician, your childcare provider has a responsibility to not only your children but also to the children of other parents. Proper and timely immunizations ensure that the kids as well as

the daycare provider will remain safe and healthy. So when s/he politely but firmly advises you that your child cannot come back until all the immunizations are current, and that you will need to bring proof of said immunizations straight from the pediatrician's office, s/he is not being overly protective or difficult, but simply astute and wise when it comes to keeping everyone healthy.

2. Timely payment is a right, not a privilege. Horror stories abound from childcare providers who receive client payments only to see the checks bounce at the bank. Hardest hit at the in-home daycare providers who do not have big corporate lawyers behind them. If you have experienced some financial trouble, do not expect your daycare provider to allow you to skip a payment any more than the credit card company or your mortgage bank will do. You owe it to your daycare provider to pay on time every time.

3. A contract is there for a reason. If your daycare provider and you have signed a contract, you are legally bound by the terms, even if later on you decide they are inconvenient. If the contract stipulates that you need to give a two week's notice prior to being allowed to cancel the care for your children, then the provider will have the right to charge you for these two weeks, even if you decide to cancel without giving that notice.

4. You get what you pay for. Do not complain because of the rate your provider charges. If s/he hires additional staff to help with the children, this means additional love, care, and attention for your little one. Similarly, if s/he raised the rates to purchase more toys and books, once again your child will benefit.

5. Business hours are set for a reason. Daycare center close and in-home childcare providers have families of their own they want to spend time with. Have respect for the times that you have agreed to drop off and pick up your children. Do not assume that an in-home provider owes you extra care simply because s/he is "home already" and your child "won't be much trouble at the dinner table." Keep in mind that there is a clear separation between business and personal life, even for folks who run a business out of their own home.

6. Support the rules of discipline your daycare provider lays down. They should not differ from your own too much, but beware of becoming overly sensitive when your child is corrected or disciplined. If you receive a report that your child has hit another child, do not automatically ask what the other child did (as though this was the determining factor to see if your child's actions were acceptable) but instead reinforce the training your daycare provider gave, namely that hitting is not acceptable.

7. Communicate openly with your daycare provider. If you see something that does not look right or that you do not like, do not take it to your best girlfriend or the clerk at the checkout stand, but instead discuss it with your daycare provider. Especially in-home daycare providers live by their reputations, and a careless word here and misunderstanding there can wreak havoc with someone else's livelihood.

8. If your child is sick, keep her at home. Nothing is more of a nuisance to a childcare provider than having a sick child dropped off. Sure, you don't want to take the sick day and you think that junior can tough it out, but if s/he is contagious, you are very likely infecting

everyone else at the daycare, including the provider. This is not only rude but also downright thoughtless. Do not take your child to daycare when s/he is sick.

Five Favorable Indicators of a Great Child Care Facility

You think you have found the perfect child care facility, but have you? Well, there is no easy answer to that question. While there may not be an easy to follow road map to the child care facility of your dreams these five indicators can help you recognize the great child care facilities that may be right under your nose.

1. A great plan for care if and when your child becomes sick or injured. For many parents, the most difficult part of childcare is leaving their child with another person. No matter how confident you may feel about the facility and the childcare professionals, it is still perfectly normal to worry.

Therefore, it is important to know that when you are not there to help your child in their times of need like when they suddenly become ill or injured that the professionals providing for their care have a plan and a protocol. Finding a childcare facility that has an effective plan for such events is extremely reassuring.

2. Child care professionals that are also trained in child development. Maria G. was taking her child to a childcare facility where the professionals were also trained in child development. One of the care attendants who spent a lot of time with Maria's daughter noticed a developmental delay that had previously gone unnoticed. Maria, with the help of her childcare attendant, was able to begin addressing her daughter's issues. With time and with the proper attention from the childcare professionals, Maria noticed a marked improvement in her child.

Whether or not your child has developmental problems, being in the care of a professional who is also trained in child development gives you and your child the advantage of information and expertise. With so many resources available to children and parents, this is one that you shouldn't skimp on.

3. Low turn over rate for the staff of the childcare facility. Knowing that the childcare professionals at a childcare facility have been there for an extended period of time shows that they not only like their jobs, but are appreciated by their employers and this is a healthy combination for you and your child. Childcare is a difficult job, but having the right qualifications and working in a supportive environment makes all the difference.

