

Parent Resources for Choosing Quality Child Care

Choosing quality child care for your child is important. Selecting care is an important step for your child's development, health and happiness. You know the needs of your child and family. As you think about your child care make a visit, ask questions, and then decide. Child and Family Resources can assist you with this process by providing you with potentially suitable providers that meet your family's needs and parent resources to help guide you in choosing quality care.

Please contact us for a child care referral by phone, by email, by mail, by fax. We can provide assistance for you in Ontario, Seneca or Yates Counties on the different options available to you. We can guide you on the different child care options and decision making for the best care for your children.

Our child care Referral Specialist will enter your information in our database and can match the criteria given by you to search for matching child care services in your area. All information is kept confidential and used for reporting, referral and statistical purposes only. CFR does not recommend or endorse the quality of the programs listed. CFR can provide you with information to help with the cost of care and resources to assist you in the interview process.

Your job as the parent is to choose the quality care that meets your needs as a family and meets your comfort level. The steps below are important resources to guide you in choosing quality care for your family.

Step 1: Call the Child Care Givers

- CFR does conduct vacancy checks on a quarterly basis, as well as throughout the year; however, due to the ever changing nature of the child care business we do not guarantee that the programs given as referrals have vacancies.
- Ask the providers what days and hours they are open, what ages they serve, if they provide transportation and any other specific criteria you might have.
- Discuss the cost of care (do they accept financial assistance)? Is there an application fee?
- Do they have a waiting list?
- Ask the provider what you as the parent need to bring, for an example (snacks, extra clothing, diapers?)
- Make an appointment.

Step 2: Visit and Assess the Program

- Visit the sites before making a decision.
- Understand the different types of care you are going to look at and the provider's experience, education and training.
- Visit more than one program and compare the different options available to you.
- What policy and rules of the child care program are there and are they available in a contract?
- Spend time observing the program and talking with the owner or director.
- If possible observe the program while other children are there, observing the interaction between the parents (if available), the children and the caregiver.
- Check references, and ask questions.

Use this resource checklist to guide you in choosing the quality care for your family. You as the parent will know when you feel comfortable with your choice.

Environment

- Good lighting
- Rooms, occupied by children are clean, attractive, safe, roomy and comfortable
- Enough toys, games and materials so that children don't have to wait to use them
- Space for each child's belongings, including a change of clothing
- A safe outdoor play area, both shaded and open that offers space to run, tumble and play and with a variety of age appropriate equipment free of hazards for all ages
- A book center with picture books
- A parent information board
- Sturdy, child-size furniture
- Windows low enough for a child to look outside with appropriate safety barriers
- Games, arts and crafts, sports and dramatic play for children of all ages
- A separate crib, cot, or nap mat for each child
- Quite, dark and separate nap area
- Are pets present in the facility? If so, will this impact your decision?

Program

- A posted schedule of daily activities
- Good balance between planned activities that are age appropriate and time for free play
- Time for conversation, reading, listening to music, homework, or being alone
- Activities are interesting, fun and challenging where children can learn by doing and can succeed
- Children work cooperatively on projects and games to solve problems
- Children make music and /or listen to music, sing and laugh
- Infants, when not asleep, are out of the crib and included in age appropriate activities
- Caregiver(s) play with, sing to, hold, and cuddle each child often throughout the day
- Caregiver(s) meet regularly to plan and evaluate their program

Policies

- Up-to-date state license or registration is always posted
- Parents are actively involved, given opportunities to participate, and welcome to visit at any time
- Written discipline policy eliminating spanking, shaking, or hurting a child in anyway
- Emergency procedures are posted
- Policy for handling sick children
- Holidays and hours of operation are clearly posted

