

What You May Not Know About Choosing Child Care

The Problem

- One of the hardest decisions for a parent may be to find a reliable child care provider they can trust.
- Unfortunately, parents have left their children with someone who was not capable of caring for children. The results have been injuries and death.

Types of Child Care Settings

- Child Care Centers
 - Required to be licensed in all states.
 - Care for groups of children.
 - Due to being licensed, these centers must meet minimum health, safety and caregiver training standards.
- Family Child Care Providers
 - Care is given in the provider's home.
 - Missouri requires family care providers to be regulated if they care for more than four unrelated children.
 - Many parents choose this type of child care because they want their children in a home like setting.
- In-Home Child Care
 - Includes nannies and housekeepers who care for children in their home.
 - Parents often choose this type of care because they feel their child would be safer in their own home.
 - Since parents are employing the provider, they may also feel they have more control over the care given to their children.
- Relatives, Friends, and Neighbors
 - Can occur in the child's home or the provider's home.
 - Many states, including Missouri, do not require these types of providers to be screened.
 - Many parents choose this type of provider because they feel more comfortable leaving their child with someone they believe has the same values they do.
 - Others use this type of care due to limited budgets and varying schedules.

Choosing a Provider

- Make a list of qualities to look for in a caregiver or day care.
- Qualities such as experience, religious background, discipline beliefs, and flexibility need to be considered.
- Parents also want to consider any religious or cultural beliefs that they wish a caregiver to impart to their child.

(Kids Health)

Choosing A Nanny or Au Pair

- There are many questions parents need to ask a potential nanny or au pair, such as: Why are they interested in working with children?
- Why did you leave your last job? Parents should always check references; ask the last family why the relationship ended and whether they would recommend that caregiver.
- What is your discipline policy? It is important to offer "what if" scenarios to seek responses to situations that could arise. For example, if a child hits another child or throws a tantrum over a toy someone else is playing with, what should the consequences be?
- How will you provide new experiences to enhance my child's mental and physical development? What are the opportunities you can offer to experience art, music, group and individual play, and indoor and outdoor play?
- Other questions to ask include how would you handle toilet teaching and how would you handle separation anxiety?
- Once parents have hired a caregiver, they should draw up a specific contract outlining expected duties, hours, salary, paid vacation, and sick leave. Parental obligations should be a part of the contract. A review date should be established within a few months to discuss how the arrangement is working and to fine-tune the agreement.
- Observe the caregiver's interaction with your child routinely and unexpectedly.
- Unfortunately mistreatment of children can occur. Here are some warning signs:
 - The child care provider has lied or stolen from the family

- They do not answer questions about the daily routine.
- Parents may come home to find their child unsupervised.
- The caregiver does not respond to your child.
- Your child becomes moody or withdrawn or has problems eating or sleeping.
- Your child suddenly becomes upset when left with the caregiver.
- You simply have a bad feeling about the caregiver.
- If a parent sees these warning signs, an alternative provider needs to be hired.

(Kids Health)

Choosing A Babysitter

- Try to find a trusted friend or family member, or select a sitter that is recommended by your friend.
- Meet your sitter first. Once you're comfortable with the person, see how the sitter interacts with your child and how the sitter reacts to emergencies or unusual situations.
- Check the sitter's references before the sitter watches your child.
- Do not choose a sitter younger than 12 years old.
- Make sure the sitter knows CPR and first aid.
- Encourage your sitter to take a babysitting class offered by the American Red Cross.

(University of Michigan Health System)

- Parents should look for the following qualities in a sitter: maturity, friendliness, common sense, and a genuine fondness for children *(Kids Health)*.
- The recommendations of people parents know and trust are the best bet for finding a reliable and capable babysitter. Parents should invite the sitter over for a dry run while a parent is home to familiarize him or her with the household and observe the interactions between parent and child *(Kids Health)*.

