

Selecting child care is one of the most important decisions that a parent may have to make. Although nothing can replace the parent-child relationship, good care givers can provide some of the important nurturing that children get at home: support, stimulation, love, security, and a safe place to play, eat, sleep and grow.

It is desirable to personally evaluate several prospective child care providers. Evaluation should include asking specific questions and observing children already enrolled in the program. Also, it is recommended that you speak to other parents who have used child care services which you are considering.

You need to feel confident about your choice. If you are not, it is probably best to select another child care provider.

When evaluating a child care provider, consider:

THE BASICS

- Is the location of the child care provider convenient to your home and/or place of employment?
- What are the days and hours of operation? What holidays is it closed?
- What does the program cost? What is included?
- Are thorough background checks conducted on all staff members? What are the criteria for hiring (including character, experience and education)?
- Is the center licensed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (outside of New York City) or the New York City Department of Health (New York City only)? Do they have liability insurance?
- What is the child-adult ratio? Generally accepted ratios are: one care giver to four infants (ages 6 weeks to 18 months); one care giver to five children (ages 18 months to 3 years); one care giver to seven, eight or nine children (ages 3, 4 and 5).

- Are meals and snacks provided? If so, are they nutritious? Are weekly menus provided?
- Do children receive the individual attention, warmth and understanding that you would like for your child?
- Are parents encouraged to visit and observe the program? Are unannounced visits welcome?
- Will the care giver provide information on a regular basis about your child's activities and progress?
- Is the facility secure enough to ensure that a child cannot wander off and a stranger cannot gain entry?
- Ask for a rundown of a typical day.

SAFETY

- Are staff members certified in First Aid and CPR?
- Are all children and staff required to be immunized?
- Are indoor and outdoor spaces for children safe and free from hazards? For example: Are stairways protected? Are electrical outlets covered with safety caps? Are cleaning agents and medicines kept in locked storage cabinets?
- Is playground equipment safe and well maintained?
- Are smoke detectors and fire extinguishers provided?
- Are there adequate emergency exits? Is there an emergency plan? How are emergencies handled?
- Is outdoor space fenced and free from debris? Is the playground area safe and supervised?
- Are children carefully supervised while eating?
- Are there appropriate facilities for frequent hand washing?
- What is the policy for sick children? What is the policy on administering medicine?
- Is there an adult responsible for receiving children when they arrive each day?
- Is written authorization required to release your child to another person?

CARE GIVERS

- Are care givers trained in child development? Are they encouraged to participate in educational opportunities?
- Do they listen to and answer children's questions in ways they can understand?
- Do you sense that care givers feel good about being with children and have a sense of humor and enthusiasm?
- Are there regular meetings between staff and parents?
- What is the turnover rate of care givers?



ENVIRONMENT

- Do the children appear to be happy, well-cared for and content?
- Is the space appealing and clean, with adequate heating, lighting, ventilation and moderate noise levels?
- Are food storage and preparation areas clean?
- What is the daily schedule for napping and where do children nap? Do they ensure that infants sleep on their backs?
- Is there space for children to store their personal belongings?
- Are good health habits, such as hand-washing, encouraged?

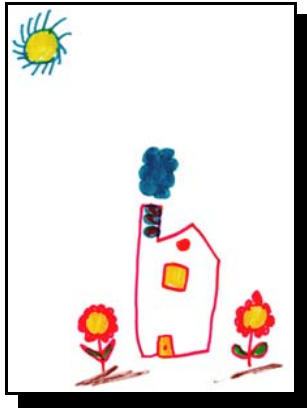
- How is diapering and toilet use handled?
- Are infants provided with extra supervision and adequate stimulation?
- Is there a special place for sick children to rest?

ACTIVITIES

- What type of activities do they use? Are activities age appropriate? How do they build imagination?
- Is the program well supplied with equipment and materials (e.g., blocks, books, games, toys, creative art materials)?
- Are pre-school children given an opportunity to play with other children in structured and free time?
- How are developmental issues such as toilet training or temper tantrums handled?
- Do activities change regularly?
- Are there any specialized programs (e.g., dance, music, art) available ?
- Is there a balance in the daily schedule that includes free time as well as scheduled activities?
- Is there flexibility in this schedule to accommodate children's individual needs and abilities? Are children given a choice of activities?
- Will "field trips" be adequately supervised? Will your written permission be obtained for each trip?

DISCIPLINE

- Is discipline handled in a positive manner?
- Are rules and expectations explained to children in age appropriate language? Are they applied consistently and periodically reinforced?
- Are reasonable and consistent limits set?
- What types of discipline are used (e.g., time out)?
- How and when is it instituted (and for how long)?
- How is chronic misbehavior or behavior which jeopardizes the safety of other children handled?



The NYS Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse (MECC)

Services generally fall into three categories: support for law enforcement, assistance provided to left-behind family members and community outreach.

■ **The 1-800-FIND-KID hotline** operates 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. In addition to case intakes, missing child lead information received on this line is immediately disseminated to investigating police agencies.

■ **The statewide missing and unidentified person repository** is continually updated by MECC with information submitted by law enforcement agencies.

■ **Investigative assistance** provided to law enforcement agencies includes:

Flagging missing child birth and educational records.

Electronically distributing missing child posters via high speed broadcast fax/email systems. When a child is deemed to be “endangered”, the *NYS AMBER Alert* and *DCJS Missing Child/College Student Alert* Programs are used to provide the most rapid and widespread public dissemination of information possible. Distribution includes police agencies, television and radio stations, NYS Thruway toll booths and service areas, border crossings, airports and bus terminals.

Placing missing child photographs and biographical information on the DCJS and NCMEC (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children) web sites.

■ **MECC collaboration** with the NCMEC, other state clearinghouses, other State agencies, non-profit organizations, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and courts can provide nationwide assistance to police agencies and family members.

■ **MECC community outreach** includes: developing and distributing educational literature; making presentations at professional conferences; and offering the *Operation SAFE CHILD* ID Card Program at community events.



IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US AT:

**NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
4 Tower Place
Albany, NY 12203**

1-800-FIND-KID

Missing child photographs and biographical information and additional child safety information can be viewed on our website.

www.operationsafechild.org

Contributions made to the NYS MECC Fund made reproduction of this brochure possible. Contributions can be forwarded directly to the fund at the address listed above. Also, the NYS Tax Law now allows individuals to donate to the MECC Fund when filing state income tax returns. Every penny of your contribution goes directly to support the work of the Clearinghouse and local efforts statewide.

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IN CASE YOU NEED DAY CARE



**State of New York
Eliot Spitzer, Governor
Denise E. O'Donnell, Commissioner**

You want the best possible care for your children while you are away from them.

Before allowing anyone to watch over your children, make sure that they are reliable and experienced individuals who truly care about the welfare of children. Interview a number of child care givers. Ask specific questions. Observe them interacting with other children.

When making your final decision, ask yourself, “Will I be able to develop a relaxed, sharing and trusting relationship with the care giver? Will this setting be a happy experience for my child?”

The New York State Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse has prepared these guidelines to assist you with selecting quality child care.