

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Selecting Child Care

"There is no second chance at childhood. It comes and goes quickly. The growing child cannot wait until he is older for the things he needs now. Later will be too late.

If he does not get sufficient food and protection from disease when he is young, he may not even live to receive everything we would want him to have later. If he does not have the chance early in life for the normal development of his mind, his body, and his relationship to others, we cannot make it up to him later.

The years of his life when he is the most impressionable, when he is most eager and ready to learn, will have been lost beyond recall." - D.B. Boguslawski.

Selecting quality child care can be a little intimidating. Your children are too precious to leave this to chance. There are several things you can do as a parent to help ensure the safety and well-being of your child while you are away.

Look

Begin by visiting several child care homes or centers. Does the place look safe for your child? Do the caregivers/teachers enjoy talking and playing with children? Do they talk with child at the child's eye level? You should always visit a home or center more than once and stay as long as possible so you can get a good feel for what the care will be like for your child.

Listen

What does the child care setting sound like? Do the children sound happy and involved? Do the teachers seem cheerful and patient. A place that's too quiet

may mean not enough activity. A place that's too noisy may mean there is a lack of control.

Count

The fewer the number of children for each adult, the more attention your child will get. A small number of children per adult is most important for babies and younger children.

Ask

It's very important that the adults who care for your children have the knowledge and experience to give them the attention they need. Ask about the background and experience of all staff: the program director, caregivers, teachers, and any other adults who will have contact with your child in the home or center. In Wisconsin, the amount of training a child care provider is required to have depends on the type of regulation category. Research has confirmed that caregivers with more training provide better care: their children will gain more than others in intelligence, and are more cooperative with adults and other children. They are as follows:

1. State Licensed - Family

State licensed child care providers are required to complete a minimum of 40 hours of Early Childhood Education to become licensed and must complete a minimum of 15 hours of continuing education each year. If they care for children under 2 years old they must also complete an infant/toddler course.

State Licensed - Group Center

The director and teachers of a group center must have at least 2 courses in early childhood education and experience as a child care teacher and assistant child care teacher, respectively. An assistant child care teacher in a group center must have at least one course in early childhood. All full-time child care staff must complete 25 hours of continuing education each year.

2. County Certified

County certified child care providers are required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of Early Childhood Education.

3. Provisionally Certified

Provisional certification is also awarded by the county but no education is required.

4. Legal Unregulated Care

This provider can legally care for up to 3 children in their home. No education is required and there is no regulating agency.

5. Illegal Care

Caring for more than 3 children in a home without becoming regulated is illegal in Wisconsin.

Check it out!

- ▶ Do the caregivers/teachers seem to really like children?
- ▶ Are caregivers/teachers trained in CPR and first aid?
- ▶ Are the parents ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- ▶ Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- ▶ Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment?
- ▶ Are there different areas for resting, quiet play and active play?
- ▶ Are the activities right for children of various ages?
- ▶ Are toys clean, safe and within reach of the children?
- ▶ Do you agree with the discipline practices?
- ▶ Do you hear the sounds of happy children?
- ▶ Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- ▶ Is the TV on? The best child care places are ones where children are active, doing things together in the company of an adult.

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Ask them about:

- Child care options
- Child care programs in your community
- Selecting quality child care

Making The Transition

Once you've made a decision on a caregiver, there are ways to help make that transition a smooth one for you, your child and the child care provider.

Get Acquainted: If time permits, take your child to the home or center of your choice and let them get familiar with the other children, teachers, procedures, and toys. Even infants will benefit from this orientation. A few visits will help reduce the fears and anxiety children experience when they are left by their parents.

Avoid Long Good-byes: Never leave your child without saying good-bye, or try to "sneak" out when they're not paying attention. Let your child know where you're going and when you'll be back. Acknowledge feelings anger, sadness, worry, or fear. These feelings are very real to your child. Try not to linger too long. Children usually settle down and get involved in daycare activities as soon as parents leave.

Make Surprise Visits: Check on your child frequently during the first weeks at a child care site. You can observe anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or be reassured that you've made the right decision.

Communicate: Being open and honest with your child's teachers/caregivers lays the groundwork for a happy experience for both of you and your child. Expressing any concerns along with your appreciation can go a long way in creating a harmonious atmosphere.

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: JOAN E. LEFEBVRE, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin-Extension, P O Box 369, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu
January, 1998