

Finding and Choosing a Quality Family Home Daycare

So after carefully reviewing your childcare options, you have decided that a home daycare setting meets the needs of your child and your family the best. You probably already have a good idea of what you want; a place that is safe, caring, and loving, where your child will be happy, learn and have fun. At the same time, child care must also meet the needs of your family. Child care should be convenient, affordable, and reliable. Finding quality child care can be a challenging and emotional experience. You are looking for an arrangement that will work best for your family and one in which you will be confident that your child will receive the love, care, and attention that he or she deserves. Choosing the best child care arrangement for your child takes time, but is well worth the effort.

Choosing child care is one of the most important decisions that parents will make. Child care plays a major role in your child's emotional, intellectual and physical growth, not to mention your peace of mind. The quality, philosophy, style, and routine of a childcare program vary greatly from home to home. Parents should seek a childcare provider who is self-confident, affectionate, and comfortable with the children. The provider should be able to encourage social skills and positive behavior, and set limits on negative ones. The environment should be stimulating, with a balance between active and quiet play. Quality childcare can be a positive and rewarding experience for both parent and child. By making a thoughtful decision now, you will be helping your child to develop a foundation for success.

When it comes to deciding what is best for you and your child, you are the expert. Trust your instincts to help you decide what you value and what child care situation will best meet your child's needs. The provider you choose will play an important role in the growth and development of your child. As you weigh your choices, remember that the most important considerations revolve around trust. You should be able to trust that the provider you choose will attend to your child's individual needs. It is essential that your child feels comfortable and safe in the setting you choose. To choose child care wisely you need an awareness of what quality child care is, how to recognize it, and how to find it. Use the following steps to help guide you in your search to find and choose a quality home daycare.

Seven Steps to Selecting a Quality Family Home Daycare

1) Identify Your Priorities

First, decide what you want and are looking for in a home daycare. You might find it helpful to write down your expectations and your child's needs according to what is most important to you and your family. You will then be better able to assess whether the child care program's goals meet your family's needs. Some things to consider are:

- Your child's age, personality, and their interests.
- Are you looking for a home daycare near work? Or would one closer to your home be more convenient?
- Are you looking for a small or large licensed home daycare?
- Will you need part or full-time child care?
- Are you looking for a childcare provider whose emphasis is geared towards learning? To play and have fun? Or both?

2) Get Organized and Do Your Research

Approach your daycare search as you would a job hunt; be thorough, and do your homework. If you're returning to work, start thinking about child care soon after your baby is born. If you live in a big city, or anyplace where good child care is scarce or in high demand, start looking as early as your second trimester. It takes time to find the right child care situation for your child, and any vacancies in the best programs fill quickly.

- Ask around to find the most reputable home daycares. Ask your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors for recommendations; personal references are the best kind.
- To help you narrow down your choices and make an informed decision, we've compiled a detailed list of childcare referral agencies for you to use, to help guide your search for a quality childcare provider. Contact them by phone or by going online to receive the names, numbers, and locations of all the licensed home daycares in your preferred area, and other helpful information.
- Go to the phone book or go online. Your local Yellow Pages and YellowPages.com should have a list of home daycares in your area under the heading of child care. If you're new to the area, this may be the best place to start.
- Check to see if your community has a Head Start program and any other child care financial assistance programs that your family may qualify for.

3) Conduct a Telephone Interview

Once you have made a list of potential childcare providers, save time and energy by using the phone to narrow your search. Any provider worth your time will be willing to answer your questions with care and courtesy. Phone several different home daycares and ask general questions to determine if the setting, location, hours of operation, and etc. meet your family's basic requirements. This will also give you a good basis for comparison, which will help you to better determine what quality child care, is and is not.

- To help you narrow down your choices and make an informed decision, we've compiled a detailed list of telephone interview questions for you to ask. Before calling a potential provider, print out the questions to have with you. Use these questions to help guide your search for a quality childcare provider. Take your time and review your options carefully.
- Schedule a time to visit the childcare programs that you think are the most promising; preferably during daylight hours, and while the children in the provider's care are present. If you must cancel or reschedule, be sure to call the provider and let him or her know.

