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Do You Have Suggestions To Help Me Find Quality Childcare?

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A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Suggestions To Help Me Find Quality Childcare?

Diana Coyl answers:*

There are several important factors parents should consider when looking for a suitable childcare provider. Experts recommend:

- Early childhood education training of all staff.
- A licensed child-care program.
- Parents' participation (some cooperative daycare programs have parents volunteer one day a week to help provide care and increase parents' awareness of the daycare environment and their child's experiences there).
- High staff-to-child ratio.
- When infant and toddler care is required, parents should talk with staff about infant to provider ratios. (The younger the child the smaller the ratio between adults and children should be. For example, one adult for three infants is considered reasonable.)

Other questions or concerns to resolve:

- How well are children's basic needs met?
- Do staff members understand child developmental stages and behavior?
- How often are diapers changed?
- Are the children fed enough?
- Are healthy and age-appropriate snacks provided?
- What sort of activities or daily agendas are provided?
- Can the provider respond to special needs of a family?
- Are there programs for school-age children to attend before and after school?
- Are there childcare centers that provide care in the evenings, weekends or when a child is sick?
- What arrangements are available if children need to be picked up after school or from home?

Don't be afraid to ask staff members direct questions about the quality and variety of services they provide. Childcare obtained outside of the immediate family can cost up to $10,000 a year per child. These costs represent a substantial investment for parents, and any investment worth making is worth doing a little research about beforehand, especially when it involves the care of children.

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