4. You can participate in program planning. Being able to have a say in the programming, projects and field trips at your child's care facility is a priceless option. Staying immediately involved in your child's life even while they are at a child care facility is extremely important for your child's experience. Sometimes childcare facilities also offer a parents group where parents can discuss issues and express concerns. This can also be extremely helpful in providing your child with the best possible childcare experience. Any childcare facility that offers options of these sorts should be on your short list for sure.

5. Last, but not least, a great childcare facility will be accredited and/or licensed (depending on various state requirements). This may seem pretty basic, but surprisingly enough parents do make the mistake of failing to ask about accreditation and licensing. These things are important because they establish rules and restrictions that are implemented to protect your child and you. So, don't over look what can seem like just a bunch of paper work. It is important. You wouldn't feel good about eating in a restaurant that failed it's health inspection, well, you definitely shouldn't feel good about trusting your child's care to a facility that is not licensed or has let it's license lapse.

Remember, parents, most childcare facilities will not advertise their benefits and drawbacks in flashing neon signs. That means you will have to do some detective work by asking the right questions and, more importantly, knowing what questions to ask. Of course, knowing what questions to ask begins with knowing what you want. The above indicators are a guide to help you formulate the right questions and find a great child care facility for you and your child, but there is no substitute for sitting down with your partner and coming up with a list of your own unique concerns and questions.

Five Important Things to Ask When Touring Daycare Facilities

Harried working parents face a lot of obstacles with daycare, and if you're thinking about putting your children in a daycare facility there will be things that you'll need to ask when enrolling your children. Knowing the right questions to ask will ensure your peace of mind, and your child's emotional and physical safety. Sometimes it's hard to remember everything, and being well prepared before you place your children in someone else's care will let you relax because you know your loved ones are being well taken care of.

Life happens, and children get sick. Employers in today's fast paced worked environment are not too happy when a parent calls in to say there is no babysitter. Knowing what the daycares policy is on sick children in their center is a must. It's a balancing game for centers to know when a child needs to be sent home because other children are exposed to illness, and the parents need to stay at work so they can pay their personal and daycare bills.

All centers have different rules and regulations on when a child needs to be sent home, and you'll need to know too. Always make sure to have a backup plan in place with an alternative childcare provider. If you're lucky though the daycare that you've chosen will have extra staff on hand for children that care for them if they cant be placed around other children. Most of these require that children are on some type of medicine from a doctor. You're charged extra for these services at daycares.

Another important issue is if your child is not in daycare will you be charged for the days that they are not there. All most all centers will charge even if a child does not show up for care, but there can be a few exceptions to the rule. For example, if your child has to absent for a very long time due to a serious illness such as diabetes or cancer. Others will give credit back on days that they're in the care center.

Don't forget, too, that daycare centers have certain policies on pick up of children after the allotted time of care. Some are very strict and others are more flexible, but you need to check it out. Most centers have the attitudes that if a child doesn't leave, then other schedules are thrown off, too. Employees can't go home, and mealtime is over run with extra children that can't be fed. A denial of service can be a part of the package if you don't consistently pick up your children from care, so make sure to get the service agreements in writing.

Quality care centers will want you to be able to come and peek in on your children at any time. This is another area that needs to be discussed when touring the care facility before enrolling them. Always be suspicious if active participation in the center is not offered, and if rooms are closed off for some dubious reason, at all times.

Excuses are fine, such as children are sleeping, or some particular child might have trouble getting to sleep, but if you find it on a continual basis, then it would be a good idea to look somewhere else for childcare. There are times that every parent should be allowed to visit if they feel the need, so ask this in an upfront manner, and look for a daycare that fits your schedule for visiting.

Daycares with highly trained efficient and caring staff will not have a high rate of employee turnover for their center either. When interviewing potential daycare centers ask about staff experience and length of time in service to that daycare center, and check ask where they've worked before too. Well-run daycare centers will encourage staff, and reward them with good service.

They'll make sure that all staff is not overburdened with long hours, and staff ratios that are state mandated. Continuing education for all employees is another area that should be top priority, so the center will not have a high turnover of caregivers. It's important for your children's emotional security of seeing the same face everyday, and physical safety because someone has not slipped through the cracks that's abusive.

