

GROWING UP

Selecting the Right Daycare

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

The thought of going back to work after having a baby is a very difficult one for working mothers. One of the major concerns for many mothers is finding appropriate daycare for their baby.

The challenge of finding daycare does not stop in infancy as mothers of school-age children have a similar challenge. They need to find a daycare that can care for their children for those extra couple of hours between when the children get out of school and when the mother comes home from work. They also need to find a place that can look after the children during summer break.

Selecting the right daycare for children can be a daunting task. There are several steps that parents can take to assist in their selection of a daycare for their children.

The first step is to gather basic information about several daycares. All daycares should be licensed by the state. In addition, Kentucky has a voluntary rating system of daycares called STARS for KIDS NOW that gives a one to four star rating as to the quality of the daycare. This can be a helpful starting point for parents.

Other basic information to collect includes the daycare's hours of operation, options for sick children, policies for payment, and the mission statement and philosophy of child care. These pieces of information will give parents an idea of whether the daycare could be a good fit.

If the basic information appears to be a good fit, parents should check to see if there are any openings or how long of a waiting list the daycare might have. It also helps to get references from other parents who are currently using the daycare.

The next step is to schedule a time to visit the daycare. While at the daycare, parents should look and ask questions about physical space, activities for children, child-caregiver relationships, and caregivers' qualifications.

The physical setting of a daycare sets the tone for what children will be experiencing each day after parents drop them off. This means that the daycare should be safe with appropriate child safety precautions that are utilized such as covers on electrical outlets and safety equipment being visible and accessible. The daycare should also be clean and have enough space for children to run around and play.

A daycare should have a regular set of activities available for the children. This includes easy access to toys and chances for children to play with other children or to choose to play alone. Caregivers should be involved with the children and not just talking with other adults.

Parents should notice how the caregivers and children interact with one another. These interactions should be warm and respectful. Caregivers should set clear limits and encourage children to be independent by assisting them in learning self-help skills. Caregivers should also read to children of all ages and nurture children's language development. In addition, the staffing level of the daycare should be of a sufficient caregiver to child ratio.

Finally, the daycare staff should be appropriately trained based on Kentucky's licensing standards. There should be some consistency in the staff as high turnover can be a sign of difficult working conditions. It can also make it difficult on children if they attach to caregivers only to have them leave the daycare.

Selecting a daycare that fits a family's needs can be difficult. By collecting appropriate basic information and then following it up with a visit to the daycare center, parents can have more faith that their children are being appropriately looked after and raised in a manner consistent with the family's values.

Biography:

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