Questions to Ask on the Phone

Is there an opening at the time I will need child care?	
Is there a waiting list for care in the future?	*Child care programs must stay within state rules for how many children they can care for at any one time, based on the child's age, adult:child ratios, and space available. Refer to your handbook for the specific numbers.*
How many children do you care for? What are their ages (including the provider's own children)?	
What experience do you have in providing child care?	*Determine if this will be a stable option for you to consider.*
What hours/days are you open? Can you be flexible?	
Do you provide transportation? To which schools/activities? Is there an additional fee?	*By asking these questions, you will get a sense for if this program is a good match for your family.*
Is your program smoke free 24 hours a day?	
Are there any pets in the program?	
What meals and snacks are provided? Are they included in your fee?	
What are your rates?	*Good child care can be costly. Yet the type of care a child receives when they are young influences their ability for learning throughout their lives.*
What is the payment policy for holidays, vacation and sick days?	
When is a good time to visit your program and arrange an interview?	*Schedule a time when you would have an opportunity for an uninterrupted conversation. Visit again when the children are present.*

Making Your Decision

Look at all of the information that you have gathered and call the providers back if you have any unanswered questions. It is OK to be a choosy parent.

- What is my overall impression of each program?
- Will my child be happy here?
- Do I feel comfortable when I'm here? Do my children feel comfortable?
- How would my child fit in with the routine and with the other children?
- Do the people seem to care about my child as an individual?
- Do I feel welcome and valued?
- Am I going to feel comfortable leaving my child each day?
- Do I have any doubts?
- What did the references tell me?

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS. If you are not comfortable with what you have found – keep looking. Please call Child Care Resource & Referral for a list of additional names. If a program that you like is full, ask to put your name on a waiting list. This may be an option for you if things don't work out with your current program.

Back-Up Child Care

All child care providers have emergencies and may also take vacation days. It is wise to have an alternate child care arrangement ready when these situations arise.

- Would one of the providers you interviewed be a good back-up provider?
- Do you have a relative or friend available for emergency situations?
- Do you need to contact Child Care Resource and Referral for a list of providers who may care for your child as a back-up arrangement?

Child Care
Resource and Referral

Child Care Checklist

Choosing Child Care

Choosing child care is one of the most important decisions that parents make. High quality child care in the early years can make a positive difference for the future of your child. By making a thoughtful decision now, you can help your child develop the skills needed to be successful in school. Finding good child care requires an investment of your time. Compare your choices and ask plenty of questions. The following steps will help guide your child care search:

1. Call Child Care Resource & Referral for a personalized list of licensed child care providers.
2. Call the providers on the list you receive immediately. Vacancies in good programs fill quickly. Use the *Questions to Ask on the Phone* list to screen providers (see back).
3. Arrange a tour and on-site interview with those programs you are most interested in.
4. Use the *Child Care Checklist* (inside) to help you interview providers. Make brief notes on each program in the boxes to remind yourself of their responses.
5. Check references. Ask for personal and professional references. You should also contact your local county social services to ask about any complaints that may be on file.
6. Make your decision (see back page).
7. Notify the provider that you would like to enroll with as soon as you make your decision.
8. As a courtesy, notify the other providers that you will not be using their program.

For more information on child care, contact Child Care Resource and Referral to request a parent handbook.

The most complete source of child care information!

Health and Safety	Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Best Practice
What are your emergency procedures? Are they posted? Do you have practice evacuation drills? How would I be notified in case of an emergency?				• *Good child care providers make health and safety a priority.* • *Evacuation procedures should be posted and practiced on a monthly basis.*
Are children taken off the premises? How and when would I be notified? How are children transported?				• *Babies need to sleep, be changed, and be fed according to their bodies' time clocks, not an imposed schedule.*
What is your policy for administering medication?				• *Ways to decrease the spread of germs include routine handwashing using soap and water by the adults and the children (including babies!), regular sanitizing with a bleach/water solution for toys*
Are hands always washed before eating and after diapering? *(Do you see hands being washed?)*				*and surfaces, proper handling of food and bottles of formula or breast milk, and proper diapering.*
Where, and how frequently, will my baby's diaper be changed?				• *All toys and equipment should be cleaned, sanitized and inspected for safety on a weekly basis (mouthed toys should be sanitized daily).*
What precautions are taken to reduce the spread of illness? What do you use to sanitize?				• *Diapers should be changed on a washable surface close to a sink for handwashing, but away from food and bottle preparation.*

