Choosing Child Care

Choosing child care is one of the most important parenting decisions you will make. Every child deserves a safe, healthy and warm child care environment. Start early in your pregnancy to look at different types of care available in your home or work area. Here are some general guidelines to help you.

Types of child care
- Center-based child care: Child care organizations that feature structured activities and programs. Staff is trained child care providers.
- Family day care center: Child care providers provide service in their own homes.
- In-home care: Someone comes to your home to care for your children.

Resources
- The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has a website that contains information about locations and history of licensed child care centers. Visiting this site can help you make your decision. dcf.wisconsin.gov
- The American Academy of Pediatrics has a program called Healthy Child Care of America. The website has information and resources about child care. You can download a questionnaire called “Is this the Right Place for My Child?” You can use the questions on this form to interview people who may take care of your children. healthychilddcare.org/about.html

Some general questions to ask when choosing child care in a home setting
- Does the child care provider have experience or training in taking care of children?
- Is the child care provider home licensed and/or accredited to provide child care?
- Are there any care site violations?
- How many caregivers are there? Are they trained in child development, CPR and first aid? Do they have criminal background checks?

- What is the turnover rate of the staff?
- How many children are being cared for? What are the ages of the children?
- Are there separate areas for different ages of babies and children? Is there a separate nap area?
- Are children’s personal items stored separately in a clean, organized area?
- Does the home have facilities to wash provider and child’s hands when needed? Are surfaces clean?
- Is the environment safe – indoors and outdoors (free of lead paint, poisonous materials and child proofed)?
- Are there references you can contact?
- What are the hours of operation?
- What are the fees and when are they due? Are there late pickup fees or additional fees for snacks, meals, etc.?
- What are the policies for vacation, holidays, etc.?
- Will breast milk be stored and fed to your baby? Where do they store food items?
- What if your baby becomes sick? Is there a sick room for your baby until you arrive?
- Are there daily or weekly activities planned? Can you see a schedule? How do they communicate to you about your child’s daily activities?
- Are any medicines labeled and out of reach?

Continued
In addition to some of the questions above, when visiting a child care center ...

- Does the program have the highest level of licensing offered by the state?
- Are there written personnel policies and job descriptions?
- Is there ongoing training of providers?
- Are indoor and outdoor activity areas checked daily for safety?
- Do you receive a daily report of child’s activities?
- Is there a disaster plan?
- Is the program evaluated once a year by someone outside the program?
- What are the values and beliefs of the day care? Are they the same as your values?

Things to look for both in home and day care centers

- Does it look safe and clean?
- Do the caregivers look like they enjoy playing with the children? Do they talk to the children?
- Are there toys and learning materials within a child’s reach?
- How do you feel when you walk through the front door?
- Are the babies held when fed?
- Do the children look happy?
- Is there space for quiet, active and outdoor play?
- Is discipline carried out with words, tone of voice and actions that show respect for the children?
- Is the play area safe and supervised by an adult so children cannot wander away?
- Are the unused electrical outlets covered safely?
- Are cleaning fluids, medications, poisons, sharp tools, matches, etc., stored away from children?
- Are bathrooms clean and sanitary?
- Are meals and snacks balanced and wholesome?
- Do the staff wash their hands before preparing and eating meals?

“Red flags” for at-home care

- Child care providers who seem overly distracted by their own housekeeping needs
- Other family members in the home who may resent caregiver’s activity
- Lack of safety features
  - No working smoke detectors
  - No safety gates on stairs
  - Non-childproof home
- Caregiver smokes in the house
- Lack of communication or language skills (if new to U.S.)
- Caregivers who make unrealistic claims
- A personal style of caregiving that makes you feel uncomfortable
- Caregivers who seem cold or have a caregiving philosophy that does not match yours

• Compare different settings until you find one you feel comfortable with.
• Take the time to get the information you need to make the best choice possible for you and your baby.

For more information, contact the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center at 800-616-2242 or visit the website at: nccic.acf.hhs.gov