4) Make an Onsite Visit

Visit as many home daycares as your time will allow. Be prepared to spend some time at each location, in order to observe the children's activities and their interactions with the provider and with each other. Choosing quality child care for your child involves being observant and asking plenty of questions. The more you know, the easier your decision and the more comfortable you will feel making it. Find out how the provider feels about things that are important to you. In evaluating the responses to your questions, carefully consider how his or her philosophy of child rearing, discipline, and nurturing meshes with your personal vision of how your child should be guided and cared for each day. Pay attention to your gut feeling and how the provider handles your questions. You should bring your child with you to meet the potential provider. You'll want to see how your child interacts with the provider and the other children, and if he or she seems comfortable in the environment. Beware of the provider who does not acknowledge your child during the interview.

- To help you narrow down your choices and make an informed decision, we've compiled a detailed list of interview questions, and a checklist to use as you visit each child care location. Before an interview, print out the checklist and take it with you. Use these questions to help guide your search for a quality childcare provider. Take your time and review your options carefully.
- Ask each home daycare you're considering for a list of past and present references.
- Interview several different childcare providers to give you a basis for comparison before you make your final decision.

5) Check References

References can be a helpful tool in helping you make your final decision about a childcare provider. Positive word-of-mouth is a powerful endorsement. If a certain daycare has a buzz, ask other parents why they're raving about it. While you may run into a bit of a bias (childcare providers aren't likely to refer you to people who weren't happy with them), nothing is more convincing than hearing how other parents rate their care. When calling, don't be shy; remember that these are also parents you are calling. They've walked in your shoes, understand your plight, and will empathize with your position. By checking references thoroughly, you will be better suited to make an informed and educated decision, all in an effort to help you screen out the not so good early childcare programs from the best ones.

- To help you narrow down your choices and make an informed decision, we've compiled a detailed list of questions to ask references for you to use, to help guide you in your search for a quality childcare provider. Before calling references, print out the questions to have with you.
- Also, contact your states local licensing agency (in San Diego County 619-767-2200 or www.cclld.ca.gov) in order to review their file on record.

6) Make a Decision

Remember that it is okay to be choosy. Review the information you have gathered and call back if you have any unanswered questions. Trust your instincts. If you are not comfortable with what you have found thus far, keep looking. Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family. If the Home daycare you like is full, don't despair. Put your name on their waiting list. This almost guarantees that you and your child will get in at some point; even if it isn't precisely when you wanted it. If you must use another childcare program temporarily, you will have this as an option. Notify the childcare provider that you would like to enroll with, as soon as you make your decision. As a courtesy, notify the other childcare providers that you will not be using their program. From what you heard and saw, ask yourself the following questions.

- Do you believe that your child will be happy and have the opportunity to learn and grow in this environment?
- Do you have a sense of trust in this childcare provider?
- Can this provider meet the special needs of my child?
- Are the provider's values and goals compatible with my family's?
- How well will my child fit in with the routine and with the other children?
- Is the child care program available, convenient, and affordable according to my family's needs and resources?
- Did I feel welcome and comfortable there? Each day, will my child feel the same?
- Am I going to feel comfortable leaving my child there each day?

- Listen to your child's opinion and feelings. Combine them with feelings of your own, and make your decision.
- Do I feel good about my decision?

7) Review Your Decision

As you become familiar with your child's home daycare program, you will get a sense of how well it meets the needs of your child.

You can generally feel secure if

- the childcare provider enthusiastically welcomes you and your child into their home each and every day.
- you are informed promptly of any minor accidents or incidents and told when your child isn't feeling well.
- the childcare provider is actively involved with the children.
- the childcare provider seems warm and genuinely interested in the children.
- there is spontaneous laughter, hugging and eye-to-eye contact with the children.
- the childcare provider is gentle, but firm when necessary.

Your child

- is relaxed and happy after the initial adjustment period.
- appears to be physically and emotionally well taken care of.
- seems to often be involved in constructive activities.
- genuinely looks forward to coming to daycare most days.
- gets the individual attention that he or she deserves each day.