Finding childcare is easy, but finding it that provides the best care for your children, and works with and accommodates parents is very critical too. Take the time and ask the important questions, so you can rest easy that your child is in the best possible hands of love and actively promotes learning for their future.

Guidelines for Helping You Find Quality Childcare When You Are New in Town

With the ever-changing job market in the U.S. more and more parents find themselves facing the challenge of raising children in new towns and cities and away from their familial support system. It can be daunting being the new parent in town, especially when it seemed like you had just figured everything out where you used to live. While this may seem daunting, it is definitely not impossible and with these guidelines for helping you find quality childcare when you are new in town the transition can be both painless and smooth.

First, it is important that you understand that you may not be able to find exactly the same arrangement you had where you used to live. Accepting this will help you to have realistic

expectations for childcare options in your new city or town. Often people make the mistake of assuming they will be able to find the same arrangement they had and when they don't it can be very disappointing. Starting your search with a realistic outlook and an open mind can significantly reduce (or even eliminate entirely) common problems before they begin.

When you are new in town, the first thing you need to figure out is: where the other parents hang out. The best way to find out about quality childcare options for your family is, well, the same way you did it where you used to live, through networking with other parents. Other parents in your new community are your best resource when beginning your search for quality childcare. Go to public parks with your family on weekends.

Join sports clubs, book clubs or any kind of club you might have an interest in. Joining groups is a great way to get to know the people in your new community. Take a volunteer opportunity in your new community. This is also a great way to meet people and get to know the fabric of your new city or town. The people in your community have been there longer than you and should be able to guide you to options and opportunities that you wouldn't know about just by opening the phone book.

Get to know your new town or city geographically. All the research in the world won't do any good if you are not quite sure where something is. Remember how great it was where you used to live? You could pick up the groceries and then swing by and pick up the kids all pretty much in a straight line before going home. Well, it can be that easy again, but getting to know your new surroundings is definitely a key. Drive around your new neighborhood and figure out where things are. Take the whole family and make it an adventure. Find areas that you like and are comfortable with and that are not too far from where you live or work.

Now you will want to narrow in on a childcare option that seems to work for you. Ask the sort of questions that will help you decide if this is the right option for you and your family. If it is a childcare center find out if you can drop in any time. Ask if you will have the opportunity to participate in program planning. Find out what the fees are and what those fees include. Ask if the caregivers are also trained in child development.

If you have chosen home childcare, be sure to not only get references but also check them. Ask for professional and personal references. With your spouse write out a list of questions that you will want to ask or any concerns you might have to be presented at the interview. If you are unsure what questions to ask, the Internet is a great resource for finding printable interview question suggestions to take with you to the child care center or for your interview with the home care attendant.

Remember, finding quality childcare anywhere is a fine balance of being overly cautious and keeping an open mind. Sure, it may sound like those two approaches are at odds but really they are not. As you know by know, parenting involves balancing a lot of seeming contradictions. Keep your mind open to what is best for your child or children and be overly cautious in the search to find it.

How to Choose Your Child Care Options During the Holidays

The holidays are a wonderful time of the year for children and adults alike. Undoubtedly you enjoy the baking, decorating, and anticipation of the big days that lie ahead. Unfortunately, for many parents these days are also fraught with headaches and questions, such as “who will look after the kids while you are at work?” After all, the kids are out of school for the duration of the holiday seasons, but you are still expected to be at work.

Sure, you might be able to take off a few days here and there, and perhaps even a week or two, but when it comes to the long holiday vacations, you will not be able to take off as much time, and you will be in need of quality childcare. How should you choose your child care options during the holidays?

Talk to your family. Will they be in town? Is someone from your family able to look after your children while they are out of school and you are stuck at work? Perhaps a grandparent, uncle or aunt, or maybe your brother or sister will be home and available. Family is usually the best option when it comes to having your children looked after. Grandparents especially cherish this time that they get to spend with their little grandkids; after all, when the kids are in school, there is not much time to go around and spend with them.

