Who's Watching the Children?

What to look for in quality child care:

Step 1: Child Care Types

Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) recognizes the following four types of child care facilities. Carefully consider each type before determining which atmosphere will be best suited for your child.

- ☐ Day Care Centers are licensed to offer care for any number of children depending on the size of the facility as well as the ages of the children in care. Generally, centers have the largest number of children in care.
- ☐ Group Day Care Facilities are licensed to provide care for seven to 12 children depending on the size of the facility.
- ☐ Family Day Care Home providers are registered to offer care for up to six children in a home environment.
- ☐ Relative/Neighbor providers are eligible to care for up to three children in their home.

Step 2: Considering Your Options

When searching for the most appropriate child care for your family, consider:

- ☐ If your child will be happy and grow in the environment.
- ☐ If the provider can meet your child's special needs.
- ☐ If you can easily communicate with the provider. Be sure your provider will take time to talk with you daily to discuss how your child's day went.
- ☐ If the service is affordable. Child Care Information Services may be able to help you subsidize your child care.
- ☐ If the facility's hours of operation fit into your schedule.

Step 3: Visit Child Care Facilities

Set up an appointment to visit each potential facility - visit twice if possible - and interview the child care provider. Be sure to ask:

- ☐ How much the care costs and if financial assistance is available.
- ☐ How many children are in care at the facility.
- ☐ If the provider has a license or registration, accreditation or other certification.

During the visit investigate the facility and look for:

- ☐ A clean, safe and healthy indoor and outdoor environment with clean and well-maintained equipment.
- ☐ A posted state license or registration certificate.
- ☐ Posted menus and nutritious age appropriate food for lunches and snacks.
- ☐ A variety of toys and learning materials such as books, puzzles, blocks or anything else that your child may find interesting and will contribute to a child's growth and development.
- ☐ A posted set schedule of daily activities. If you do not find one, ask what the children do all day. Do they spend their time playing and participating in developmentally appropriate activities instead of mostly watching TV?
- ☐ Where the children take naps.

Select a caregiver who:

- ☐ Smiles and plays with the children as well as shows responsiveness to their needs.
- ☐ Encourages children to do things for themselves and promotes independence.
- ☐ Appropriately handles discipline.

Other things to consider include:

- ☐ Making sure it is acceptable to visit anytime during the day without calling first.
- ☐ Staff to child ratios - Look at how many children are being watched by one person. OCDEL has strict guidelines on the number of children one person can supervise at a time.
- ☐ What is the procedure if your child becomes sick or hurt while at the facility?
- ☐ Does the facility provide a substitute or back up caregiver?
- ☐ Is the facility participating in Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources and Support)? This voluntary process for child care facilities enables providers to become recognized and rewarded for exceeding state health and safety licensing requirements.
- ☐ What kind of child care-related training has the provider completed?

Step 4: Select A Quality Child Care Facility

Ask each provider for references and check them.

- ☐ Ask other parents about the provider's reliability, discipline practices and responsiveness to the child's and parents' needs.
- ☐ Ask what kinds of values are practiced in the facility to verify the general culture.
- ☐ If their child is no longer at the facility, ask the reference why.
- ☐ Choose a child care facility that best suits your needs.

Who is Watching Your Children?

To learn more about quality early care and education or how you can become a provider, contact Community Action Inc.'s Local Education and Resource Network (LEARN) Project at 814-938-3302, ext. 204; toll-free 1-800-648-3381, ext. 204 or email LEARN@jccap.org.

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