Questions to Ask Baby Sitters

- In addition to CPR, ask if she knows the first steps to take in case of an infant or toddler choking and what to do in a fire or other emergency.
- If you ask a sitter if she loves children, she'll obviously say yes. It's important to ask open-ended questions to get a more complete answer. Questions such as "Why do you like working with children?" and "What do you like best about babysitting?" will get better responses.
- If there are older kids, find out how interested she is in entertaining them with games and other activities. Is she up for kicking a soccer ball around in the backyard? Parents don't want a sitter who will plop their child in front of the TV all night while she chats on the phone with friends.
- Make sure to ask if there are any personal habits — like smoking or drinking — that you'd object to. If language is important to you, let her know you don't want her to swear in front of your child. And make sure you mention any restrictions, such as limits on TV time or not watching particular shows or listening to certain types of music when your child is awake.
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(Babycenter.com)

Instructions and Information to Share with Sitters

- The child's usual routine (for example, homework, bedtime, mealtimes) and general house rules (for example, any limits on TV, computer use, video games, playing outside, etc.) should be shared with the sitter.
- A sitter should always know where the parent will be and how to reach them at all times. They should also know under what circumstances to call 911 before contacting the parent.
- Parents should leave sitters phone numbers for poison control, which is 1-800-222-1222 (it should be posted in a prominent location).
- Make sure the sitter knows what to do in an emergency. Parents should provide an emergency phone list that includes neighbors, friends, relatives, and doctor. A parents own phone number and address should be on the list, so that in case of an emergency, the sitter can provide that information to the police or paramedics.

- Show the sitter where door keys are kept in case a child locks him or herself inside a room.
 - Show the babysitter where emergency exits, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers are located. Demonstrate how to enable and disable security systems and alarms.
 - Let the sitter know of any special problems a child may have, such as an allergy to bee stings, certain foods, or household products, or the need for medication at a specific time (the directions for which should be clearly explained and written down). Show the sitter where first aid items are kept.
 - Teach kids the meaning of 911 and how to call for help, so that if something happens to the babysitter, they know what to do.
- (Kids Health)*

Safety Rules for Sitters to Follow

- Medicine should not be given to children without their parents' written instructions.
 - Don't leave kids alone in the house or yard, even for a minute.
 - Don't leave kids unattended near water. Infants and small children can drown in only a few inches of water, even in a bucket or toilet.
 - Don't feed kids under 4 years old nuts, popcorn, hard candy, raw carrots, or any hard, smooth foods that can block the windpipe and cause choking. Foods such as hot dogs or grapes should never be served whole and should be chopped into very small pieces (skin should also be removed from hot dogs).
 - Don't let kids play with plastic bags, latex balloons, coins, or other small objects they could choke on.
 - Don't let kids play near stairs, windows, stoves, or electrical outlets.
 - After parents return home, they should ask children if they enjoyed the sitter's visit. If parents have found a reliable sitter their children like, they'll probably have a more relaxing and enjoyable time away from home.
- (Kids Health)*

Safety for Babysitters

- Babysitters should not allow strangers into the house unless the employer specifically informs the sitter to let someone in.
 - Sitters should not tell a caller that they are alone with the children. A message should be taken and the caller should be told the person will return the call momentarily.
 - Babysitters should not go outside to investigate suspicious noises or activities. Instead, they should turn on outside lights and call the police. They should also make sure that all doors and windows are locked.
 - When babysitting for a family for the first time, sitters should walk through the home to familiarize themselves with the locations of all rooms. Sitters should determine which bedrooms children will be sleeping in and make sure there are two exits from each. They should locate all exits from the home.
 - Babysitters should never leave children alone. When children are alone, they can have unintentional injuries with matches, gasoline, the stove, water, poisons, falls, and drowning.
 - Babysitters should trade sharp and electrical objects for something safe to play with.
 - It is important sitters keep portable heaters away from play areas, curtains, furniture, and the children as well.
 - Toddlers are especially susceptible to contact burns. This can happen if they fall against hot surfaces like space heaters.
 - Babysitters should not smoke on the job. Baby-sitters have caused child deaths by smoking.
- (City of Phoenix Police Department)*

Sitter Safety Tips

- Babysitters should know the parents or guardians and the families of the children they will babysit.
 - Young babysitters should tell their parents or guardians where they will be, when to expect them home and how to contact them. Sitters should also know where their parents or guardians are and how to contact them.
 - If a sitter is babysitting for a family and they feel uncomfortable at all, they should not do it.
 - Babysitters should make their own arrangements to get to and from the job safely. They should have a back-up plan if they become uncomfortable at any point (Example: If they are uncomfortable riding home with an employer, they should have a code word they can use on the phone to let their parents or guardians know they need a ride home).
- (American Red Cross)*