If your family is not available to help out, speak to your friends, especially if you have friends who are teachers and who will have a similar chunk of time off during the holidays as your children do. Of course, many teachers subsidize their incomes by taking on work during the holidays, so they might not be available to help you out. When considering a friend as an option for childcare, please make sure that your children have an established relationship with that person. The last thing your child wants is to be dropped off with a virtual stranger.

If friends and family are not a good option, go ahead and talk to your child's friends' parents. They will most likely be in a similar boat as you, and they might have some childcare options ferreted out that might also work out for your child. The advantage would be for your child to be in a situation where she or he already has a friend there, and it will be easier to integrate. Another great resource is your child's teacher. She or he will most likely know of holiday child care options available, either from speaking to other teacher, because of being approached by a child care provider, or simply from talking with other parents.

Check with your school's office. Sometimes teachers will supplement their income by offering childcare and leaving flyers and business cards with the office staff to give out to parents in need of such information. Other times, childcare providers will contact the office and ask if they may hand out their business information.

If all else fails, check your community resources. The local chapter of the YMCA, for example, almost always offers childcare during holiday breaks, except for the actual days of federal holidays. These facilities are well run, supervised and staffed, and for reasonable rates you should be able to drop off your child with the confidence that she or he will enjoy the day and be safe and sound.

Of course, if your child is older, you may consider taking her or him to work with you. Talk to your boss and see if s/he will accommodate you and allow for your child to come working with

you. Older children will be able to perform simple tasks such as filing or copying, while you get other work done. Your child will enjoy the privilege of being at the office with you, and just in case she or he gets bored, you can pack plenty of things to keep busy, such as the handheld computer games, books, and other assorted items. Of course, if you work in an environment where having children present would be inappropriate, this is not a viable option.

As you can see, there are many ways to choose your child care options during the holidays. Start early and do not be caught off guard by the sudden approach of the day your children are scheduled to be home!

Is Faith-Based Childcare the Right Avenue for Your Kids?

If you are an adherent to a faith, you probably want your children to step into your footsteps. After all, one of the most important goals for a faithful individual is to raise a faithful family. Summer is a great time to explore faith based summer camps, and almost every church out there will have something to offer. Yet what are your options for the rest of the year? There are numerous faith-based day care centers available, but is faith-based childcare the right avenue for your kids?

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Does the childcare center's environment seek to bridge cultural gaps? In other words, do you see a wide variety of cultures represented when you visit the childcare center? A faith-based organization should be reaching out to all segments of the community, but if you notice that one segment is noticeably missing, then perhaps the center's idea of faith is somewhat different from that which you hold dear.

Is your faith-based childcare center based on one faith or is it interfaith based? In other words, do you expect your child to receive training in your religion, or do you wish for her or him to be trained in understanding and appreciating the faiths of other groups as well as her or his own? This is an important question to ask before signing up, since the implications may be that this sort of training is contrary to those whose faith is firmly rooted in the more conservative quarters of their religion.

Is the faith your faith-based childcare center is advocating the same as you are teaching at home? This is of special significance to Christians, since there is such a plethora of denominations found throughout Christianity, many of which have opposing viewpoints of key issues of faith and religious living. Very often your faith and that of the childcare center are compatible, but at times it will not be.

Go through several trial sessions and see how your kids respond to being at the childcare center. Most often they will enjoy the stories, the new things they learn, and the many arts and crafts they will prepare. On the off-chance however, that they are not enjoying their stay, find out what is going on. Is the staff pushy with respect to the faith? If your child is older, does he or she feel pushed toward being baptized, or making a public declaration of faith that she or he

is simply not yet ready for? Conversely, do younger children feel threatened with stories about hellfire and brimstone?

If you find that all the caveats have been taken care of, and you and your kids feel comfortable with the faith-based childcare you have chosen, then the odds are good that this will be the right avenue for your kids. After all, the many lessons learned at such a childcare facility center around character traits that are valuable in modern day society.

Your kids will be trained in taking responsibility for their own actions. Blame-shifting is strongly discouraged, and personal accountability is of high importance.

Respect for authority, such as parents, teachers, and of course the supreme deity are fostered. Children no longer see themselves as an authority to be reckoned with, but learn to understand, accept, and thrive in their assigned role in life.

