



# Daycare Center

## Director/Caregiver Interview

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Start looking for a good daycare center *before* you need one. Parents who wait too long often discover that the center they think is best is already too full to admit their child. Visits can be as short as 15 minutes and as long as an hour — the more time you can spend, the better. Use these questions to guide your search.

**Basics:** A good daycare center has been in business for a while and has solid, up-to-date credentials, clear rules and regulations, and firm policies on operating hours, pickup and drop-off times, and when children are too sick to attend.

### **About the daycare center**

- How long has the center been in business?
- What are the center's accreditations?

### **Enrollment**

- What is the center's licensed capacity?
- Do you have space for my child? If not, can we get on a waiting list, and how long is it?

### **Days and hours**

- What are your hours?
- What's your holiday schedule?
- On what other days is the center closed?
- How flexible are you with pickup and drop-off times?

## Costs

- What are the fees?
- Do you offer scholarships or sibling discounts?
- Is there a late-pickup fee?
- Do I pay when my child is ill or we're on vacation?
- How and when would you bill us?

## Supplies

- Do you supply diapers, or is that up to the parent?
- What other supplies would I need to bring for my child?

## Interacting with parents

- Do you encourage visits from parents?
- What do you expect from me as a parent?
- How do you communicate with parents? Is there a regular newsletter or a notice board? Is there a daily report or another way you inform parents of what children did during the day (naps, bottles, BMs, etc.)?
- Do you encourage parent/provider conferences?
- Can I bring my child in for a pre-enrollment visit?

**Size:** Look for a center with small groups of children and plenty of staff. The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends having one caregiver for every three to four babies, and no more than eight babies in a group; one caregiver for every four to six children between the ages of 2 and 3; and a staff-to-child ratio of 1:8 to 1:10 for 4- and 5-year-olds.

- Are the kids grouped by age or are the ages mixed?
- How large is the group my child would be in?
- What's the caregiver-child ratio in each group?

**Staff:** Employees should be educated, with at least two years of college, a background in early childhood development (although many states don't require this), and CPR and other emergency training. The center should provide ongoing staff development in early childhood education. Caregivers should be responsible, enthusiastic, and well prepared, sharing your philosophies on key childrearing issues such as sleep, discipline, and feeding. A center with good staff benefits is likely to have less caregiver turnover, which means consistent care for your child.

## **Staff and qualifications**

- How many full-time caregivers do you have?
- How many are part-time?
- How do you screen staff? Do you perform background checks before hiring?
- What are the staff's credentials and training?
- Does the staff have emergency training?
- Training in first aid?
- Training in CPR?

## **Staff compensation and work environment**

- Do staff members get benefits such as health insurance and paid holidays?
- Do they get breaks during the day?
- How long do staff members stay at the school, on average?

**Activities:** A good daycare center will have a well-thought-out daily schedule with a variety of activities. The program should be changed regularly so children have a chance to learn new skills and don't get bored. Television and other forms of screen time should play little or no part in the day's routine.

- Are your toys and activities age-appropriate?
- Do you have a comfortable, childproofed indoor play area where babies can safely explore and develop physical skills?
- Do you have a safe, enclosed outside play area that encourages large-motor skills (climbing, running, riding wheeled toys)?
- For toddlers and older kids, do you have inviting and well-defined areas for different kinds of activities (art, music, blocks and toys, quiet reading, etc.)?
- What will my child's activities be on any given day? May I see the daily schedule?
- Do you take the children on walks through the neighborhood?
- What role, if any, does screen time have at the daycare center?

**Social Skills:** A good daycare program teaches children to begin to take care of themselves and to respect other children and adults. Providers should help children learn how to express themselves appropriately, discipline them kindly, and encourage their good behavior.

- How do you discipline children?
- How do you comfort children?
- How do you handle teasing, bullying, and inappropriate group behavior among the children?

**Health, Hygiene, and Safety:** A good daycare center is clean and sanitary and observes basic safety rules. If you see poorly maintained equipment or the place seems dingy or cramped, keep looking.

### **Health**

- Must children be immunized in order to attend?
- What is your sick-child policy?
- What if my child needs medication during the day?

### **Hygiene**

- Do caregivers wash their hands after changing diapers and before feeding the children?
- Are children taught/required to wash their hands after using the potty?
- How often are the toys cleaned and replaced?

### **Safety**

- Are indoor and outdoor play areas childproofed and escape-proof?
- How old is your play equipment? When was it last inspected?
- Are the children ever left unattended?
- Do you have a sign-in and sign-out sheet? Are the doors secure so strangers can't just walk in?
- What is your release policy?
- Who may pick up my child?
- What is your disaster plan? Do you have procedures for handling fires, earthquakes, intruders, and other emergencies? Is the staff well trained for these situations?

**Food and Sleep:** If the daycare center provides food, make sure it serves nutritious meals (covering all four food groups) and snacks. For sleeping, bedding should be fresh and firm (to reduce the risk of SIDS for babies) and nap areas should be clean and quiet.

## Eating

- Do you provide breakfast, lunch, and/or snack?
- If yes, what kind?
- If not, what kind of food should I bring for my child? Are there any food restrictions?
- Do you have a refrigerator for storing bottles of breast milk or formula?
- Do you feed babies on demand or on a schedule?

## Nap times

- What is the nap schedule?
- Where do the children sleep?
- Do you place babies on their back to sleep and follow other safe sleeping practices to reduce the risk of SIDS?

**Additional considerations:** Be sure to take a moment to ask yourself the following questions when you visit.

- Do the staff and children seem happy and engaged?
- Do caregivers cuddle babies? Talk directly to the children? Is their tone friendly and caring?
- Are crying children responded to immediately?
- Is the daycare center clean and pleasant?
- Is the bathroom a pleasant setting, encouraging children to use it?
- Are appropriate safety measures (fire extinguisher, first aid kit, fences, etc.) in place?
- During the hours you and your child are apart, will you feel at ease knowing your child is in this setting?

**References:** Ask each daycare center you're considering for a list of past and present references with phone numbers — and call them.