

What to Look for when You Visit a Child Care Home or Center

Before visiting child care providers, it's important to interview several providers on the telephone to see if they meet your needs. If so - set up an appointment to visit their home or center to see for yourself what they have to offer your child. It's a good idea to visit when children are there and bring along your child so they can meet the provider and other children.

First impressions are important. As you walk in, listen. Unless you're there at nap time, there should be noise, but it should be at a pleasant level, indicating that the children are involved in activities and interacting together. If the television is on, find out how long the provider has it on each day. Too much TV indicates that your child might not be doing some of the other things that are important for their growth and development. Is the setting clean? Look for cleanliness but don't expect to see everything neatly in place - when children are at play some mess is necessary.

Observe how the family child care provider or staff at the center interact with the children. How many children for each staff member? Look for people who talk directly with the children, get down on the floor with them and in general seem to like being with kids and are willing to attend to their needs for attention and affection. Look at the children who are being cared for. Do they seem happy and act at home in the setting? Now look at the space. As you tour the inside of the home or center ask yourself:

- Is there enough room for the number of children? Is it clean?
- Are there a good variety of toys for each age of child being cared for?
- Are there places for children to do things in groups and also places where children can go to for individual activities?

Check out the toileting or diapering facilities.

- Are they separate from the areas where food is prepared and served? Where is it prepared and where do the children eat?
- Are there enough high chairs, booster seats or small scale furniture for all the kids?
- Is there an outside play area with safe equipment and plenty of room? Is the play area fenced, clean and well maintained?
- Is the play area totally visible so children can always be seen?

Safety is a big issue. Look for gates on stairways, covers on electrical plugs, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors. Also, look for uncluttered and child proofed spaces where the kids can play safely.

Smoking is not allowed in child care centers, but if you're looking at a family child care home, ask if the provider or anyone else in the home smokes.

In the end, if the site is safe, has a good variety of toys and play equipment and the caregiver(s) are involved, loving, and responsive to the children they care for, ask yourself "How would I like to spend my day here?" If you think you might like it, then perhaps your child might like it too.

Willamette After School welcomes visits at all times and we look forward to meeting you and your children.