
Help Making Your Decision

Provider Name _____

Make copies of this checklist to use with each program you are considering.

1. Call Provider

Date called: _____

Once you have a list of providers that meet your initial criteria, we encourage you to call each provider on your list. This will allow you to find the best match for your needs. When you first call, we recommend you verify the information you have for each provider. You can use this checklist to help guide you through the questions you should ask during the call.

Ask provider the following questions:

✓	Question	Answer
	Does your child care have an opening for my child for the dates I need to begin care?	
	What hours and days are you open?	
	Where are you located?	
	How much does care cost?	
	Is financial assistance available? For example, do you accept CCDF vouchers or provide a sliding fee scale?	
	How many children are in your child care?	
	How many children would be in my child's class, and/or how many children are there per adult?	
	What age groups do you serve?	
	Do you provide transportation?	
	Do you provide meals? If so, which ones? (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Snacks)? For infants, do you provide formula and/or diapers?	
	Do you have any additional accreditations?	
	When can I come to visit?	

2. Check inspection reports

Based on what you learned from the phone call, narrow your list based on your needs for child care. Then, check inspection reports for each of the programs still on your list. All regulated programs must follow specific rules set by the state of Indiana. Licensed Centers, Licensed Family Child Care Homes, and Unlicensed Registered Child Care Ministries have inspection and complaint information available online on the Child Care Finder Indiana's website (www.childcarefinder.in.gov).

3. Visit Your Provider

Date of visit: _____

Visit in person with those providers who continue to meet your criteria. Stay as long as you can - you may even choose to visit more than once. During your visit, ask questions or observe to discover the following:

Questions to ask provider during your visit:

✓	Question	Notes
	<p>Can you provide me with a copy of your program's policies? <i>Look for:</i> Readily available and current policies that cover a number of the questions below.</p>	
	<p>Can I visit any time? <i>Look for:</i> An open-door policy that allows you to visit at any point during the day.</p>	
	<p>How do you handle discipline? <i>Look for:</i> Positive-guidance techniques that avoid yelling, spanking, and other negative punishments. Caregivers should encourage toddlers and older children to use words to resolve conflicts with other children.</p>	
	<p>How do you approach meals and feedings? <i>Look for:</i> For infants, caregivers should hold infants during feeding times, and feeding times should be according to the child's schedule (not according to a group schedule). For older children, meals should be nutritious, well balanced, and caregivers should serve them on a consistent schedule.</p>	
	<p>What is your policy on toilet training and diapering? <i>Look for:</i> Consistent practices for record keeping of diaper changes and toilet training attempts. Policies for toddlers should focus on identifying developmental signs of readiness, an encouraging environment, and partnership with parents.</p>	
	<p>What do you do if a child is sick? <i>Look for:</i> Clear policies that outline the provider's action if a child becomes ill in their care, including guidelines for giving medication. Policies should also outline when it is appropriate for the provider to send a child home, exclude the child from care, or allow the child to return after illness.</p>	
	<p>What would you do in case of an emergency? <i>Look for:</i> Clear action plans for responding to injured/lost children and responding to disasters (fire/flood, etc.).</p>	

What training or certifications do you or other staff members have?

Look for: Directors with degrees or other qualifications in caring for children. Teachers with a credential such as the Child Development Accreditation (CDA) or an Associate’s degree relating to early childhood. Continuing education trainings on topics such as child development, CPR / First Aid, medication administration, child abuse prevention, or safe sleep.

How are staff trained and evaluated?

Look for: Programs that have written personnel policies and job descriptions, those that have annual internal staff evaluations with self-assessments, and those that have a written annual training plan for staff professional development. Someone outside the program should evaluate the program each year.

What are your caregiver-to-child ratios and group sizes?

Look for: Ratios vary depending on the age of the child and the setting of the provider (center vs. home).

Age Range	Ratio For Center-based Care in Indiana
Infants	(1:4)
Toddlers	(1:5)
2 years	(1:5)
3 years	(1:10)
4 years	(1:12)
5 years	(1:15)
6 years and up	(1:20)
Age Range	Ratio For Family Child Care in Indiana
Birth to 24 months	(1:6) two of the 6 children must be at least 16 months and walking. Otherwise the ratio is 1:4
Birth to 6 years	(1:10) No more than 3 of the 10 children may be under sixteen months of age and must be walking
3-10 years	(1:12)
All ages	(1:12) the maximum capacity in a child care home is 1:12 plus 3 children during the school year who are enrolled at least in Grade 1

How often throughout the day do caregivers read to the children?

Look for: Adults read to children at least twice a day or encourage them to read on their own, if they can read.

