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## **HOW TO CHOOSE CHILD CARE**

Here are a few simple tips to get the decision making process off to the right start.

### **#1 START WITH YOUR CHILD**

The age of the child.

Babies need large amounts of individual care and comfort, warmth, love, prompt response to needs and do not socialize much with other babies. You should choose a setting that has four or fewer children with one care-giver. The care-giver should not have distractions that take their attention away from your baby. The setting should be warm and comfortable as well as bright and inviting.

Toddlers need safe space to explore and room to crawl and walk without disturbing the play of others. They need one main care-giver that does not change and they do well with consistent schedules. The setting should have room for free exploration, crawling and walking. There should be enough toys for each child, to avoid disputes and allow for redirection. The daily schedule should be available and allow for a balance of quiet and active time.

Keep in mind that the toddler may go through separation anxiety at this time. The setting you choose should have one main care-giver. It should be someplace you want to keep your child for a good length of time so frequent changes are not necessary.

Preschoolers need stimulating learning activities, appropriate play materials, others to socialize with, a balance of active and quiet time and time to explore outside every day. The setting may include "preschool time" for activities that stimulate learning. Preschoolers benefit from socialization with a few other children their own age. Group settings enable them to practice the meaningful use of speech and language, and work out problems.

Children begin to develop a sense of self-control and self-sufficiency in the preschool years. They should be given opportunities to begin dressing themselves, choosing some foods, helping themselves and solving problems. They will need to learn to follow directions, work in a group and make decisions to optimize the chances for success in kindergarten.

School age children need adults to talk with, healthy nutritious snacks and meals, physical exercise and opportunities for rest. They may need help with home-work, and transportation to extra curricular activities. Children this age need a setting that provides; snacks, naps, laps and raps. In other words, children at this age need settings that provide flexibility to meet individual needs. The child should feel at home and comfortable without pressure or over rigorous routines. The child will need a time to de-stress after a busy school day. Look for a setting that allows the child a place to unwind and relax without a lot of demands and rigidity.

The child's temperament.

Soon after birth your child's temperament will begin to emerge. Some children are sensitive, timid, quiet and shy others may be outgoing, active explorers who never meet a stranger. Parents know their child's individual temperaments. Choose a center that meets the needs of your child. Outgoing children will enjoy other children and high levels of activity. Often a licensed child care center may meet the needs of such a child. Other, more sensitive, children may do better in an "In-Home" or "Relative Care" setting where there is less activity and only a few other children to interact with.

The child's home environment.

The atmosphere of the care setting, should be similar to the atmosphere in the home for a smooth transition. A care environment that is vastly different from what a child is used to at home will not be a good fit for the child or the parent. Your child may be used to a schedule that provides for a lot of activity. Homes with older siblings at home naturally have a different flow than a single child home or a home with a new baby. Several children with various schedules of their own can make for different meal times, eating on the run and packing up the family to accommodate those that need chauffeur service. Parents of children involved in sports are well familiar with the routine. Children used to these routines will do better in care settings that have a variety of activities, field trips and projects. Otherwise, you may find your child will be bored and discontent. Children from homes with calmer activity patterns, only children and homes with small children and babies will be comfortable with a more sedentary atmosphere.

The key is to know your child and choose accordingly. Certain settings will provide more of what your child needs than others. Form a picture of the ideal care setting for your child. Look carefully at the various options available. Jot down a list of possible care options, from those options choose one that comes closest to the ideal. Don't forget, there may be options close to your job, along the way to work or close to your home.

## # 2 VISIT THE CENTER OR HOME AND OBSERVE A TYPICAL DAY

Narrow the choices down and plan a visit to each. Allow enough time to actually sit and get an idea of what the day would be like for a child. Ask questions. Take a note pad so you don't forget anything. Things you may want to know could include:

- \* What do you do in the case of an emergency?
- \* What is the pick up procedure for times when I can't be there?
- \* How do you handle medicine and other health care issues?
- \* What is your policy on colds and flu?
- \* What is a typical meal and are the meals posted each day?
- \* Will my child be leaving the home or center and how is insurance handled?
- \* Who else will be in contact with my child during the day?

For more information about a licensed center or home you can call Child Care Community Connection, The Department of Children and Family Services or your local Resource and Referral Agency. Ask for the names of other families who have received care from the provider and ask around.