

Observation Tips

Making an informed decision.

Your first concerns are your child's safety, health and welfare. Every program will have positive features, but only you can decide what is most important.

Looking and listening.

You can tell a great deal by watching and listening to what is going on in a classroom or home. Do the children seem to be happy and enjoying their activities? Do the teachers seem loving, nurturing and responsive to all children in their care? Are problems handled promptly and appropriately? Do the teachers seem like people you can trust with your child's health, happiness and well-being? Is this a place where you would feel good about your child spending many hours each day?

Asking questions.

If you have any questions or concerns, write them down as they occur to you. Ask for a time to discuss them with the teacher or director.

Paying attention to your instincts.

You know your child best. Pay attention to any uneasy feelings you may have had during your visit. Can you picture your child in this setting? Were the toys and activities you observed the kinds your child would enjoy? Were they clean? If your child was with you, what was his reaction? Children respond in their own unique ways to new situations. Don't rule out other factors that could influence your child's reaction such as being hungry or tired. Trust your instincts and your ability to make wise decisions for your child.

Considering costs.

Carefully weigh the "pros" and "cons" of each teacher and facility that you visited. Decide which one meets the greatest number of your priorities at a rate you can afford. Keep in mind that the highest cost doesn't always guarantee the best teacher and facility. Likewise, the least expensive rates do not necessarily mean poor teachers and facilities.

Making a good choice.

Now that you have done your homework and some careful thinking, you are ready to make your choice. Remember, selecting and placing your child in an early learning program is just the beginning. Talk to the new teacher often and visit occasionally to ensure your child is safe and happy and your decision was the right one.

Visit the Office of Early Learning at
www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com, or
call the Toll-free Family Line 866-357-3239 (TTY: 711)



Quality Checklist *For Evaluating Early Learning Programs*



| WHAT TO LOOK FOR: | Provider 1 | Provider 2 | Provider 3 |
|---|------------|------------|------------|
| Do children look happy, involved in activities and well cared for? | | | |
| Do teachers get at a child's eye level to listen, talk and play with children? | | | |
| Do teachers give individual attention to each child? | | | |
| Are teachers warm, kind, calm and patient? | | | |
| Are there sufficient materials such as blocks, books, puzzles, art supplies and toys for all the children? Are they available throughout the day? Are they clean? | | | |
| Are well-planned activities such as music, painting and dress-up play provided for children? | | | |
| Does the facility seem cheerful, clean and safe with equipment in good repair? | | | |
| Are washing hands and changing diapers done frequently? | | | |
| Is there adequate indoor space for play, naps, meals and belongings? | | | |
| Is the outdoor play area fenced, safe, well-equipped and supervised at all times? | | | |
| QUESTIONS TO ASK: | | | |
| Is the program licensed? Accredited? | | | |
| Are reference and background checks conducted on staff? | | | |
| Does staff practice fire drills and evacuation procedures regularly? | | | |
| How many of the teaching staff have been employed in this facility or home for more than one year? | | | |
| Will my child's teacher have training in early childhood education, first aid and CPR? | | | |
| How many children are there for each adult? (adult to child ratio) | | | |
| How many children are in my child's group? (<i>Smaller group size can be a quality indicator.</i>) | | | |
| Are there policies and procedures in place for dropping off and picking up children? | | | |
| Are there policies and procedures in place to ensure that all children are present and accounted for during and following outdoor play, field trips and other transition periods? | | | |
| Are there written policies and procedures regarding emergency plans and handling vacations and substitutes? | | | |
| Are there written policies and/or information regarding philosophy of education for young children; discipline; on-going staff education and training; illness and injuries; napping; and toileting habits? | | | |
| Do teachers welcome parent visits any time of the day and encourage parent involvement? | | | |
| Are creative activities (e.g. music, art) offered? Are they included in the rate? | | | |
| Are meals and/or snacks provided? Are they included in the rate? | | | |
| What rates are charged? Are there additional fees for registration, materials or field trips? | | | |
| Will my child be happy in this program? | | | |