Choosing Child Care Centers

- Hours.** Parents should check to see when the center is open, how holidays are scheduled, or what will happen if they are late.
 - Licensing/Accreditation.** It is important to know whether or not the center is licensed or registered with the appropriate local government agencies. Parents need to ask and to check to see if there are any outstanding violations on the center. Another question to ask is if the program is currently accredited or is it in the process of becoming accredited?
 - Inspections/Consultations.** Is there a qualified health professional, such as a doctor or nurse, for the program? (According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, The national standard recommends that center-based infant-toddler programs should be visited by a health professional at least once a month, and all other child care programs should be visited at least once every 3 months.)
 - Visiting policy.** Can you visit the center before your child is enrolled? If your child is enrolled, can you visit the center anytime it is open? Can you see all the areas that your child will use? Are visitors screened or is their identification checked, so that only approved adults can visit the center and pick up children?
 - Experience and training.** It is important to know what education, training, and experience the staff has. What type of additional training has the staff had during the past year? Do outside experts provide training?
 - Adequate staffing.** It is important to ask questions about staffing issues. Are there enough trained adults available on a regular basis? What happens if staff are ill or on vacation? Are children supervised by sight and sound at all times, even when they are sleeping?
 - Child-Staff Ratios.** Is there an adequate number of staff for the size of the group of children? For example national standards define a child to staff ratio as 3 to 1 for children ages birth to 1 year old. There should only be a maximum of 6 children in a room in this age group.
 - Health standards.** Do children need a medical exam before they can enroll? Have staff been checked by a doctor to be sure that they are healthy? What are the policies when children are mildly ill?
 - Quality.** Are children cared for in small groups? Are activities proper for their age group? Is there a daily schedule? Is there daily indoor and outdoor play time? Can children watch TV and if so, what is watched and for how long?
 - Policies.** Check the center's written policies. What is the discipline policy? Do the children go on outings? If they travel by car, van, or bus, are the proper child safety seats, booster seats, and seat belts used? Is there someone besides the driver supervising the children during transport?
 - Consistency.** Are the program's policies on meals, discipline, and issues such as toilet training the same as yours? How long have the staff worked at the center? How much experience do they have with children of your child's age?
 - Backup plans.** What happens if your child is sick or the child care program is closed?
 - Fees and services.** What is the cost? How are payments made? Are there other services available in addition to child care? Do these cost extra?
 - References.** Ask for references and contact information from parents who use the program, as well as at least 1 parent whose child was in the program during the past year.
 - Communication.** Can you talk with staff on a regular basis? If there was something sensitive you needed to bring up, would you feel comfortable talking to them?
- (American Academy of Pediatrics)*

Checklist

"Is This the Right Place for My Child? 38 Research-Based Indicators of High-Quality Child Care" is a checklist put together by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) that you can use to evaluate child care programs. This checklist is on the NACCRRA Web site at www.naccrra.org/parent and available through a link from the AAP Web site www.healthychildcare.org. All of the questions are based on research about what is important to your child's health, safety, and development.

Resources

- Missouri Department of Health and Human Services, Section for Child Care Regulation, <http://www.dhss.mo.gov/ChildCare/>
- National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02/guide.htm>
- Kids Health.com, <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/babysitter.html>
- Committee for Children, <http://www.cfchildren.org/issues/abuse/caretakers/>
- BabyCenter.com, http://www.babycenter.com/0_using-a-babysitter_44.bc?page=1&articleId=44
- American Academy of Pediatrics, http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_ChildCare.htm

- American Red Cross (Mid-MO Chapter), Babysitter Training, http://www.redcross-boone.org/health_safety%20youth.html
- American Red Cross (Safety Tips), <http://www.redcross.org/services/hss/tips/fire.html>
- Phoenix Police Department, <http://phoenix.gov/POLICE/babysi1.html>
- About.com: Child Care, <http://childcare.about.com/od/daycarecenters/tp/pitfalls.htm>
- Suite101.com (Six Rules for Babysitting), http://kidsactivities.suite101.com/article.cfm/rules_for_babysitting