Space and Environment				Best Practice
Based on your observation, is the space clean, safe and comfortable?				• *Children need enough space to work on projects and participate in activities.*
Where will the children wash, sleep, play and eat? Are babies always put to sleep on their back on a firm, flat surface in a crib or playpen?				• *Child-sized furniture encourages independence in children.* • *Babies should not be confined to carseats, swings, or bouncy seats, and should <u>not</u> be allowed to sleep in these objects.*
How are children supervised at all times?				• *Children should be checked on regularly during naps.* • *The caregiver should always see where children are and what they are doing, indoors and outdoors.*
How often do you take the children outdoors?				• *Year-round outdoor activities provide a change of pace, fresh air (which decreases the spread of illness), as well as exposure to nature and the larger community.*

Activities and Materials				Best Practice
Describe a typical day in your program. What activities are children involved in?				• *Children learn through using play materials that are of interest to them and that challenge their minds and bodies without frustrating them.*
Are there areas for quiet play, as well as active play?				• *Children develop independence and responsibility when allowed to make choices about what they want to do. They*
Are items displayed at the child's level so the child can easily choose toys and materials to play with? How do you decide which toys are appropriate?				*need activities that develop thinking skills, large motor (running, jumping, riding trikes), and fine motor skills (drawing, writing, putting toys or puzzles together).*
Can children bring a special item from home, such as a toy or blanket?				• *A variety of books should be available for all children to use on their own, in addition to being read to daily, individually and in groups.*
How often do you read with the children?				• *A skilled provider asks open-ended questions, encouraging a lot of language and extended learning.*
Tell me how you plan activities to promote my child's development.				• *American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV viewing for children under two years old, and for older children, no more than 1-2 hours per day of educational, non-violent programs. Frequent*
How much screen time (TV, computer, video games) is typical?				*use of video games and computer time replaces activities that contribute to healthy development and increases the risk for obesity.*

Interactions				Best Practice
Observe how the caregiver responds to the children.				• *Warm, loving care is needed for all children.*
What is your policy on guidance and discipline?				• *A skilled provider is patient and gives children time to adjust from one activity to the next.*
What are the rules and how do the children know what the rules are?				• *She involves the children in setting fair rules and limits, and is clear and consistent.*
How do you settle disputes between children?				• *A variety of guidance techniques are used, such as sticking to a daily routine or schedule, redirection, and positive*
What are your feelings on wetting, thumb-sucking, pacifiers, finishing meals, biting, etc.?				*reinforcement, which helps children feel ready to take on new challenges and learn new skills.*
Ask "what if?" questions. (What if my child hits you? What if my child bites another child? What if my child won't take his nap?…)				• *Physical punishment, belittling or shaming should never be used.*

Training and Experience				Best Practice
Tell me about your experiences caring for children. Do you have a philosophy on child rearing?				• *Good caregivers are eager to learn about child development through books, professional journals, and training.*
How many hours of training are you required to have? How many hours did you attend in the past year? *Get specific information on the caregivers who will be with your child.*				• *Research shows that the more child development training a caregiver has, the better care your child is likely to receive.* • *Training should include a variety of topic areas – how children grow, learn, and form relationships.*
Tell me what you've learned in recent workshops. How will you keep me updated on your training?				• *Training certificates are often displayed for parents to view in a prominent area.*
How long do you anticipate providing child care?				

Security				Best Practice
Can I drop in anytime unannounced?				
Who are all of the people who would be around my child? Are they screened? May I meet them?				• *Parents should feel welcome at the child care program. You should feel comfortable with all of the adults who will be in contact with your child.*
Is your license posted? Would I be informed if you were out of compliance with the child care rules?				
Can you provide me with contact information for references?				• *It is essential to do a thorough reference check, contacting current and past users of the child care program, as well as the licensing entity at county social services.*
Are you on the CareCheck registry?				
After the interview, contact county social services to find out if the provider has been in compliance with the rules. CCR&R can supply you with the phone number.				• *Drop in unannounced to compare what is actually happening at the child care program to your expectation for good care.*

Program Management				Best Practice
Please explain your written policies and contract.				• *Good communication between parents and providers is essential so that the caregiver can give individualized care to your child.*
How will we build effective communication?				
How would any dispute between us be settled?				• *Talking at the beginning and end of the day is very helpful.*
Are parents encouraged to become involved with the program? How?				• *Many providers use daily communication forms to inform parents of their child's routines, mood and activities.*