

A Guide to a Safe Child Care Environment

When choosing quality child care, the initial telephone screening should be followed by:

- ***IN-PERSON INTERVIEW AT THE FACILITY*** - an opportunity to ask questions about activities, contract terms, etc. It is also a time to survey the surroundings. If considering a family child care home, you may ask to see the entire house.
- ***SCHEDULED OBSERVATIONS*** - an opportunity to remain in the background and watch the provider's body language, level of supervision provided, and how the provider interacts with and disciplines the children. You may want to observe at different times during the day (i.e., active play time, mealtime). These observations will also afford you more opportunities to inspect the environment.

Before making your final decision:

- Ask the provider for several names of parents currently using the child care (or who have recently used it); call them and ask about their impressions of and experiences with the provider; listen to their tone of voice as well as what is actually said.
- Arrange a time when you can bring your child to meet the caregiver.

When examining the environment, make sure:

- Electrical outlets are covered
- Doors into restricted areas are in good condition with working locks
- There is no unsupervised access to bathrooms, kitchen, tool room, basement, garage, and any staircases, etc.
- Medicine, cleaning supplies, and other hazardous substances are inaccessible to the children
- Personal belongings of all who have access to the facility are stored properly
- There are first aid supplies, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and an emergency plan
- Equipment and toys are in good shape and age-appropriate
- Outdoor play areas are hazard-free and defined by thick bushes or fencing
- Pools, ponds, and streams are inaccessible without adult assistance
- The kitchen, bathroom, and diaper-changing areas are clean

After choosing your child care:

- Routinely exchange information about your child with the provider.
- Make sure there are no potentially hazardous items or substances in your child's pockets or personal belongings (i.e., make sure the provider puts any of your child's medicines in a secure place; toys that would be unsafe for a younger child should not be taken to day care, etc.).
- Drop in without notice every once in a while.

**NEVER LEAVE YOUR CHILD IN A FACILITY WHERE YOU ARE TOLD
YOU MAY NOT HAVE ACCESS TO YOUR CHILD AT ANY TIME!**