Staff

- Warm, nurturing, friendly, accepting and patient
- Caregiver(s) with training and experience (regulated providers required 30 hours of training every 2 years'; accredited programs have higher standards than State licensing regulation and usually a higher quality program)
- Director and lead teacher with college level training in early childhood education (in a Child Care Center or School Age Child Care program)
- Caregiver(s) work as a team. What is their staff turnover? (low staff turnover may indicate higher quality program since there has been stability and consistency in the program)
- Parents comfortable talking with the caregiver(s)

- Caregiver(s) comfort a sad or angry child in a loving way
- Caregiver(s) offer positive guidance when a child misbehaves
- Caregiver(s) enjoy working with the children
- Caregiver(s) really listen to the children and parents
- Individual needs of children are being met
- Words of sincere praise and encouragement are given
- Caregiver(s) encourage children to learn new skills
- Caregiver(s) are energetic and in control, while being flexible and fun
- Caregiver(s) are positive role models for children
- Refer to the handout "Types of Childcare" (or found on the website) for information regarding group size and child-to-caregiver ratios. The lower ratio of caregiver to child allows more time to be spent with each child, which could lead to a higher quality program.

Nutrition

- Well-balanced, nutritious meals
- Pleasant and sociable meal times
- Infants and toddlers are encouraged to feed themselves
- Caregiver(s) sit at table with children during meal times
- Infants held during bottle feeding, and are fed according to their needs and individual schedules
- Bottles are refrigerated until needed, and used promptly
- Left over formula discarded at the end of the day
- Program accommodates special diet needs

Parent Involvement

- Parents are allowed to visit any time
- Caregiver(s) inform parents about their children's successes and about activities for the day (such as nap schedule, meals, etc.)
- Parents make suggestions about menus, activities and program
- Parents are encouraged to participate in the program
- Parent newsletter and/or bulletin board
- Regularly scheduled parent meetings

Diaper and Toilet Routines

- Child-size toilets and sinks
- Diapers changed without delay after they are soiled, and infants are thoroughly cleaned after the dirty diaper is removed
- Changing table surface disinfected after each baby is changed
- Caregiver(s) and baby's hands washed after changing each baby's diaper
- Toileting begins only when the child is physically ready, interested and able to understand the process of using the toilet
- Parents involved in the decision to begin toilet training for their children
- Toilet training as a positive, pleasant part of toddler's day

Health and Safety

- Children are supervised by caregiver(s) at all times
- A CPR and first-aid trained staff member at the center or program at all times
- A smoke free environment (even when children are not present)
- A well maintained supply of fire extinguishers, first aid kits, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in the facility

- Toys and equipment are clean, sanitized and in good repair (for example: free from sharp edges , splinters, paint chips and loose parts)
- A written health record is kept for each child
- Children will be released to another person only if you have given written permission in advance
- Area that is used for food preparation and eating is clean and sanitary
- Written procedures for reporting suspected cases of child abuse and neglect by parents or caregiver(s)
- Written policy stating that medications will only be given to children by a caregiver who is certified to administer medication
- Written policy for handling sick children
- Diapering/toileting areas clean, free from odor, well-ventilated and removed from the feeding area
- Pads and blankets changed and laundered daily or more often as needed
- All children and caregiver(s) wash their hands after using the toilet, before eating and as needed throughout the day

Warning Signs

- The program does not encourage parents to visit or observe
- The children move about without any guidance or involvement for thirty minutes or more
- The caregiver(s) spend most of their time scolding or yelling at the children

Be sure to ask the provider for references from other parents. Call the Office of Children and Family Services, 585-238-8531 or check online www.ocfs.state.ny.us for a history of violations.

Inquiries about registered providers' compliance history can be made either by calling Child and Family Resources or by going to the Office of Children and Family Services website: http://it.ocfs.ny.gov/ccfs_facilitysearch/. Enter in the county in which you are seeking child care and a list of all the Registered/Licensed providers in that county will appear. You can view the provider's profile, which is a link to the right of each provider's name.

Regulations are available from our website, www.cfresources.org or at www.ocfs.state.ny.us, the Office of Children and Family Services website. You can also call and request these at any of our offices.