Children will develop a healthy self-image that comes from the inside instead of which brand name of clothes or shoes they may wear, and which toys they might possess. Before the creator of the universe all people are equal, and children will learn to look at the inside of themselves and others, rather than at the outside. This is a valuable lesson that faith-based childcare will offer.

Your kids will learn positive conflict resolution. Conflicts are a given, yet how they are resolved varies depending on a child's understanding of right and wrong, and her or his ability to apologize and right a wrong. By honing your children's ability to know right from wrong, and to quickly apologize and forgive for wrongs perpetrated, your faith-based childcare provider will put your kids on the right avenue to life!

Research Your Options for After School Child Care

You love your children and want the very best for them. If you could, you would be there to take them to the school bus in the morning, and be waiting for them when it drops them off. Unfortunately, in today's society of nine to five employment this is wishful thinking for the majority of parents, and it is therefore not surprising that many a parent is in search of high quality after school child care at some point.

Since there are many different after school child care programs available, it is imperative to research all your options - not only to secure the best facility possible for your child, but also to ensure that the program is suitable for your child's temperament, need, and academic status.

Possibly the number one factor for parents in search of after school child care is the absolute knowledge that their children will be safe, picked up on time from school, taken to a friendly environment, and have help with homework if needed. Yet how can you measure "safety"? A very good indicator is a visit to the childcare facility: is it clean? Are doors and gates secured so that children cannot leave without someone knowing about it? Are there sign-in and sign-out procedures to ensure that strangers cannot come and pick up children without parental permission?

Is there a defined ratio between caregivers and children, ensuring that each child will receive enough age-appropriate attention? Do the caregivers know how to give child CPR? Are the vehicles used to pick up the children from school well maintained and devoid of dings, dents, and other signs of accidents? Ask to take a look inside a couple of vehicles – are they clean, well maintained, and the seatbelts all in working order?

Do the vans smell of cigarette smoke? While it is up to you to grant permission to smoke around your children, a van that reeks of smoke might be an indicator that you want to investigate a little more thoroughly. Also, if the vans look beaten up, you will need to ask how they came to be in this condition. Ideally, staff and drivers should have undergone a criminal background investigation and finger printing check, while drivers in particular should have been screened for drugs and alcohol.

Taking a look at the caregivers will also give you a clear indication about how “friendly” the facility is. If there caregivers appear rushed, short tempered with one another or the children, and if you see different faces each time you visit, you might have found a good indicator that the facility is understaffed, the caregivers overworked, and the employee turn-over ratio high.

Additionally, take a look at the ages of the caregivers: do they appear to be high school students who are making an extra buck or does it look like there are trained professionals working at the child care center? Turn-over is a warning sign that the facility is lacking in some way; additionally, since children thrive on routines, the continuous change in staff is stressful and since bonds cannot easily be formed this way, there is a good chance that the facility may not meet your child’s understanding of “friendly”, even if she or he cannot express it in so many words.

To find out if the after school child care center of your choice will have age-appropriate activities for your child, take a look at the toys and games that are offered. Do the toys and games look to be in good working order, or are pieces missing? Are they appropriate for your child’s age, or are they more geared toward younger or older children? Additionally, are the children simply warehoused upon arrival and left to their own devices, or is there a schedule of activities in effect, so children will be able to enjoy some kind of structure even after school?

When researching your options for after school child care, there is one more very important question you need to ask: is the facility licensed by your state? If it is not, you might want to move on and look for a different childcare center.

While a license in and of itself does not guarantee a quality environment, it does go a long ways to ensuring that a government agency is having some oversight. A lack of a license is a sign that perhaps all is not as well as it could be. So go ahead and research your options thoroughly, ask a lot of questions, and do not be shy when taking a look around – open cupboard, open doors, get on your knees and look around the ground – but above all, trust your gut-feel about the place!

Terrific Resources That Parents Can Turn to When Searching for a Childcare Provider

If you are looking for a childcare provider, you will have to do a lot of homework. Ideally, you will have a close friend or family member whose recommendation you may trust with respect to the placement of your children. If, however, you are new in town, or most of your friends do not have childcare providers, then the job of finding proper care is left to you alone. Do not despair! There are some terrific resources available that parents can turn to when searching for a childcare provider.

