

Child Care: Partners in Caring—A Guide to Finding the Best Fit

This guide is designed to help you in your search for a caregiver. Read through this list before visiting a home-based child care program for ideas about what to look for and questions to ask. This list is not necessarily comprehensive – it is a sample of the main areas to evaluate and consider.

Think about what is important to you and your child ... let these be your guide. You may want to highlight questions that are of particular concern to you. Ideally, you should be able to schedule two or more visits with potential caregivers. Information can be gathered through observation as well as by talking to the caregiver. Feel free to ask questions – you are considering a very important partnership.

Remember – you need to do a complete screening and reference check of all caregivers. CCPRN does not do that – we are here to offer resources, information, support, and training.

Caregivers

- Does the caregiver appear to be warm and loving?
- Is the caregiver sensitive to children and their needs?
- Does the caregiver have a sense of humour? Is there laughter?
- Does the caregiver appear happy and confident?
- Is the caregiver involved with the children or just directing their activities?
- What kind of experience does the caregiver have? Are they also a parent?
- Do they have any specific child care education or training?
- How many children do they care for? What are their ages?
- Does the caregiver have recent First Aid & CPR training?
- Does the caregiver have home insurance that covers their child care business?
- Does the caregiver have a recent Vulnerable Sector Police Check?
- Is there anyone else in the home that would be with the children during the day? If so, do they also have a recent Vulnerable Sector Police Check?
- Is back-up care available if the caregiver becomes ill?

- Does the caregiver have pets?

Health and Safety

- Does the home appear tidy, clean, and welcoming?
- Are safety measures in place? (Electrical outlets covered? Gates securely fastened at the top of the stairs? Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in place? First Aid kit and fire extinguishers available? Toxic and harmful substances out of reach? Etc.)
- Is the home smoke/vape free?
- Are play areas, toys, and equipment clean, safe, and well maintained?
- Is the outdoor play area fenced?
- Is there a pool? If yes, is it inaccessible to the children with a locked gate?
- Are rooms clean, bright, and well ventilated?
- Are facilities for food preparation clean and safe?
- Do children receive nutritious and well-balanced meals and snacks? Is there a meal plan or menu for parents to see?
- Are meals modified for allergies if necessary?
- Do children have a rest or nap time each day? How is this time supervised?
- Does each child have his/her own crib/cot/bed?
- Does the caregiver take the children in a vehicle? If so, is there insurance? Who provides and installs the car seats?
- Are the children supervised at all times?

Program

- Is there a consistent, clear daily routine? Is there enough flexibility in the routine to accommodate individual children's needs and creativity? What does a typical day look like?
- Are there activities which encourage children to think, to be creative, to explore, to express themselves, to problem solve, and to relate well to others? What are some examples? Do the activities follow the interests of the children?
- Does the caregiver follow a specific philosophy—i.e., Montessori, Reggio, or Waldorf? If so, can they explain it to you?

- Are there different types of play materials? (art supplies, science experiments, sensory play (sand, water, etc.), blocks, rhythm instruments, dress-up and dramatic play, loose parts, books, puzzles, etc.). Are there enough toys for the children in the group?
- Are there many opportunities to enhance each child's self-concept?
- Does the caregiver plan activities that recognize each child's cultural background?
- Is there quiet time as well as active play?
- Are there field trips into the community (parks, museums, playgroups, etc.)?
- Do children appear to be interested and involved rather than bored?
- Do the children play outside most days? Where and for how long?
- Are the children permitted to watch TV/other screens? Is the caregiver aware of screen time guidelines for young children?

Behaviour Guidance & Communication

- How does the provider handle upset and big feelings? How do they comfort an upset child?
- Is the caregiver able to explain their philosophy on behaviour guidance/discipline? Is s/he open to your input?
- Do the caregiver's methods seem appropriate for the ages of the children?
- Does the caregiver use time-outs or time-ins?
- How are incidents involving two or more children handled? (Biting, for example).
- What kinds of behaviour does the caregiver see as problem behaviour?
- Does the caregiver explain the rules clearly and reinforce positive behaviour?
- Does the caregiver's style of discipline and behaviour guidance reflect and align with your style as a parent?
- Are the children made to feel special, listened to, and important?
- Does the provider get down to the child's level to speak to them?
- Does the caregiver greet and talk with each child/parent as they arrive?
- How (and how often) is information shared between the caregiver and the parent? Face-to-face, email, text, through an app, journal, or private social media account?
- Are parents encouraged to visit at any time?

Business

- Is the caregiver independent or affiliated with a licensed agency?
- Do they have a contract?
- Do the guidelines and expectations of the contract work for your family?
- Do they close for certain periods during the year?
- Is there a specific COVID-19 policy and/or a general sick leave policy?
- Is payment by enrollment and is that something that works for you?
- Does the caregiver's schedule work with yours? (If they leave at a certain time to get to playgroup or an outing, can you make the drop off time?)
- What is the daily fee and how do they like to receive payment? Is there a late fee? When and how are receipts provided? Do they accept subsidized spaces?
- What is the process/routine/timeline for transitioning a child into care?

General Atmosphere

- Do the children appear happy? Is there a lot of laughing, hugging, caring?
- Are the children encouraged to care about and respect each other?
- Is there parent involvement in the program and are parents encouraged to communicate with each other?
- Does the caregiver's general philosophy about children agree with yours?
- Does it feel like "your kind of place"?

Is there time to play?

Play is a complex developmental task which is key to early learning and development. It is the vehicle through which children learn to express their emotions, develop coping skills, build resiliency, and develop a healthy self-image. Play allows children to build the necessary skills for lifelong learning and success. Talk to your home child care provider and ask how she/he supports the children's right to play.

We hope that as you get to know potential child care providers by referring to this guide and opening up discussions with them, you will be able to visualize your child in their care—in a safe and secure home environment with someone who will become a partner in their care for years to come.

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