	<p>May I see an example of your daily or weekly activity plan? <i>Look for:</i> Planned experiences for the children to enjoy and activities to help children learn. Providers should include sensory play activities (e.g., sand, water, clay, Play-Doh, shaving cream, pudding painting) in play. Look for indications that providers encourage children to learn and grow at their own pace.</p>	
	<p>How often do you take the children outside for fresh air? <i>Look for:</i> A policy that aims for daily outdoor activities, with guidelines for inclement weather.</p>	
	<p>How often do you check your outdoor playground equipment for hazards or other issues? <i>Look for:</i> Provider checks outdoor equipment each morning before children use it.</p>	
	<p>Have criminal history background checks been conducted on individuals present at the provider? Was the check based on fingerprints? <i>Look for:</i> All adults that will be present during child care should have a criminal background check, including family members in child care homes, volunteers, or other staff such as cooks or administrative staff. Staff and volunteers under 18 must get a juvenile criminal history check.</p>	
	<p>May I see a copy of your license or other certification? <i>Look for:</i> Clearly posted, readily available documentation.</p>	
	<p>Do you have substitute or back-up caregivers? <i>Look for:</i> Policies that outline procedures when the provider is sick/unavailable, how provider adjusts fees, and available qualified substitute providers.</p>	
	<p>What do you do to work closely with parents? <i>Look for:</i> Providers who seek feedback directly from parents, have open-door policies, and conduct annual parent-teacher conferences.</p>	
	<p>May I have a list of parents (current and former) who have used your care? <i>Look for:</i> Providers who are enthusiastic and willing to give you a number of references. Be wary of any provider who will not give you names or numbers.</p>	

During your first visit, use your senses to help answer the questions below. The answers to all questions should be YES:

✓	Question	Notes
	Are caregivers watching children at all times, including while sleeping?	
	Are infants napping on their backs, in cribs, with no pillows or blankets? Is there a separate crib for each infant? Are older children resting/napping in a semi-private area away from active, noisy, or busy areas of the classroom?	
	Are caregivers warm, welcoming, nurturing, affectionate, patient, and good-natured? Do they pay individual attention to each child?	
	Do caregivers talk with children at eye-level, engage them in conversations, and ask questions when appropriate?	
	Do caregivers handle discipline in a calm, consistent way to encourage positive behavior?	
	Are children happily involved in daily activities and comfortable with the caregiver?	
	Is the space organized into different play areas with bright, colorful, easy-to-use materials at eye-level? Are these materials available at all times and clean/well-maintained?	
	Are books, pictures, food, dolls, and other materials age-appropriate? (Older children have separate areas for different kinds of play. Infants and toddlers have toys that “do something” when the child plays with them.) Do the materials celebrate diverse ethnic and cultural groups?	
	Do adults and children wash their hands (after using the bathroom, changing diapers, eating, etc.)?	
	Do caregivers appear to clean infants and toddlers promptly when diapers are wet or soiled? Do they clean diaper-changing surfaces and disinfect them after each use?	
	Are soft surfaces for sitting and lying available? Are floors and sitting/playing surfaces clean?	
	Do caregivers have medicines labeled and out of children’s reach? Do they have cleaning supplies and other poisonous materials locked up, out of children’s reach?	
	Are all breakable, sharp, or potential choking hazards out of reach? Are outlets covered and curtains/blind cords, furnaces, or space heaters appropriately secured?	
	Are stairs and doorways protected with locked gates?	
	Is the outdoor play area a safe place for children to play? Is the equipment the right size and type for the children who use it? Is it surrounded by a fence at least 4-feet tall? Is the equipment placed on mulch, sand, or rubber matting?	

4. Check References

Date called: _____

Even if you feel you've found "the one" after your provider visits, it's still important to call references. Parents whose children are no longer enrolled can be especially useful, as they may be more candid. Parents whose children are currently in the provider's care can speak best to the recent program strengths and challenges.

Ask for a number of names - six or seven is not too many. References may be difficult to reach, so it's best to have more names than you need. This also allows you to reach as many parents as you need to feel comfortable, without needing to go back to the provider to ask for more names.

Listen to what is said and what isn't said. Silence and hesitations can speak volumes. Ask follow-up questions if a parent gives a confusing or disturbing answer. Some suggested questions to ask:

✓	Question	Notes
	Tell me about how reliable the caregiver was/is on a daily basis.	
	How does/did the caregiver discipline your child?	
	How does/did your child enjoy the child care experience?	
	What was the most difficult part of transitioning to the child care, and how did the provider respond?	
	How does/did the caregiver respond to you as a parent and involve you with your child's progress?	
	Talk about the caregiver's level of respect for your values and culture.	
	How long do you plan to keep your child with this provider? OR Why did you leave this caregiver?	
	Are there any program rules that you disagree/d with (e.g. fees, holidays, hours)? Were there any surprises regarding rules?	
	Do you have any other strengths or weaknesses to share about this provider?	
	Would you recommend the caregiver without reservation?	
	Can you recommend any other parents whose children were with this caregiver to whom I can speak?	

5. Choose your provider

After you have researched the available providers, ask yourself:

- Which child care program will best allow my child to be happy and grow?
- Which caregiver can meet the special needs of my child?
- Are the caregiver's values compatible with my family's values?
- Is the child care available and affordable according to my family's needs and resources?
- Do I feel good about my decision?