

Choosing Infant and Toddler Care

Escogiendo Cuidado Infantil para Niños y Bebés

CRC Bulletin #107

With the social and economic changes that face us today, more and more parents are confronted with child care decisions earlier and earlier in their children's lives. Locating and choosing child care is one of the most difficult and frightening responsibilities of being a parent. If you are a first time parent the "choosing child care" process can be even more overwhelming. Take heart. You will be able to do it. With some time and energy, you will be able to choose quality care for your child.

The first step is to look at your choices for infant and toddler care in your community. Most of these options are in our referral files at Community Resources for Children.

INFANT AND TODDLER OPTIONS

Family Child Care

These are state regulated programs that operate in the caregiver's own home. This is the most traditional care used by parents. Licensed family child care providers are required to have at least 15 hours of training in preventive health practices including pediatric CPR and pediatric first aid.

- A family child care provider who specializes in infants and toddlers under the age of two years of age is licensed to care for a total of four children only.
- In a small family child care home, the provider may care for six or eight children. If she is caring for six children, only three may be under the age of two years. If the provider chooses to care for eight children, only two may be under the age of two years, while at least two children must be six years of age or older.
- The large family child care home is licensed for twelve to fourteen children. If the provider is caring for twelve children, only four may be under the age of two years. The provider must have an assistant any time there are more than six children present. If the provider is caring for fourteen children, only three may be under the age of two years, and two children must be six years of age or older. The provider must have an assistant if more than eight children are present.
- In both small and large family child care homes, the provider's own children under the age of ten are included in the licensed count when they are on the premises.

Child Care Centers

Centers are programs licensed by the state to operate

outside of a family residence. Most centers are licensed to care for children age two years and up, however there are a growing number of child care centers that care for infants and toddlers. The licensing regulations for infant centers require that one child care worker be present for every four children under the age of 24 months. Staff must meet specific educational requirements and must have training in CPR, First Aid and Preventive Health.

In-Home Caregivers/Babysitters

These are child care providers who come into your home to care for your child. Live-in sitters generally work for room and board plus a salary.

Shared Babysitting Arrangements: This is an arrangement where two or more families come together and hire a sitter to work in one (or more) of the parent's homes.

License-exempt Care

The provider who cares for children from one family only is not required to have a license. The size of the group is determined by the number of children the family has. If the provider decides to care for children from more than one family, he or she must get a family child care license.

There are no licensing requirements for in-home caregivers or shared baby-sitting arrangements. All the responsibility rests with the parent-employer. Parents who opt for these types of service arrangements now have TrustLine as an additional tool in selecting a license-exempt child care provider. TrustLine is a child care provider registry that helps safeguard children. All child care providers listed with TrustLine have submitted their fingerprints to the California Department of Justice and have no disqualifying criminal convictions or child abuse reports in California. You can call TrustLine at 1-800-822-8490

FINDING CARE

After you have decided on the option that you think will best meet your family's needs, you're ready to start your search. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to interview and screen potential child care providers before you make a final decision. If you have decided to consider family child care or center-based care, call COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN for referrals.

As you begin to call providers you will want to ask some basic questions, such as: are there any openings, how many children are cared for, and what are the hours and

"The mission of Community Resources for Children is to provide resources for the early care and education of children in Napa County"

fees? Depending on the answers you receive and the feel you get about the program as you talk, you can begin to make appointments to meet the providers who sound best for you. You'll need to remember that providers are often too busy to speak for very long over the telephone. Also, remember it is natural for programs to put their best foot forward to impress you. The only way to make a quality child care decision is to visit the child care facility. As your infant or toddler cannot communicate their feelings regarding the facility, it is important that you observe conditions carefully. A good time to observe is when other parents are leaving their children or picking them up. As your choices narrow, you will want to speak to the provider again when no children are in care. This way, the provider can stay focused and answer your specific questions. Remember you are not going to find another person who will do everything exactly the way you do, but you do want to find a program or a person you respect. Ultimately, your goal should be finding someone that you trust and who makes your child feel safe and loved.

Here are some questions to consider in your search. You may want to ask these questions during your interview with a prospective child care provider.

YOU AND THE PROVIDER

- Do you feel welcomed and respected by the child care provider?
- Is the child care provider interested in hearing about your child?
- Is the child care provider willing to take time each day to tell you about your child?

NURTURING

- Will there be other people caring for your child during the day or week? Have you met them all?
- Is the ratio of adult to children meeting the licensing requirements?
- Do the children get individual attention when they need it?
- What is the child care provider's response to the children's needs when they are hungry, overstimulated, tired, etc.?
- What is the child care provider's attitude? Does she seem to enjoy her work or does it seem like a chore?

DAILINESS

- Is there a regular routine to the day for the children?
- Are the caregiving tasks used as an opportunity to learn? (Infants and toddlers learn from everyday activities - eating, playing, having diapers and clothes changes...) Does the provider take time to talk with the child during these times?
- Are meal times social and pleasant? Are you satisfied with the quality and variety of the menu?
- What is the noise level? Is there a quiet, private space for the children to relax?

- Does nap time seem warm and peaceful? How are the children put down to nap?
- How is the safety and general hygiene of the facility? Are diapering areas and food preparation areas clean and safe? Does the child care provider routinely wash her hands before and after diapering and food preparation?
- Is there a special place for your child's things?

PLAY

The world looks very different from a child's perspective. Try sitting on the floor (even if you feel foolish) and taking a look around you.

- Is the room safe and attractive?
- Is there opportunity to go outside regularly?
- Are the infants given the opportunity to move around or are they confined in cribs, infant seats, etc. for most of the day? (Infants and toddlers learn by moving, touching and trying.)
- What happens with the infants and toddlers when there are older children around?
- Is there opportunity for the infants and toddlers to play with each other? Are they allowed to try and solve their own problems when they can? Is the caregiver present and ready to intervene when they cannot?

ARRANGEMENTS

- What happens when your child is ill?
- What happens if the child care provider is ill?
- Are there plans for handling emergencies such as earthquakes or fires? (This is required by Licensing.)
- What are the arrangements for paying fees, paying for vacation time, holidays, etc.?
- Is there a written contract or agreement? It is usually best to have one.
- Be sure to obtain the social security number or employee identification number of the caregiver you select so that you can take the state and/or federal child care tax credits.

THE SEARCH CONTINUES...

It is oftentimes not easy to find infant and toddler care. A feeling of being overwhelmed and frustrated is not unusual as you look for care. Remember, you can always call COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN for more referrals. It is helpful to talk to other parents who have been through this search and/or you are welcome to drop by our office to get some additional advice or support. Don't despair! With some time and leg work your search can lead to the child care provider or program that will lend richness and stability to your family's life.

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