

LOOK, LISTEN, AND ASK

Tips for Choosing a Quality Family Child Care Home



Use this tip sheet as a guide when you visit to help you look at, listen for, and ask about key features of a quality family child care home. Please note that because of the current pandemic, some programs may not be able to offer in-person tours or program visits at this time. In this case, you should discuss virtual tour options with programs you are considering.

Look



- Look at all the spaces in the home used for child care. Are any **safety concerns visible**? Is it well-organized? Can the provider see all the children easily?
- Look at the outdoor play space, equipment, and toys used for physical activity to see if it is **safe and appropriate**.
- Look to see if the furnishings, flooring, equipment, and materials are **clean and in good repair**.
- Look at the **program's daily schedule** to see if there is a mix of activities (indoor and outdoor, playtime alone and in a group, active and quiet, and staff-directed and free play).
- Look to see if there is a **variety of toys** that your child would enjoy. Are the toys kept so that children can reach them to play with them? Are they clean?
- Look to see if the **provider gets down at children's eye level** to speak or play with them (they sit or kneel when talking to children).
- Look to see if the **provider greets each child** and seems interested in what they are doing.
- Look to see if the **provider and children frequently wash their hands**.

Ask



- Ask how the provider supervises children **during meal prep, restroom use, and diapering**.
- Ask how the provider **meets the individual needs of each child** (napping, feeding).
- Ask for a copy of the program's **handbook or written policies**. Review the program's philosophy and policies for rates, fees, and payment. Look at drop-off/pick-up, program closure, emergency planning, and child discipline and guidance policies.
- Ask if others help the provider care for the children during child care hours. Are there any **other adults or children present in the home** during the day? Have all the adults had a criminal background check?
- Ask about how the provider handles **challenging behaviors**.
- Ask if **families can visit** during the day (visiting to nurse an infant). Please note that this may not be permitted during the current pandemic.
- Ask how the provider **supports children when they are upset**.
- Ask how the provider **keeps families informed** about things happening in the program. Ask if there are opportunities for families to get involved in program activities.
- Ask how the provider **shares details of the child's day with families** (feeding, napping, diapering, playing, developmental milestones).
- Ask if **meals and snacks** are provided. When are they served and what's typically included?
- Ask about the **education and experience** of the provider and their staff. Do they participate in continuing education?
- Ask how the provider plans activities.
- Ask how the provider **handles sick children and when a child should stay home due to illness**. What is their process for **giving children medication**, if applicable?
- If your child has a disability, ask how the provider would support your child. Has the provider received **training on how to care for children with disabilities**?
- If the provider offers **transportation**, is a safe and reliable vehicle used? Is the provider licensed and insured? Are children properly restrained in a car safety seat that is appropriate for their height, weight, and age?

Listen



- Listen to the sounds you hear while visiting. Do you hear **frequent laughter**? Do you **hear children playing**?
- Listen to how the provider speaks with the children. You should hear a **positive, nurturing tone of voice** at an **appropriate volume level**.
- Notice the smells of the home. Are they **clean, pleasant smells** or are there any strong unpleasant odors (perfumes, smoke, pets, etc.)?

If you have an infant or toddler



- Look to **see where the children are**. How long are children in devices that restrict their movement (such as swings, high chairs, bouncy seats, exersaucers, cribs)? Children should spend most of their time playing on the floor.
- Look to see if a **variety of toys** are available to the children. **For infants**, are there toys they can use to make noise, listen to, or look at? Are there board books? Are there toys that allow them to build, stack, or play pretend? Are there toys that allow them to use small and large muscles (peg puzzles, large and small balls)? **For toddlers**, are there toys that allow them to solve problems (wood puzzles, things to sort), toys that help them pretend and build (dress-up items, play food and furniture, puppets, different building blocks), and art materials (large crayons, chalk, markers, paint, paper, basic instruments)?
- Ask how often the children play outside.
- Look at **how bottles are handled and stored**. Are bottles clearly labeled with the child's name and date and safely stored?
- Listen to **how the provider talks with infants and toddlers**. Does the provider speak with them frequently, in a nurturing way (during diapering, feeding, and play)?
- Ask to **see where children sleep**. For infants, are they placed on their backs to sleep with no toys, bottles, or blankets in the crib? For toddlers, ask how the provider supports **nap and rest time**.
- Look at **how diapering is handled**. Are diaper-changing surfaces cleaned and disinfected after each use? Does the provider wash their hands before and after each diapering? Do children wash their hands as well?
- Ask how the provider supports **breastfeeding**, if applicable.
- For toddlers, ask how the provider supports **toilet learning**.

If you have a preschool child



- Look at the program space. Are there areas for **preschool children to play without being interrupted** by infants and toddlers?
- Ask how often the children play outside.
- Look at the toys and play materials. Are there a **variety of interesting materials** for preschool children to explore and play with? Can they reach them without having to ask for assistance? Materials should include blocks, dress-up and make-believe play items (costumes, play kitchen, play tools, play doctor kit, cars and trucks, etc.) art materials, Play-Doh, books, music and movement toys, and science toys.
- Look to see if the program **displays the children's artwork**.
- Ask how the provider supports **children's social and emotional development** (taking turns, following directions, playing and compromising with others, caring and showing empathy, sharing, recognizing and talking about their emotions).
- Listen to the preschoolers in the program. Do you hear the **children talking and laughing** with one another?