Child Care Aware

On the Internet you will be able to look up the website for Child Care Aware, an outcropping of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Being a referral service as well as a not-for-profit educator of parents, this organization has worked long and hard to forge relationships with childcare providers that will permit the providers to receive training and standards to uphold. In turn, those agencies that comply with the NACCRRA and its standards will find themselves on a trusted referral list.

Parents who use this resource will have the peace of mind that comes from knowing that someone has already done a lot of the hard research and weeded out some of the providers that simply were not up to par. Keep in mind that a referral from this agency is in now way a suitable substitute for doing your own checking into the childcare provider you may wish to choose, but it is a wonderful first step.

Provider Literature

While you go around checking out daycare providers, it is important to take a look at the literature they should be able to give you. This should include a copy of the contract, the rules and regulations, policies and procedures, a schedule of daily activities, as well as any other information pertaining to the facility.

Granted, an in-home provider will probably give you papers that are not exactly on glossy stock, but they should be straightforward and filled with information. If you are handed a poorly photocopied piece of paper that has a number of spelling errors, then this might indicate that the professional end of the business is not as important to the provider. While this is not an indicator as to the quality of the childcare end, it does beg the question how serious the provider is taking the business.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Care

This website is a wonderful tool for parents to read up on the health related issues they need to be on the lookout for. Some of the topics it discusses are proper diapering techniques, hand washing, and other cleanliness aspects. Additionally, the site offers a link to the licensing requirements of every state. This will help you to find out if your provider indeed has a valid license, and secondly it will inform you what had to be done to obtain that license.

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education

This site provides further education and articles as they pertain to the hiring of childcare providers. While there are no easy answers on how to choose a provider, a lot of information, such as it is present on this site, takes the guesswork out of making the right decision.

The Pediatrician

Your pediatrician is another wonderful resource when trying to solve your childcare dilemma. She or he probably has had many interactions with parents who have sung the praises of their daycare providers, and they will be happy to share their recommendations with you. Similarly, they may have some publications on hand that will give you more information about childcare options in your neighborhood.

While your pediatrician may shy away from giving you a direct referral, she or he will know you and your child well enough to make some personalized recommendations with respect to the size of daycare setting you may wish to choose, the things you may wish to look out for with respect to your child's temperament, and any other personalized factors that you might not have thought of. Since she or he is also privy to your child's medical background, s/he should be able to make some sound recommendations on the reduction of allergens or other things you will need to keep in mind when choosing a daycare provider.

The Pros and Cons of Daycare Facilities

Making arrangements for your child's care while you are away at work is not as easy as simply calling up the local daycare center and booking a spot; as a matter of fact, for many parents it is the hardest thing to do! While there are many options available, they need to not only match the needs of the child, but also the needs of the parents.

Additionally, not all setups are beneficial for children. Some children may enjoy the care of an in-home childcare provider, while others will do better in the structured environment of a daycare center. If you are determined to take to your child to a daycare center, here are the pros and cons of daycare facilities that you need to be aware of:

A daycare center will have more children than an in-home care provider. If your child is a social butterfly and enjoys a lot of interaction, then the hustle and bustle of a busy center is a most welcome plus. Additionally, it will help her or him to hone socialization skills, which will come in handy when school starts.

During the hours of operation, you are always welcome to stop by. Surprise visits are encouraged, and you will find open doors whenever you arrive. This is a great plus when you are coming to check up on the well being of your child. An in-home provider might take it a little personal if you show up during working hours to assure yourself of your child's safety and wellbeing.

Since the daycare has a license and perhaps even an accreditation to protect, the personnel is bound to be screened, fingerprinted, and checked for drugs.

Another major plus when it comes to daycare centers are the standardized practices. Children thrive on routines, and most centers will have a schedule that will permit children to understand what it expected, what is scheduled, and what comes next. This provides a lot of security for the kids.

Additionally, since daycare centers cater to a large number of children, they often employ a large number of caregivers, which will ensure that your child received adequate attention and it also serves as a deterrent against inappropriate behavior, since many eyes are watching. The higher staff ratio is also a wonderful plus when it comes to sick days for individual workers – if your only in-home daycare provider takes ill, you will have to find a replacement; if, however, a worker at the center becomes sick, it is the manager's responsibility to call in another worker and maintain the proper staff to child ratios.

