Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Guide for Choosing a Group Daycare Center

Group daycare centres vary greatly in size, location, environment and the style and quality of the care provided.

Use a consumer approach during your search. You are purchasing a valuable service and should assess your needs and expectations together with the quality of care, to make an informed decision.

Tips on Choosing a Daycare Center

Conduct a pre-screening check. You can save yourself time and energy—which are both things you are undoubtedly short of—by pre-screening a number of different centres before short-listing the ones you will visit.

- Is the location convenient for your home, office, child's school or other family members?
- What is the ratio of children to staff members?
- What ages of children do they accommodate?
- What are the hours? Do they offer flexible or extended hours?
- Do they have vacancies?
- What is the cost?

Take a tour. You will probably want to visit several different facilities before making a firm decision. You may be feeling pressure from your employer or temporary child care provider, but don't rush into a hasty choice. Take the time to review your options carefully to make sure they fit all your needs.

Questions to ask:

- What experience and qualifications do the staff have?
- Is there always someone available with up-to-date first aid training?
- What is the staff/child ratio? Is each child given some individual attention?
- What is the staff turnover rate?
- Is each staff member assigned to one group of children?
- What arrangements are made for rests during the day?
- Does the program include enrichment activities?
- What would be a typical daily routine?
- Is a specific child development theory or teaching method used?
- Is the whole program evaluated on a regular basis?
- Will your child's progress be assessed regularly with plans developed for his or her needs?

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- Will your receive regular reports on your child's progress? Will you have opportunities to share progress and goals from home?
- How is discipline handled?
- What will happen if your child is ill?
- Is there a procedure for handling an injury?
- What happens when a child has an infectious illness?
- What professional development choices are available to the staff? Do they participate regularly?
- What will happen if you are unexpectedly late to collect your child? Are there overtime charges?
- Will they provide you with names of other parents to call for references?

Things to look for— Inside physical setting

- Is it clean, bright and well ventilated?
- Is there sufficient space for the children's activities?
- Are there areas for different activities, such as quiet play or more vigorous activities?
- Is child-sized furniture available?
- Do the children have their own cubby holes or storage areas for sweaters, artwork and notices for parents?
- Are there pleasant and clean areas for eating and sleeping? Does each child have his or her own blanket?
- Is the toilet area clean and accessible?
- Have adequate safety precautions been taken?
- What provisions are made for fire safety? Are the exits well marked? Are there adequate fire and smoke detectors and sprinklers?
- Is there a first aid box?

Things to look for—Outside physical setting

- Is there a safe and pleasant outdoor play area?
- Is there a variety of playground equipment? Is it well maintained?
- Is the area safely fenced off?
- Is there space to run around, ride bikes and sit quietly?

The children

- Do the children look relaxed and content?
- Do they appear physically well cared for? Are they helped with nose wiping, washing and dressing?
- Do the children seem busy and involved?
- Does staff deal with bullying quickly?
- How is the noise level? Is it quiet at sleep time? Is there laughter and merriment?

- How are the children disciplined?
- Do they seem to have close relationships with the staff?
- Does each child receive proper attention from the caregivers?

Once you have narrowed the selection, you may want to return to your preferred choice for a final check. Depending on your child's personality, you may want to consider taking him or her along for this visit.