

MAKING A QUALITY CHILD CARE CHOICE

by the Canadian Child Care Federation

Finding and keeping quality child care can be challenging. Where do you start?

What is quality child care?

Child care should support a child's emotional, social, intellectual and physical well-being. Quality child care is not baby sitting.

Care givers are the key to quality child care. They should...

- understand how children grow and learn
- be affectionate and responsive, open and informative
- provide a stable and stimulating environment
- seek out community resources and support
- be willing to develop common goals

Quality child care settings have common characteristics...

- clean, safe, and secure
- a caring, learning environment
- a small number of children with each adult
- space for quiet and active times, indoor and outdoor play
- a balance of interesting activities
- flexible, yet predictable daily routine
- a variety of easily available toys and equipment
- nutritional meals and snacks

How do you find quality child care?

First, identify your needs and priorities:

- consider your child's age
- do you have more than one child requiring care?
- are you eligible for a government subsidy?
- what fee can you afford?
- do you prefer centre or home based, licensed or unlicensed care?
- what hours?
- in what location -- near your child's school, your home, your work?

Community information services are invaluable. Child Care Connection-NS can help. It is also helpful to talk to neighbours and friends who use child care. Give yourself plenty of time and find care that suits you and your child.

Once you have a list of caregivers and day care centres, it is time to start telephone interviews. Jot down the questions you want to ask.

Visiting potential centres is the next step.

- look around
- is this a quality child care setting?
- listen
- would you feel good about your child spending time here?

The relationship between you and your caregiver is extremely important.

- it should be one of mutual respect, trust, and cooperation
- the interview is the time to ask plenty of questions
- don't forget to discuss hours, fees, discipline, sickness, vacations, the involvement of parents

Check references before you make a final decision. And write a contract or letter of agreement -- it can save unnecessary misunderstandings in the future.

Being an effective child care parent

A parent's responsibility does not end with finding child care.

- the three-way relationship between the parent, care-giver and child requires an ongoing commitment
- communication is vital
- take the time to hear about your child's day
- agree on mutual expectations
- voice concerns
- express appreciation
- live up to the agreement
- stay aware

Put your day care arrangements in writing for better understanding:

Day Caregiver
123 Main Street
Anytown. Canada

Dear Caregiver:

It was very pleasant talking to you this afternoon about your providing care for my child. I would like to confirm some of the points we covered in our conversation.

Your understanding of the benefits of stimulating daytime activity was one of the key reasons why we chose to place Chris in your care. We fully agree on the importance of outdoor play, learning-oriented activities, having stories read and going on occasional outings. Also, Chris should nap for one hour in the afternoon.

I understand that you will provide Chris with juice, healthful snacks, and a hearty lunch. I would appreciate it if there are no sweets. (For infant: I understand I will supply formula, baby food, and diapers for Chris.)

As agreed, you will care for Chris from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. I will let you know if it is ever necessary for someone else to pick up Chris.

As we said, Chris will be kept home when sick to protect the other children in your care, and I expect that the same rule will apply to other parents. Should you become ill, I understand that you have arranged for an appropriate back-up support person. (Back-up is ultimately the parent's responsibility, but if caregiver has arranged, parent should interview this person also.)

In the event of an emergency I have supplied you with my doctor's name and telephone number, my health plan number, Chris's birthdate, and phone numbers to reach me or my spouse at home or work. Chris has no known allergies to any food or medications.

The fee for your day care services will be \$00.00 which I will pay by cheque every Friday. Any additional expenses for Chris will be reimbursed at this time as well. Should I be late in picking up Chris for any reason, there will be an overtime payment of \$00.00 as we discussed. I will be provided with receipts for child care.

We both agree that if, for any reason, either of us should wish to terminate the relationship, two weeks notice will be given. I agree with your position on payment for statutory holidays, family vacation or if Chris is ill or absent on a regularly scheduled day.

I look forward to working with you, and I know that Chris will enjoy the excellent care you provide.

Sincerely,

Day Care Buyer
222 Jones Street
Anytown, Canada

NOTE: In order to ensure this is a proper agreement, your caregiver should indicate acceptance of the "terms and conditions" you have set out in this letter, by signing it as well.