On the downside, if you need flexibility when it comes to dropping off or picking up your child, a daycare center will probably charge you some stiff fees and fines if you are late or arrive early. As a matter of fact, you are probably pretty much stuck with their hours of operation, so if you need to stay late at the office, you will have to make alternate arrangements to have your child picked up. An in-home childcare provider might be more flexible and may permit you to leave your child late once in a while if you are stuck.

Another downside to daycare centers that has almost become legendary is the high employee turnover. The burnout rate is immense, and coupled with low pay, some daycare centers seem to have a revolving door when it comes to staff retention. Of course, such a high turnover rate means that new personnel need to constantly be trained with respect to proper policies and procedures. Additionally, the bonding process that is so important between children and their caregivers is seriously interrupted.

As you can see, the pros and cons of daycare facilities may be found on the side of the daycare center or on the side of the in-home daycare provider. It is therefore of the utmost importance to visit the facility with open eyes, and in a way to be looking for problems and flaws. While in life this may be hailed as a negative outlook, when shopping for the best daycare facility available to your child this kind of behavior is actually a virtue! So do not be shy, ask a lot of questions, and feel free to open up cupboards and doors in an effort to discern if this facility ranks head and shoulders above the rest you have already inspected.

Why Having a Back-up Plan for Childcare is Important

Having a backup plan if you've got small children is a necessity because in real life they get sick. You never know when the flu, virus, strep throat or accident will occur. Most employers are not that happy when one has to miss an important work schedule, or a special presentation, so being prepared for inevitable is the key. Know what some of your options are, so you'll be stress free when the day arrives of illness from your children.

It's true that finding reliable daycare is hard enough, but finding it on a deadline with illness is very hard. Most daycare centers are very picky when it comes to children with communicable illness at their centers. They do have to make a profit, and the last thing they need is an empty daycare with a lot of mad parents. However, you have to get to work and there are ways to get there.

Some centers will have extra staff on hand for children that are sick. Most though will require the child to be on antibiotics before their readmitted to the care of the employees. Some are on staff permanently, and some have to be called in for emergency work. At times they are not at home, but it's an option to look at when choosing a daycare center.

Another option is to use a family member when your children get up and are sick. You'll need to look at the fact though that some members of your family might not be home, or more importantly don't need to care for a sick child. If an elderly parent has certain medical issues that could be complicated if exposed to an illness, then find someone that is reliable, but doesn't have the health issues. A backup plan with trusted family members is the way most working people solve their sick children issues, so talk with others and arrange for help if it's needed.

Online Internet agencies exist for emergency childcare problems, and some are listed right in your local telephone directory too. Just make sure that their credentials are stated, and if possible talk with others before the situation ever arises that you need emergency care for your children. There are a few very specialized agencies that offer nurses to come to your home, and care for sick children.

Please understand though these are very hard to find, and most of these types of services don't exist in many areas of the U.S. At times you might even be able to find care from a local hospital service for working parents with sick children. Again, these are hard to find, but if you do find one your company might pay part of the bill, so you'll not miss work. Both of these services are very expensive, and depending on the area can cost over \$100.00 for an eight-hour work day.

Some neighborhood communities have a care system set up where mothers or fathers that need help can get it by letting their child either stay with a parent that is off work, or with their nanny if for some reason their help (nanny) is sick. The drawbacks are that the help might be suddenly called in to work, or they consider that your child is too sick to stay with the care giver.

Look to your local church or synagogue as an important aid in getting quality childcare help too. A helpful pastor might be willing to care for your children, and the benefit is that they know many people that would likely help you out in a jam. Even if they can't recommend anyone within your religious organization they have access to other centers and hospitals that could care for them.

Finally, there is the option that you can take the day off by using a few vacation or sick days if your employer offers it. Also, look into eliminating child care back up plans by either starting a business from home, or asking your employer to let you telecommute from home. There are many that are offering that solution, and the Internet is making it a very viable option for

today's working parents. Don't forget your partner either, ask them to fill in if their schedule allows.

Back up plans is the best way to get quality childcare, and if you plan well enough ahead for the emergency it's likely that you won't be stuck high and dry without help. Remember though, at times even the best laid plans get derailed, so just take it on the chin, and spend some quality time with your children because they need you.