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What to Look for in Your Child's Caregiver

Many different child care arrangements are possible: care by a relative; family care in the caregiver's home; care in your own home by a visiting caregivers or live-in nanny; daycare centers. For infants and toddlers, a more home-like environment with fewer children may be better than a conventional daycare. Regardless of which arrangement you choose, infants in child care should have no more than one or two regular caregivers who are affectionate and enjoy babies. The ratio of experienced and trained personnel to children should ideally be 1:3 for children under 2 years of age and 1:4 or 1:5 for older children. When selecting your child's caregiver, it is a good idea to conduct interviews with prospective caregivers and check their references. As an aid in screening daycare facilities, a list of questions to ask is provided below.

Questions to Ask About Child Care

- Is the facility licensed or certified?
- How many children are cared for in the facility, and what are their ages?
- What is the staff-to-child ratio?
- Will care be provided to each child by the same staff member? How many primary caregivers will a child have each week?
- What is the child-care training and experience of the director and staff?
- Can medications be administered by the staff?
- How is the staff supervised, and by whom?
- What is the rate of staff turnover? Why?
- How is care individualized for each child (feeding, sleeping, toys, comforting, play, and talking with others)?
- What is the typical schedule of activities for each day?
- What are the opportunities for play and exploration?
- Is there a "quiet" area of children to rest and relax?
- How do you manage misbehavior? Temper tantrums?
- What precautions are taken to assure the children's physical safety? Do you have a checklist of specific items?



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- Are smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and other protective devices used? Are there regular fire drills?
- What kind of food is served, if any?
- What sanitation procedures are followed for the children and staff?
- What medical care-routine and emergency-is available?
- Can I visit anytime I wish without prior arrangements?
- What information do you share with parents? Will I receive a regular report on my child's progress?

Making a Smooth Transition

Try making the transition from your care to that of a substitute caregiver as smooth as possible. If possible, arrange your working hours so that one parent can be with your child most of the time, at least initially. Part-time work, job-sharing arrangements, flexible time schedules or work at home may be options open to you. To help your substitute caregiver to individualize your child's care, provide a "check-list" about your child (e.g. your child's formula, favorite foods, naptimes, favorite toys/games, temperament, level of development).

Be aware that although your baby may seem well adjusted to daycare at first, problems may arise at different stages of development. At about 8 to 9 months, toddlers may experience "separation anxiety". At about 17 to 18 months, toddlers may experience "separate anxiety".