

Child Care, Part 2: Selecting the Best Provider

This HelpSheet has some helpful tips on deciding what is important for your family in evaluating and choosing a child care provider. Quality child care can provide a great environment for little ones to learn and grow; as parents it is your responsibility to find the best care for your budget and needs as a family. For more detailed information, check out our [Child Care Guide](#).

The National Association for The Education of Young Children suggests that a quality child care provider is one that “provides a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.” When choosing a provider, the most important things to consider are:

- Supervision & Learning Environment
- Health & Safety
- Training and Qualifications

A quality child care provider is one that:

- Shows love and respect toward children
- Exhibits genuine enjoyment in interacting with young children
- Provides children with learning experiences that match their ages and interests
- Talks with and reads to children daily
- Positively acknowledges children’s accomplishments
- Positively encourages children
- Provides a safe environment in which children can freely explore

Evaluating a Child Care Provider:

It is always a good idea to schedule an interview with a potential provider, whether in an in-home setting or in a daycare center. While there, a good rule of thumb to follow is “Look, Listen, Count”:

- **Look:** Is the environment clean and safe? Are there plenty of activities, books and toys to keep little minds and hands busy, and are they well-organized? Is there an outdoor space to run and play? Are emergency numbers clearly visible?
- **Listen:** Are the children happy and engaged? Are the teachers engaged and actively promoting learning and positive reinforcement?
- **Count:** Count the number of children compared to the number of caregivers—the ratio varies by age group and type of care; you can find out more information on this by contacting the City of Sioux Falls Health Department or the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

The Helpline Center has provided a useful Provider Questionnaire that can help you with this step. Go to

www.helplinecenter.org/childcare and click on “Interview Form.” You should also ask for references. Even though providers are likely to give you their “biggest fans,” you can gain a lot of useful information about what each provider’s strengths are and how they do things on a day-to-day basis.

Building a Relationship with Your Provider:

So, you've looked at your budget, evaluated your options, gone through the interview process and selected a provider that fits with your needs. Well done! But the process doesn't stop there. Now you need to build a relationship of trust with your provider. S/he will be the home away from home for your little one(s), so you need to keep communication lines open and work together with your provider as a team to make sure your child(ren) is getting the best care. Here are some tips for maintaining a positive relationship with your provider:

- Honor the contract you agreed to follow
- Pay your provider on time
- Provide requested items
- Hand in paperwork on time
- Speak to your provider for a few minutes every day
- Set monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss your child
- Let the provider know if there are any family or life changes or events that could affect your child
- Let the provider know of any changes in routine, or if someone else will be picking up your child
- Get involved! Ask your provider how you can get involved with the program

Note: If something doesn't seem right (mood changes in your child(ren), lack of communication from your provider, betrayal of trust, concerns from other parents), listen to your intuition and investigate. And if any sign of abuse is occurring, call the Department of Social Services at (877) 244-0864 to report the incident.

For more information, **call 211 and ask to speak with our Child Care Specialist** or visit www.helplinecenter.org/childcare.

Sources:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children <https://www.naeyc.org/>

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